

OpenTheo

Canon of Scripture



Genesis - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg explains the significance of understanding the Canon of Scripture, which refers to the approved and authorized books. The Old Testament books were mostly written by prophets who received inspiration from God, while the New Testament books were written by apostles appointed by Jesus Christ to speak with authority. The Canon of Scripture is not the result of arbitrary human decision but is a result of a desire to preserve the genuinely inspired writings. The authorship of some of the books and the Apocrypha's inclusion in the collection of scriptures serves to show that certain writings were not inspired and did not contain prophetic authority.

Transcript

Whenever we begin studying a new book of the Bible, I always like to have an introductory lecture because there are, with each book of the Bible, special and individual considerations. In many cases, the authorship has to be considered. Most of the books we're studying in this school all have the same author, although not all of them, because we're going to be studying Job and Mark also.

But today we will have our introduction to the book of Genesis, but not first. Just the way I think, before we study Genesis, we have to study the Pentateuch, and before we study the Pentateuch, we have to study the whole Bible. What I mean by this, we need to introduce, we need to see the biggest picture first, and then narrow our view, our focus down to Genesis.

So today we have lectures in the morning on an introduction to the Bible, which you can see is the notes I've handed out to you. And then there will be, in the next hour, an introduction to the Pentateuch, which is the block of material that Genesis belongs to, the first five books. And then we'll have an introduction to Genesis.

Now, we've already talked a lot about the Bible in our previous week, because we had an introduction called The Authority of Scripture. We looked at a lot of things, but there are some considerations about the Bible we need to look at before we go any further, and that is, for one thing, why the Bible? Why is the Bible trustworthy? Why is it that we think

of it as the Word of God? We know that it's a collection of writings, and not everything that has been written in ancient times belongs in the Bible, and we know that someone made a decision to include and to exclude certain documents from the Bible, and many people wonder, well, why do we trust the decision they made? How do we know the right collection is here? And, in general, we know that the reason for inclusion of the books in our Bible is that the Old Testament is believed to have been written by prophets, essentially. Now, there's a few books that are not necessarily believed to have been written by prophets, the books of Chronicles and Ezra and Nehemiah.

Ezra is believed to be the author of Ezra and also of Chronicles, and Ezra was not said to be a prophet, he was said to be a scribe. But those books are historical in nature merely, and therefore, I don't suppose it requires a prophet to write the history, especially the history of his own time, but Chronicles, 1 and 2 Chronicles, depended heavily on books that were written by prophets. In 1 Chronicles 29.29, the writer there tells us that he depended in measure, perhaps heavily, on three books written by prophets.

One was a book by the prophet Gad, another by the prophet Nathan, and another by the prophet Samuel, all of whom were contemporaries with David. And so, the history of 1 Chronicles is said to have been connected with the writings of certain prophets of David's time. Now, 2 Samuel, we don't know perhaps what other prophetic writings may have influenced him, but the Jews believed that Ezra's writing was authoritative and had prophetic credentials somehow, even though he may not himself have been a prophet.

It's just like Luke and Mark were not apostles, but their writings were considered apostolic because of their close connection with the apostles. And so, apart from those few books, the Old Testament books are believed to have been written by prophets. Even some of the historical books, well, most of the historical books are thought to be written by prophets.

A prophet is a man who was called of God to be a messenger to his people and who was inspired by God to speak the words that God wanted him to speak. Many of these prophets spoke as oracles of God, as they actually received a word from God and spoke it out in the first person. I, the Lord, intend to do such and such.

But not all the prophets spoke that way. Moses, for example, was a prophet and considered to be one of the great prophets, the greatest of the prophets, in fact. Yet, it wasn't very common for Moses to speak oracularly, though he received revelations from God and laws from God and so forth.

He certainly knew the mind of God. He stood before God in the tabernacle and communed with God. So, he was considered to be one that God had chosen and informed and inspired to lead the people and to speak for God.

In any case, it is the prophetic credentials that usually determine whether a book in the

Old Testament was included. And then in the New Testament, it's different. The New Testament is written not by prophets, but by apostles.

Now, the New Testament makes a distinction between prophets and apostles. Paul said in Ephesians 4 and verse 11 that when Christ ascended, he gave gifts to men and he gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers. Also, Paul distinguished between apostles and prophets in the end of 1 Corinthians 12, where he said, God has appointed these first apostles, secondarily prophets.

Interestingly, Paul seemed to think that the apostles had an authority even above that of prophets, because he said first apostles, secondarily prophets. And the New Testament was not written by prophets, unlike the Old. So, the Old Testament was written by men who received direct inspiration.

And we have reason to believe, at least when they were giving oracles from God, they were the very words from God being put down eventually in writing. Most of the prophets actually just spoke their oracles and sometimes someone else wrote them down. But in any case, their words were the words of God in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, as I said, it was not prophets who wrote it. There were prophets in the early church, but none of them wrote scripture that we know of. None of their writings have been preserved for us as scripture, except, of course, the book of Revelation, which is indeed a prophecy, but it was written by an apostle also.

