

**Xenos Christian Fellowship**  
**Christian Principles Unit 3: Week 10**  
**Biblical Canonicity**

**Introduction – why are some books in the Bible while others excluded?**

Was the canon determined by councils of men (Jamnia, Nicea) or was it determined generation by generation through acceptance of inspired writings?

*Canonicity is the study of the recognition and acceptance of the books given by God's inspiration. "God gives divine authority to a book and men of God receive it. God reveals and His people recognize what He reveals. Canonicity is determined by God and discovered by man."<sup>1</sup>*

**The Old Testament**

MODERN LIBERAL THEORY:

- The Pentateuch
  
- The Prophets
  
- The Writings

THESIS: The canon was known and immediately recognized as scripture as it developed in each generation.

CRITERION FOR INCLUSION IN THE CANON: PROPHETIC AUTHORSHIP

Test #1 for Prophetic Authorship:

Deut. 18:18-22 “I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And it shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ ”And you may say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' ”When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”

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<sup>1</sup> Norman Geisler and William E. Nix, *From God To Man: How We Got Our Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 66.

1 Sam. 3:19,20 Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD.

Jeremiah 28:9-10 "The prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then that prophet will be known as one whom the LORD has truly sent."

Ezekiel 33:33 "So when it comes to pass-- as surely it will-- then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst."

### Test #2 for Prophetic Authorship:

Deut. 13:1-5 "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you."

## BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR PROPHETIC AUTHORSHIP OF OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS

### Old Testament Evidence for prophetic authorship

1. Moses wrote the Pentateuch (Exodus 17:14; 24:4-7; 34:27; Deuteronomy 31:9,22,24; Ezra 7:6; Psalm 103:7; Joshua 8:31, 23:6; 1 Kings 2:3).
2. The Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah/Lamentations, Ezekiel), except for Daniel, identify themselves as prophets. They stated that they were ordered to write (Jeremiah 30:2; Ezekiel 43:11; Isaiah 8:1) because they were aware that they were communicating revelation.
3. All of the 12 Minor Prophets identify themselves as prophets.
4. 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings were written by prophets (1 Chronicles 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29; 12:15; 13:22; 20:34; 32:32; 33:19).
5. Joshua (Joshua 1:1; 5:13-15), Solomon (1 Kings 3:5ff.), and Daniel (Daniel 7:1) all received revelation from God, either directly or through dreams and visions, which squares with God's description of a prophet (Deuteronomy 13:1; Numbers 12:6-8). Joshua was the first fulfillment of Deut. 18:15--God's promise to raise up another prophet after Moses. This accounts for Joshua, Daniel, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.
6. David and Asaph, the two main authors of the Psalms, are identified as prophets in Nehemiah 12:24,36 ("David the man of God") and 2 Chronicles 29:30 ("Asaph the seer").  
Therefore, only Judges, Ruth, Chronicles, Job, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and a few Psalms lack internal evidence for prophetic authorship.

NOTE: Contrary to the "antiquity theory" (the oldest books belong in the canon).

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#### New Testament Evidence for Old Testament Canonicity

1. Jesus and the Apostles evidently had the same Old Testament we have today. They quote from it over 600 times, and clearly view it as God's Word.
2. They also quote 1 and 2 Chronicles, and Job--books which lack internal Old Testament confirmation of prophetic authorship (see above).
3. They explicitly confirm the prophetic authorship of David (Acts 2:30) and Daniel (Matthew 24:15).

The only books not quoted in the NT are Ezra, Esther, Nehemiah, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

#### EXTRA-BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR PROPHETIC AUTHORSHIP OF OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS

*The Dead Sea Scrolls* (DSS): Discovered in 1947, they contain writings dated largely from the first and second centuries BC, including entire scrolls or portions of every Old Testament book except for Esther.