And it's the only New Testament book that's prophetic. There are other books of the New Testament that contain prophecies. For example, in the Gospels, we have some prophecies that Jesus uttered.

In Paul's writings and Peter's, there are some predictions about future things. But those writings are not primarily prophetic. They're primarily apostolic.

And the difference is, an apostle means one who is sent officially as an emissary, as an ambassador. Someone who speaks officially for someone else. An apostle of Jesus Christ is appointed by Jesus Christ to speak officially for him and therefore carries his authority.

What that person says is already pre-approved by the one who sent him. Now, it's interesting, the apostles did not claim to be infallible, but they did claim to be apostles. And while I'm not aware of anything the apostles ever wrote that reflected any errors on their part, we do know that in their private lives, the apostles were quite capable of making mistakes.

We know that Peter certainly made a mistake on one occasion. Paul had to rebuke him publicly, according to Galatians chapter 2. Both of these men were apostles. If we say, well, it wasn't Peter who was mistaken, it was Paul.

Well, he's an apostle too. I mean, the fact that two apostles disagree means that one of them had to be wrong. Likewise, Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement about whether Mark should accompany them on their second missionary journey.

Apparently, they did not come to an agreement about that, and so one of them was wrong too. So it is possible for an apostle to make a mistake, one of them. I don't think any apostle made a disastrous mistake.

Now, when they wrote, we don't have any reason to believe that they wrote down anything that reflected mistake and notion to theirs. But they didn't claim otherwise, they just claimed that they were apostles of Christ and they spoke for Christ. And we accept their writings as if Christ had written them, because they have his authority.

But you see, there is a difference between prophetic and apostolic authority. Prophetic authority is based on the fact that the man is receiving an oracle from God and his very words are the words of God. The apostles didn't claim that about their own words, they just, in fact, sometimes they claimed the opposite.

Paul said on this, I have no command from the Lord, I just, I'll give my judgment on this. But the judgment of a man like Paul is worth, you know, infinitely more than the judgment of any of us, because he was commissioned by Jesus. He saw Jesus numerous times, he received revelations, some of them so lofty that he said he was not really permitted to repeat some of the things that he saw and heard when he was in heaven.

A man like that can speak authoritatively. And so the collection of writings in the New Testament is a collection of apostolic writings. And therefore, both testaments have authority, they derive from different places, and that is, I should say, in both cases the authority derives from God.

But they are transmitted in a different manner. The Old Testament transmitted by direct oracles, the New Testament by approved and authoritative men that Christ ordained to speak for him. And Jesus said, whoever receives him that I send receives me.

So the apostles, to receive what they said is as good as receiving what Jesus said. All right, now that's why we have the books we do. But even so, there have been disputes as to which books really are prophetic and which books really are apostolic.

And those disputes existed in the early days of the church and also even among the Jews as far as the decisions about what books belong in the Old Testament. And here we come to the question that we call the canon of Scripture. The word canon is a Latin word that means, well, it originally meant rule or standard.

And it came to mean a list of approved or authorized books. So when we talk about the canon of Scripture, we're really, the word canon is commonly used, but one could simply say the collection, the approved collection is what the canon is. Now, how did, you know,

who made the decision about the canon of Scripture? There are popular notions out popularized by novels and movies like *The Da Vinci Code*, which suggests that the canon of Scripture was kind of decided by, oh, maybe men with an agenda, unscrupulous men, maybe even men who wanted to make sure that their own doctrines were preserved and others were omitted.

This is, there's no evidence that this is so. Those who say that this is so are only guessing, and most of them have never done any research to know whether their guess is even an educated guess or a credible guess or a plausible guess. The evidence is that those who established the Old Testament canon were very interested in knowing which books really belong there from God.

In fact, the Jews, of course, are the ones who preserved the writings of the prophets that have come to be in our Old Testament. And you'll recall the Jews were not favorable toward the prophets in their lifetimes. Almost never were the prophets accepted by their contemporaries, and many of them were killed by their contemporaries.

So, the fact that at a later date, the descendants of those who killed the prophets would say, wait a minute, these guys really did speak from God, and they did recognize them. And, by the way, the books they preserved were not flattering toward them. If the Jews wanted to preserve a collection of writings that flattered the Jews, they picked the wrong writings.

Because the Old Testament describes the Jewish people as people who are continually rebellious, continually apostate, or not continually, but repeatedly at least apostate, going off the wrong direction, making foolish mistakes, incurring God's anger. And, you know, like I say, it's not exactly the kind of glorious history that most nations preserve about themselves. For example, we don't have any record in the Egyptian history of the Exodus.

But that's largely because the Egyptian pharaohs and most pagan kings preferred to preserve history that made them look good. And the Exodus did not make Egypt look good. It made them look weak and foolish, and, you know, greatly humbled by the God of Hebrews.