- "It is written" and "God said"
- The apocryphal books are quoted also, but

#### CONCLUSION:

*Josephus*: Jewish historian writing around 70 AD, had the actual Temple scrolls in his possession as a gift from the Roman general Titus.<sup>2</sup>

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"For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another (as the Greeks have), but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them, five belong to Moses, which contain his laws, and the traditions of the origin of mankind until his death. This interval of time is little short of three thousand years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining

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<sup>2</sup> *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, 75.

four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life. From Artexerxes to our own time the complete history has been written but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records because of the *failure of the exact succession of the prophets.*” (Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion* 1:8)

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Summary:

So what about Judges, Ruth, Chronicles, Job, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther and a few Psalms?

## The Apocrypha

The Apocrypha is included in the Roman Catholic Bible and was written by Jewish authors during the period from 200 BC to 50 BC. It contains both historical works and wisdom literature.<sup>3</sup>

Since these works are the primary source documents for this period of Jewish history, they are very important from a historical standpoint. These books should not be included in the canon for these reasons:

- they were not written by prophets,
- they were universally rejected as scripture in their own day,
- they never make the claim to be scripture,
- and subsequently were rejected by both Jews and Christians,

## JEWISH EVIDENCE THAT APOCRYPHAL BOOKS AREN'T CANONICAL

### Apocrypha

And they laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, *till there should come a prophet*, and give answer concerning them. (1 Maccabees 4:46)

And there was a great tribulation in Israel, such as was not since the day, that *there was no prophet seen in Israel.* (1 Maccabees 9:27)

And that the Jews, and their priests, had consented that he should be their prince, and high priest forever, *till there should arise a faithful prophet.* (1 Maccabees 14:41)

### Josephus

“From Artexerxes to our own time the complete history has been written but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records *because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets.*” (Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion* 1:8).

### Manual of Discipline (Dead Sea Scrolls)

### The Council of Jamnia (90 AD)

"The books which they decided to acknowledge as canonical were already generally accepted, although questions had been raised about them. Those which they refused to admit had never been included. They did not expel

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<sup>3</sup> The Roman Catholic Bible contains the apocryphal books (Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and I & II Maccabees) and certain additions to Esther and Daniel.

from the canon any book which had previously been admitted. 'The Council of Jamnia,' writes J. S. Wright, 'was the confirming of public opinion, not the forming of it.'<sup>4</sup>

## CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE THAT APOCRYPHAL BOOKS AREN'T CANONICAL

- Early church writings
- How then did it find its way into the Bible?
- When and why did the Roman Catholic Church canonize the Apocrypha?

“And the day following Judas came with his company, to take away the bodies of them that were slain, and to bury them with their kinsmen, in the sepulchers of their fathers. And they found under the coats of the slain some of the donaries of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbiddeth to the Jews: so that all plainly saw, that for this cause they were slain. Then they all blessed the just judgment of the Lord, who had discovered the things that were hidden. And so betaking themselves to prayers, they besought him, that the sin which had been committed might be forgotten. But the most valiant Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves from sin, forasmuch as they saw before their eyes what had happened, because of the sins of those that were slain. And making a gathering, *he sent twelve thousand drachmas of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection, (For if he had not hoped that they that were slain should rise again, it would have seemed superfluous and vain to pray for the dead,) And because he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness, had great grace laid up for them. It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.*”  
(2 Maccabees 12:39-46)

- Many objectionable apocryphal references
  - Ecclesiasticus 25:19 Any iniquity is insignificant compared to a wife's iniquity.
  - Ecclesiasticus 25:24 From a woman sin had its beginning. Because of her we all die.
  - Ecclesiasticus 22:3 It is a disgrace to be the father of an undisciplined, and the birth of a daughter is a loss.

## The New Testament Canon

### THE CRITERION FOR INCLUSION IN THE CANON: APOSTOLIC AUTHORSHIP

(remember last week: Matthew 10:40\*; Jn 14:26; 15:26,27; 16:13)

### INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF APOSTOLIC AUTHORSHIP

- The thirteen letters of Paul
- The gospel of John (John 21:23,24)
- The 3 epistles of John (1 John 1:1)
- Revelation (Revelation 1:4,9)

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<sup>4</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Books and Parchments* (Old Tappan, NJ.: Fleming H. Revell, 1963), p. 98.

- 1 & 2 Peter (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; 3:1)

This leaves only Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews, James, and Jude without direct internal claims to apostolic authorship.

#### EARLY CHURCH EVIDENCE FOR APOSTOLIC AUTHORSHIP OF REMAINING BOOKS

- Early church writings state that the apostle **Matthew** wrote the gospel named for him.  
Papias (140 AD) states that "Matthew composed the oracles in Hebrew, and each one interpreted them as he was able."<sup>5</sup>  
Irenaeus (180-192 AD) states: "Matthew, among the Hebrews in their own dialect, brought out also a gospel while Peter and Paul in Rome were preaching and founding the church."<sup>6</sup>
- John **Mark** was Peter's *amenuensis*<sup>7</sup>-- (an understudy who researches or writes under the supervision of an apostle).  
Papias said that "Mark, having become Peter's interpreter, wrote accurately all that he remembered . . ." <sup>8</sup>  
Irenaeus says that "Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also himself committed to us inscripturated the things being preached by Peter."<sup>9</sup>  
Tertullian (200 AD) also states: ". . . that (gospel) which Mark had published may be affirmed to be Peter's, whose interpreter Mark was."<sup>10</sup>
- **Luke** functioned as Paul's *amenuensis*.  
Irenaeus said of the gospel of Luke: ". . . Luke, the follower of Paul, the gospel being preached by that one (Paul) he put down in a book."<sup>11</sup>  
It is clear that **Luke** and **Acts** have the same author (refer to Luke & Acts introductory remarks; read Donald Guthrie's, "New Testament Introduction").  
Origen says that Luke, "composed for Gentile converts . . . the Gospel commended by Paul."<sup>12</sup>  
Tertullian called it "Paul's gospel written by Luke."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Penguin Classics: Eusebius [AD 263-339], *The History of the Church*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 152.

<sup>6</sup> Penguin Classics: Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, p. 210.

<sup>7</sup> Paul and Peter both used *amenuenses* in some of their letters. See Tertius in Rom. 16:22 and Silvanus in 1 Pet. 5:12. Paul also implies that he used *amenuenses* in Gal. 6:11 and 2 Thess. 3:17.

<sup>8</sup> Penguin Classics: Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, 152.

<sup>9</sup> Penguin Classics: Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, 210.

<sup>10</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, IV, 5, cited in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Robertson and Donaldson, vol. 3, p. 350.

<sup>11</sup> Penguin Classics: Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, pp. 210,211.

<sup>12</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, preserved in *Eusebius Ecclesiastical History*, vi. 25.6. cf. *ZINT*, vol. 2, p. 385.

<sup>13</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, iv. 5, cited in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, p. 350.

- **Hebrews** is of uncertain authorship. It is theologically and conceptually connected with Paul, and 13:23,24 may refer to his imprisonment. On the other hand, the style and vocabulary are quite different from Paul's other books. Two options are possible:
  - 1.
  - 2.
- Two explanations are possible with **James** and **Jude**.
  - 1.
  - 2.

#### CONCLUSION:

"We need speak of no strong intuition of the early church, as does Westcott, whereby these holy writings were distinguished from others. It was not an intuition: It was simple obedience to the known commands of Christ and his apostles."<sup>14</sup>

"By thirty years after the death of John virtually all of them were known and used in all the centers from which our evidence comes. Certain of the smaller books were still, in some quarters, questioned as to their authorship, and therefore as to their authority, for perhaps another fifty years." (Ibid. p.246.)

"What is particularly important to notice is that the New Testament canon was not demarcated by the arbitrary decree of any church council. When at last a church council--the Synod of Hippo in AD 393--listed the 27 books of the New Testament, it did not confer upon them any authority which they did not already possess, but simply recorded their previously established canonicity."<sup>15</sup>

### New Testament Pseudepigraphal Writings

"Pseudepigraphal" means "false writings." These writings claim apostolic authorship so they will be viewed as authoritative. They were written from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD into the Middle Ages.