And so, if the Jews had been like the Egyptians or the Babylonians or many others, they would not have preserved those books. And that made them look so bad. But they preserved them only for one reason.

They believed after the fact, after they were written, that these books proved to be genuine. That the prophets who wrote them made predictions that came true. And they realized that they'd made a mistake, or their ancestors had made a mistake, in killing them.

So there doesn't really seem to be any evidence that the Jews, you know, selected books according to their taste or according to the preference of their contents. But rather, they had more of a devotion to God and to wanting to preserve those books that have the real evidence of being genuinely from Him. Now, the Old Testament canon is, to the Jews, it contains three major sections.

There's the law and the prophets and the writings. The writings are sometimes called the Hagia Grappa, which means holy writings. Hagio is Greek for holy, and grappa is the Greek word for writings or scriptures.

The same word functions both for scripture and writings in the Greek language. And so, the first time these three sections of the Old Testament are mentioned is about 130 years before Christ, in an apocryphal book called Sirach, which is also called Ecclesiasticus in some Bibles. Now, Sirach is written, like I say, about 130 years before Christ, and therefore it was not part of the Bible.

The last prophet that we know of, who wrote, was Malachi, and he's the last book in our Old Testament. He wrote about 400 years before Christ. Therefore, between the close of the Old Testament with Malachi and the opening of the New Testament, there's a gap of about 400 years.

During that time, the Jews were still writing books, and one of those was called Ecclesiasticus, or Sirach. And in that book, the author mentioned the law and the prophets and the holy writings, as already, in his day, an authorized collection, or recognized as scripture among the Jews. Now, this is kind of important for us as Christians, because when we point out, for example, that Jesus fulfilled a lot of the prophecies of the Old Testament, skeptics will sometimes say, well, how do we know those prophecies were not written after the fact? How do we know that, you know, someone didn't mess with those prophecies and write them to make it look like they're about Jesus afterwards, after Jesus lived? But we see the Jews already had their collected writings, officially, 130 years before Christ.

And maybe considerably before that. We don't know how much before that. It's just the earliest documented reference to these three sections.

By the way, the New Testament writers also made reference to these sections. Jesus did in Luke chapter 24, in Luke chapter 24 and verse 44, it says, Then he said to them, These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms concerning me. Now, Psalms was the predominant book of the collection called the writings.

So Jesus recognized these three segments of the Old Testament, the law and the prophets and the Psalms. The Psalms would be shorthand for saying the holy writing.

That were the third category.

See, the law was Torah. Torah is the Hebrew word for law. If you go back far enough, the word Torah originally etymologically referred to the word to shoot, like to shoot an arrow.

But apparently through the years, it came to have the meaning of to aim, as you would aim an arrow that you're about to shoot. And then further, it went through further development until it meant to direct or instruct. So that Torah means instruction, although it is the word that the Jews use for the law, the law of Moses.

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are called the Torah. That's the first division of the Old Testament. And then there is the prophets and the Jews recognize certain books as prophets that we might not.

For example, Joshua, Judges and the books of Samuel and Kings were called prophets. Now, those are really historical narratives. The Jews called those the early prophets or the former prophets.

And then Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and what they called the twelve, which is the minor prophets. We call them the minor prophets, the twelve. Those were the latter prophets.

So they have the early prophets and the latter prophets in the prophet section. Now, there are certain books that we include in the prophets that the Jews did not. They include in the writings.

For example, they included Daniel and Lamentations in the third category, the writings. They also included Ruth and Esther there and Psalms, of course, and Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon. So these are kind of miscellaneous writings.

It's not known for sure why Daniel was placed in the writings rather than in the prophets. And for that matter, why Ruth was. Ruth is a historical narrative and so is Esther.

But for whatever reasons, the Jews included those among the writings instead of where we would put them. Their canon is the same books as our canon, but they're in another arrangement in the Jewish Bible, different than in our Bible. But the interesting thing is the Jews had the same canon of the Old Testament that we have.

Now, there were some who disputed it. The Samaritans split from the Jews about 110 B.C. The Samaritans were a race to the north of Judah. Jesus encountered them.

They were a despised race to the Jews. The Samaritans and the Jews did not love each other at all. Jesus talking to the woman at the well was talking to a Samaritan.

And most Jews would not talk to Samaritans or women for that matter. Jesus kind of broke custom in both respects in that conversation. The woman was surprised when Jesus asked her for water to drink because she said, You're a Jew and you're asking me,

a Samaritan, for water? You Jews don't drink from the same vessels as we Samaritans.

You have nothing to do with us. And that's because the Samaritans in an earlier time had come into being by intermarriage between Israelites and Gentiles. And the Israelite blood had been mixed so thoroughly that they created what the Jews regarded to be a half-breed race, neither Gentile nor Jew, but certainly not Jewish enough to be considered clean and acceptable to the Jewish people.