Two categories:

1. Cheap devotional literature focusing on the miraculous and bizarre, written to satisfy the desire for further information about the life of Jesus and the careers of the apostles,
 

EXAMPLE: *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (middle 3<sup>rd</sup> century). It records various alleged incidents in Jesus' early childhood. For example, Jesus molds clay pigeons on the Sabbath. When people object to this, he claps his hands and the pigeons fly away. When another child disperses a pool of water Jesus made, Jesus calls him an "insolent, godless

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<sup>14</sup> R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1969), p. 234.

<sup>15</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, pp. 112,113.

dunderhead” and paralyzes him. When another child bumps into his shoulder, Jesus becomes exasperated and kills the child by cursing him. When his parents complain about this to Joseph, Jesus smites them blind.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. Attempts to propagate different and heretical teachings (e.g. Gnostic).

EXAMPLE: New Age advocates use *The Gospel of Thomas* to claim Jesus' support of their views of spirituality. Probably written in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century, it was discovered in 1945 among the literature excavated at Nag Hammadi. Is not a historical narrative, but is rather a collection of 114 alleged sayings of Jesus, many of which are similar to canonical sayings, but many of which (like the following) contain Gnostic elements that clearly contradict the canonical gospels.<sup>17</sup>

"These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymus Judas Thomas wrote down. And he (Thomas) said, 'Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death.'" (1)

"Jesus said, ' . . . the Kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are sons of the living Father. But if you will not know yourselves, you will dwell in poverty and it is you who are that poverty.'" (3)

"Jesus said, 'Blessed is the lion which becomes man when consumed by man; and cursed is the man whom the lion consumes, and the lion becomes man.'" (7)

"The disciples said, 'We know that you will depart from us. Who is to be our leader?' Jesus said to them, 'Wherever you are, you are to go to James the righteous, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.'" (12)

"Jesus said to his disciples, 'Compare me to someone and tell me whom I am like.' Simon Peter said to Him, 'You are like a righteous angel.' Matthew said to Him, 'You are like a wise philosopher.' Thomas said to Him, 'Master, my mouth is totally incapable of saying what you are like.' Jesus said, 'I am not your master. Because you have drunk, you have become intoxicated from the bubbling spring which I have measured out.'" (13)

"Mary said to Jesus, 'Whom are your disciples like?' He said, 'They are like children who have settled in a field which is not theirs. When the owners of the field come, they will say, "Let us have back our field." They will undress in their presence in order to let them have back their field and to give it back to them . . .'" (21)

"His disciples said to Him, 'When will the repose of the dead come about, and when will the new world come?' He said to them, 'What you look forward to has already come, but you did not recognize it.'" (51)

"Simon Peter said to them, 'Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of Life.' Jesus said, 'I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'" (114)

## Memory Verses (covered last week)

Matt. 5:17,18\*- The Old Testament is completely accepted by Jesus.

Matt. 24:35\*- Jesus' own words are authoritative.

Matt. 10:40\*- Jesus pre-authenticates the Apostles' words.

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<sup>16</sup>Ron Cameron, ed., *The Other Gospels* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), pp. 124,125.

<sup>17</sup>All quotes from Ron Cameron, ed., *The Other Gospels* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982).

## **Assignment**

Study for the exam.

### **Key Points to know for the Exam**

Be able to define canonicity is and explain why it is important.

Know the criterion for canonicity for the Old Testament (prophetic authorship) and the New Testament (apostolic authorship).

Be able to explain why the Apocrypha (internal admission of non-prophetic authorship; Josephus) and the New Testament pseudepigraphical literature (evidence against apostolic authorship; contradictory to apostolic doctrine) do not belong in the Bible.

Matt. 5:17,18\* -- Jesus Christ affirmed the Old Testament as scripture.

Matt. 24:35\* -- Jesus affirmed his own words as authoritative.

Matt. 10:40\* -- Jesus pre-authenticated the apostles to write scripture.