And the Samaritans had given opposition to Zerubbabel and to Ezra and Nehemiah in the days after the exile. And in the year 110 BC, the Jews had destroyed the Samaritan temple, which was on Mount Gerizim. The Jews, of course, had their temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

The Samaritans had started a rival religion to Judaism and put their temple on another mountain, Mount Gerizim. You might remember when Jesus spoke with the woman at the well. She said, Sir, I see you're a prophet.

Our fathers worshipped God in this mountain, she means Mount Gerizim, where there had once been a temple standing. And you Jews say we should worship in Jerusalem. What do you say? And so she was referring to the fact that the Samaritans and the Jews had separate mountains, separate sanctuaries, where they authorized the worship of God.

But the Jews had destroyed the sanctuary of the Samaritans in 110, and that was the final break between those two. At that time, the Samaritans accepted only the Torah, only the law as the Bible, as their Bible, because they believed that the later books tended to authorize Jerusalem as a sanctuary. You know, you get into the books of Samuel and so forth.

You've got David establishing Jerusalem as the place and Solomon building a sanctuary there. And the temple in Jerusalem is kind of central in the rest of the Old Testament. So probably for that reason, primarily the Samaritans rejected everything except the Torah.

Also, it is thought that the Sadducees of Jesus' time only accepted the Torah. This is based on something Josephus said, and most interpret it to mean that the Sadducees didn't recognize any scripture except the five books of Moses, the Torah. But they and the Samaritans were different than the Jews in general.

Most of the Jews recognized the law, the prophets, and the writings as scripture. Now, there were books called the Apocrypha. They weren't called the Apocrypha until later, but they are books that were written in the intertestamental period.

Remember I said the last writing prophet of Israel was Malachi, 400 years before Christ. And then, of course, there were no more prophets until John the Baptist came in the New Testament era. And therefore, we have 400 years in between these testaments where

God was not really inspiring any prophets to speak or to write.

Nonetheless, the Jews still had an ongoing literary tradition going on. And they were writing their histories. They were writing their edifying books.

The only problem is they weren't writing as prophets. They weren't inspired. Just like we have many good Christian books that we would recommend to people to read because they're edifying, but we wouldn't call them inspired.

We might recommend that people read A. W. Tozer or, you know, My Utmost Forest Highest or some of these devotional books that most people have found edifying, but we don't want to put them into the Bible. We don't believe they are on the same level with the Bible. So the Jews also, in that 400-year intertestamental period, wrote a number of books.

Some of them were historical in nature. Some of them are regarded by scholars to be reliable history. Some of them are thought to be somewhat fanciful.

Some of them seem to be legendary. And then there were like wisdom books that resembled Proverbs. The book of Ecclesiasticus or Syracuse is a book like that.

And there's a book called The Wisdom of Solomon that was written. That latter book brings to light something in that some of these books that were written in the intertestamental period bore the names of someone who had lived earlier. For example, The Wisdom of Solomon was not written by Solomon.

It was sort of an imitation of the style of Proverbs, which was written by Solomon, but the apocryphal book of wisdom claimed to be Solomon's, but was not. And sometimes, like there was a book written that claimed to be written by Baruch. Now, Baruch was the scribe of the prophet Jeremiah, but the book of Baruch was written long after the lifetime of those men.

So, these are what we call, what scholars call pseudepigraphal literature. There's a word to get into your vocabulary. You use that a lot.

Pseudepigraphal. You can recognize the first part of the word. Pseudo means false.

And the last part, grapple, is from grapple writings. I can't tell you what the middle syllable comes from in the Greek, but basically pseudepigraphal literature means written under a false name. There were a lot of pseudepigraphal gospels in the second century, like the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Philip.

These were not written by those people. They were written long after their death by people who wanted their readers to think they were written by those people. And so, a book that's written in a false name, as if the author is someone who is really not, that

class of literature is called pseudepigraphal literature.

Now, the books written in the intertestamental period, many of them were, although not inspired, they were quite edifying. And they found their way into the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Old Testament was translated into Greek, most scholars believe, about 285 years before Christ.

At least, they believe the translation began to be made then. It was done over a lengthy period of time. And the legend is that it was done by 70 some odd scholars, Jewish scholars, in Alexandria, Egypt.

And the name of that translation is called the Septuagint. And that is a word you should know. You can live without knowing pseudepigraphal.

But as a Christian, you certainly ought to know what the Septuagint is, because it is an alternative Old Testament source. Our Old Testament was written in Hebrew, but the Septuagint was written in Greek. It's a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek.

The Jews, about three centuries before Christ, approximately, had been conquered, like everyone else had, by Alexander the Great, had come under the Grecian rule. Alexander had imposed Greek as the language upon his entire empire. And there were fewer and fewer people who read Hebrew.

And so these scholars, as the story goes, in Alexandria, these Jewish scholars, translated their Hebrew scriptures into Greek, so that the people who knew Greek and didn't know Hebrew could read them. It's actually the first instance in history of any book being translated from its original language into another language. The Bible is the first book ever to have been translated, as far as we know.

Now, the Greek Old Testament, once they finished translating the Old Testament books into Greek, they kept going. They kept translating other Jewish religious literature into Greek. So the Septuagint began to be swollen with books that didn't belong to the Bible, including these intertestamental books, these books that were written in the intertestamental period.

And because the Septuagint included some of these books, it became confusing as to whether they belong in the Scripture or not. I don't know if it was confusing to the Jews, but it was confusing to Christians later on. And this was, in fact, why the Roman Catholics still include these intertestamental books in their Old Testament, because they say, well, the Septuagint had them in there.

Although, by the way, it's a rather inconsistent rule they're applying, because the Septuagint also had other books in it that the Catholics do not recognize. There was 1 and 2 Esdras, there were 3 and 4 Maccabees, and the Catholic Bible does not recognize

those. 1 and 2 Maccabees, the Roman Catholics do include in their Bible, but 3 and 4 Maccabees, they don't.

And yet all of those are found in the Septuagint. So, there's kind of an inconsistent rule followed by those who include the Apocrypha, as it's called. Now, it was Jerome in the 4th century, I believe, who first referred to the term Apocrypha, or 5th century, referred to the term Apocrypha, when he made the Vulgate translation of the whole Bible into Latin.

When Jerome translated the Bible into Latin, he used the word Apocrypha for these books that we're referring to, that were written between the two Testaments. The word Apocrypha means hidden away, and it's not even known for sure why Jerome chose that word to refer to these books, hidden away. Some scholars think it's because when a book was not considered the sacred book, but it was a respected book, they didn't want to destroy it, but they didn't want to include it, so they just hid it away.

And so, that may be why Jerome chose that term. But Apocrypha means hidden away, and we refer to these books as Apocryphal writings. Now, of course, the reason I bring all this up is because we're talking about the canon, or the proper collection of books for the Old Testament, and there is dispute about that canon among Christians.

That is, between Roman Catholics and Protestants, because Protestants really have never accepted the Apocrypha as scripture. When Martin Luther made his German translation of the Bible, remember, Luther was a Catholic until the Reformation. He was a Roman Catholic monk, and then he became a believer in doctrines that came later to be associated with Protestants.

He's the founder of that movement. But as a Roman Catholic, his Bible that he read in Latin, it had the Apocrypha in it. He read the Vulgate, which was the Latin translation made by Jerome.

Now, Luther translated the Bible into German, but he wasn't sure what to do with the Apocryphal books because he was convinced they were not really scripture. He included them separately in his translation, and he said that he believed these books were edifying and profitable for Christians to read, but they were not scripture. They were not inspired.

And that has been the view of Protestant scholars for the most part ever since. Now, there is, of course, this dispute. Do the Apocryphal books really belong to the canon of the Old Testament? If they do, it's a shame for our Bibles to leave them out.

But if they don't, it's confusing to put them in. And the arguments for excluding them from the Bible are as follows. There is no claim, really, that these books were written by prophets.

The Jews did not believe they were written by prophets. They emerged after the prophetic era was closed, after Malachi's time, and no more prophets came. So even though these books bore the names of famous characters from the Old Testament in some cases, they were not believed by the Jews to be written by prophets.

And therefore, the evidence is the Jews did not accept them as scripture, even though they included them in the Septuagint. When they made the Greek translation, they did include them, and others besides. I mean, the Septuagint includes a lot of books that are not scripture, as well as the scripture.

But Josephus was a Jewish historian living in the time of the apostles. He was born like two years or three years after Jesus died. So Josephus never saw Jesus, but he lived in Jerusalem at the same time the apostles did.

He was not a Christian, but he's a thorough historian. He wrote, after Jerusalem fell, he wrote two major works and some minor works, works of history. And interestingly, his works have survived, while very few works of history from that period have.

And in Josephus' work, he tells us that the apocryphal writings were not regarded worthy of equal credit with the inspired books of the Old Testament. And thus, Josephus seems to represent the attitude of the Jewish people of his time about those books. He indicated the number of books that the Jews recognized, and they seem to correspond with the books we recognize in our Old Testament.

So it would appear from him that the apocryphal books did not belong in the Bible that the Jews used. They didn't consider them to be scripture. Likewise, another Jew living at the same time, Philo, a very famous Jewish philosopher and religious writer who lived in Alexandria, Egypt, at the same time as the apostles, at the same time Josephus was in Jerusalem, Philo was in Alexandria, and he was an authority, a Jewish authority, and he also, though he quoted extensively from the canonical books of the Old Testament, he never quoted from the apocryphal books and did not apparently accept them as scripture either.

So we have reason to believe that in the time of Jesus, the Jews did not accept the apocryphal books, the apocrypha as scripture. And we have further evidence from Jesus and the apostles, who we know quoted the Old Testament a lot. There are believed to be about 300 quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament.

It's approximately 300 citations, but there's not one citation or quote from the apocryphal books. Now, that would seem strange if Jesus and the apostles recognized the apocryphal books as scripture. It would be strange if they never quoted them when they quoted so extensively from the books that we regard as scripture and know as scripture.

It would seem that Josephus, Philo, Jesus, and the apostles all bear testimony that in the first century the pious Jews did not accept the apocryphal books as scripture. Now, what makes this confusing is that later church fathers, especially in the third century and following, did quote the apocryphal books as if they were scripture. And thus, when the Roman Catholic Church emerged in later centuries, they accepted the apocryphal books and still do.

The Roman Catholics still include them in their Bibles. But they're all in the Old Testament. There are no New Testament apocryphal books in the Catholic Bible.

So it would seem that the Protestants are justified in not including the apocryphal books in the Old Testament, and therefore the Protestant Bible, I believe, contains the correct canon of the Old Testament. In the second century, this is before the church fathers began to quote from the apocrypha as authoritative, Justin Martyr and Theophilus of Antioch cited Old Testament scripture frequently, but they did not quote from the apocrypha. And the earliest known list of Old Testament books among Christians, a man named Melito, made a list in 170 AD of the books that Christians recognized as scripture in the Old Testament, and they did not include the apocrypha.

So it would appear that the early church, even up into the second century, did not recognize the apocrypha, though later church fathers did, and eventually the Roman Catholics adopted it. So that is probably all I have to say about the Old Testament canon. I want to talk about the New Testament canon, because we sometimes hear that there are a lot of books written by Christians that got cut out of the New Testament canon.

This is especially said to be true about Gospels, records of Jesus' life. I mentioned that there are apocryphal Gospels that were written in the second and third centuries, and there are some today, not Christians, but non-Christians, and in most cases with a mind to undermine Christianity, they say that these apocryphal Gospels are really the authoritative ones. They say that in the early church there were different streams of belief about Jesus, and the Gnostics who wrote the apocryphal Gospels, they say, were the real true Christians, and yet the Gospels that we have in our Bible were written by another stream of thought in Christianity, and they say that in the fourth century the Gnostic Gospels were omitted by Constantine, and the four Gospels that we have, what we would call the canonical Gospels, from the word canon, the canonical Gospels, that they were included by Constantine, and the argument that you often hear is that the early Christians thought of Jesus merely as a man, but in later generations he was conceived more as a divine being, and that the Gnostic Gospels present him as a man, a mere man, but that Constantine wanting to deify Christ approved only of the Gospels we have, which present him as deity.

Now those who make that argument are not very familiar with either the Gospels in the Bible or the apocryphal Gospels, because actually the Gnostics, the writers of the

apocryphal Gospels, are the ones who didn't make him out to be a real man. The Gnostics believed that Jesus was not really human. They believed that he was a spirit being, and some of the Gnostics actually said that when Jesus walked he didn't leave footprints, because they said he was only an apparition.

He only looked like a man, but he didn't really have physicality. That's what the Gnostics thought. Whereas our Gospels actually present him very much as a man.

They make him get hungry, they speak of him falling asleep because he's exhausted, everything about him is human. Although the Gospel of John brings out, as the others do not, that he was also, in addition to being man, he was God who had become a man. But the representation of the distinction between the canonical Gospels, which are said to allegedly teach that Jesus is God, and the Gnostic Gospels that make him out to be more of a man, which is the way it's represented, for example, in the Da Vinci Code, when it's trying to undermine the Gospels of our Bible.

Dan Brown, who wrote the Da Vinci Code, could have saved himself some embarrassment by actually reading these documents, and he would have realized that the Gospels as we have them, for the most part, do not emphasize Jesus being God. John's Gospel is an exception, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke, you could read through them all the way and never get the impression Jesus was God. And yet the Gnostic Gospels, they're the ones who make him something different than human.

So, the question is, why do we have these four Gospels and not more? Well, as I said, the New Testament books have their authority due to being written by apostles. Now, two of the Gospels were not written by apostles, at least not written by any of the twelve apostles. Matthew and John, obviously, were among the twelve, and they wrote Gospels.

Mark and Luke were not among the twelve, but both of them were probably apostolic men in the sense that they traveled in apostolic teams. Paul sometimes spoke about himself and those who traveled with him as apostles, although Paul was an apostle of another sort. Paul was an apostle on the level of Peter and James and John and those guys.

The others who traveled with him probably had sort of a derived apostolic authority because they were under Paul. They were traveling with Paul under his direction and so forth. The team was apostolic, and therefore, the men on that team could be seen as apostolic men even if they were not themselves apostles.

Certainly anything Luke wrote while he was traveling with Paul would never have been published without Paul's approval, especially if he was writing something as important as the story of Jesus' life or, in the book of Acts, the story of Paul's life. Written while Paul and Luke were together, in all likelihood, these books would have had to have Paul's approval before they would have been issued, and therefore, they're believed to be

apostolic. Mark's gospel, according to very early sources, the original source for this information is Papias who lived in the early 2nd century.

Papias said that Mark was Peter's interpreter and that the gospel of Mark was actually, should be regarded as the gospel, according to Peter, written down by Mark. So that's apostolic, too. So these gospels were recognized, these four, as being the products of the apostolic community.

Now, the Church Fathers knew this and accepted them. The Church Fathers also knew about the Apocryphal Gospels. They knew about the Gospel of Philip.

They knew about the Gospel of Thomas. They knew about these other Gospels. They were around in the 2nd and 3rd century, and the Church Fathers often wrote treatises debunking them and refuting them because the early Christians knew that these Apocryphal Gospels were forgeries written falsely in the names of apostles.

They were pseudepigraphal. So the early Church recognized the four Gospels essentially from the beginning, as being from the apostles. The earliest actual record we have of a recognized collection of four Gospels probably comes from about 170 AD, and we have it from two sources in that year, in that period of time.

One of those is the Church Father Irenaeus. Irenaeus, about 170 AD, said that the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, were universally accepted, and they were the only Gospels universally accepted by the entire Church throughout the world. Now, this could have been true long before Irenaeus' time.

We just don't have anyone saying so. They could have held that status even a hundred years earlier, almost. But we do have very early witness.

And when you think about it, Irenaeus saying that in the year 170 AD, that's 150 years before Constantine. It's evident that Constantine didn't have anything to do with deciding which Gospels belonged in the Bible. That decision was universally known by the churches, all the churches worldwide, at least 150 years before Constantine's time.

So, the suggestion that Constantine shaped the canon of our New Testament is really just made up out of thin air. Now, there was another early source for that information, and that was Tatian. T-A-T-I-A-N, Tatian.

Tatian was the first person to make a harmony of the Gospels. You can buy harmonies of the Gospels today. Actually, our brother Frank here has been working for a couple of years on a harmony of the Gospels you can see online, where you've actually got columns with all four Gospels harmonized, where it's got the same stories next to each other, and they're compared, the four Gospels compared.

The first attempt to do that was by a man named Tatian. His book was called The

Diatesteron, and it was a harmony of the four Gospels. And it, again, is from 170 A.D., and therefore provides evidence that these four Gospels were the recognized Gospels in that year, because Tatian didn't make it with three Gospels or five Gospels or a different four.

He used the same four Gospels that are in our Bible. So, we don't... Now, by the way, before that, there were earlier Church Fathers who quoted extensively from our four Gospels. We don't have any earlier witness saying these four are the four accepted Gospels.

But we do have the writings of the Church Fathers prior to Irenaeus, who quoted extensively from our four Gospels, and not from the Gnostic Gospels. So, there's plenty of reason to say that the early Church knew which books were written by the Apostles and which were not, and that we have every reason to accept the Gospels that we have as belonging there. Now, of course, the rest of the writings after the Gospels in Acts... By the way, Acts, I think... Acts got into the canon sort of on the coattails of Luke, because Luke's Gospel was accepted as a genuine Apostolic work.

And Acts... The book of Acts is really Luke Volume 2. Luke wrote a two-volume work. The first was the Life of Christ, in the book of Luke, and the other was the book of Acts, the Acts of the Apostles. And it would seem strange to accept Luke's first volume and not his second, especially if the question was whether it's Apostolic or not.

The same man wrote both. Clearly, if you accept one, you should accept both as Apostolic. And so that's why the Gospels and Luke are there.

Now, the rest of the books in the New Testament are either... Well, they're all epistles. Even the book of Revelation is an epistle. And the epistles of our New Testament are written by Paul and James and Peter and John and Jude.

Now, Paul's apostleship came to be universally recognized among the churches within a few years after his conversion. And even Peter, as we have seen, in 2 Peter 3, verses 15 and 16, Peter referred to all of Paul's letters as Scripture. Now, I want to say that we don't know if Peter had all of the same letters from Paul that we have because Paul's letters, like the others, circulated as independent documents.

Paul wrote one letter to Rome, two or three or four to Corinthians, a letter to the Galatians, a letter to the Colossians, and so forth, two to the Thessalonians. And these letters went to different geographical areas, but because they were Paul's letters, the people cherished them, copied them, circulated them, and eventually after Paul's death, someone made every effort to collect all of his letters. Now, whether Peter had all of Paul's letters that we have when he spoke of all of Paul's epistles in 2 Peter 3, verse 15, we don't know.

But he knew of several, apparently, because Peter uses that expression when he talks about our beloved brother Paul writing of these things in all his epistles. Now, even if Peter had only five or six of Paul's epistles instead of the thirteen that we have, still, in referring to all of Paul's epistles as Scripture, we have every reason to believe that they were Scripture because they were written by the Apostle Paul. And therefore, if Peter didn't even have the whole collection, and we do, they're all written by the Apostle Paul, so they all would have the same status as Scripture.

Peter's apostolic credentials really have never been questioned. So, 1 Peter was always accepted as Scripture. 2 Peter was questioned for a long time because some doubted that Peter had written 2 Peter.

It was one of those books that was held a little bit at arm's length for a while because people were not sure initially whether Peter had written 2 Peter. And likewise, Jude, because Jude was not known to have been an apostle. Now, Jude was a brother of Jesus and a brother of James.

Now, James was called an apostle. The book of James was written by James, the Lord's brother. And that James was not one of the twelve apostles, but he became respected as an apostle after the resurrection of Christ.

And Paul, in Galatians chapter 1, refers to that James as an apostle. So, it's clear that the brother of Jesus, James, was called an apostle. Perhaps the brother of Jesus, Jude, was too.

We don't have any specific testimony in the New Testament that Jude was recognized as an apostle. But he was, like James, he was a brother of Jesus and both of them were respected leaders in the church. It's probable that Jude was considered an apostle also.

Now, John, of course, was also an undisputed apostle. So, the letters of John, as well as his gospel and the book of Revelation belong there. However, there were questions about some of these books.

Like I say, 2 Peter and Jude were questioned for some time as to whether they had apostolic credentials. The book of Hebrews was questioned, largely because it's anonymous. No one really knows who wrote Hebrews.

Now, of course, if we don't know who wrote it, it's hard to affirm that it was written by an apostle. And for that reason, many in the early church weren't sure whether Hebrews belonged in the New Testament Scriptures. I think the decision was probably made in favor of it, because there's strong evidence within the book that it's apostolic.

For example, the writer of Hebrews in chapter 13 mentions that he's traveling with Timothy. Now, Timothy traveled with Paul all the time, or most of the time. And whoever is traveling with Timothy must have been in that company with Paul.

In fact, of course, there's lots of churches that felt that Paul wrote Hebrews. There's reasons to question that. And so, some of the churches believe Paul wrote it, others did not.

I won't mess with that question right now. It's a complicated, tangled discussion of who wrote Hebrews. But there's evidence within it that the writer of Hebrews himself speaks of himself traveling with Timothy.

And we know that Timothy was essentially inseparable from Paul. So, whoever wrote Hebrews either was Paul, or was somebody in that circle, and probably as such was just as worthy to be included in Scripture as the writings of Luke. In fact, there is one theory, that Luke is the writer of Hebrews.

The books of Luke and Acts, which are written by Luke, have some of the most cultured Greek style in the New Testament. The only other book that has similar cultured Greek style is Hebrews. That doesn't prove that Luke wrote it.

There could be other early Christians who wrote in a cultured Greek style. But if it's somebody traveling with Timothy, someone who was one of Paul's companions, there's a possibility at least that Luke wrote the book of Hebrews. And if so, he or somebody in his same circle would be qualified to contribute to what we call Scripture.

Eventually, all these books came to be accepted. Revelation was held in question for a while, because the style, the Greek style of Revelation is unlike the Greek style of the Gospel of John and the three epistles of John. And yet, it was almost universally believed in the first two centuries that John wrote, the same John who wrote the Gospel and the three epistles wrote Revelation.

But it was like in the fourth century that some people began to say, wait, the style is too different. Maybe it was a different John. That was questioned for a while.

However, all 27 of the books that we have and no others were accepted by the Senate of Hippo in 393 and the Senate of Carthage in 397. Also, Jerome's Vulgate in Latin, which was translated between 382 and 405 A.D. It had the same canon of the New Testament we have. Before that time, there were certain churches that weren't sure about a few of our books.

And also, before that time, there were some other books that people wanted to include. There was a book called the Didache, which is still available to read. Highly respected in the churches, but it was not written by the Apostles, so it was not put in.

Some wanted it in. There was a book called the Shepherd of Hermas, which is kind of written similarly to the Book of Revelation. It's kind of a series of visions by a guy named Hermas.

And the early church really liked that book. They read it a lot. Some wanted it to go into the canon of Scripture.

But since it was not written by an apostolic individual, it was not included. Actually, if the New Testament had been a collection of prophetic writings like the Old Testament was, the Shepherd of Hermas probably would have been included because many early Christians saw it as a prophetic book. But since the New Testament were apostolic rather than prophetic, and Hermas was not an apostle, he did not end up making the final cut.

There was also an epistle of Barnabas alleged. Alleged epistle of Barnabas and two epistles of Clement that many people considered as possibly canonical early writings. But the epistle of Barnabas was not written by the Barnabas who traveled with Paul.

And Clement, his identity is not certainly known. And they were not included. So, by at least the late 4th century, all the churches recognized the 27 New Testament books we have and no more.

Well, I'm just about out of time, but there's a number of other things I want to say by way of introduction to the Bible. So, maybe we should just take a break here. And I'll continue with these notes and if we finish in the next hour, we'll also continue into our introduction to Pentateuch in that hour.

For more information, visit www.fema.org