

NICK GUY & ONE “N” CANON AFFAIR

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THEME: Who determined which books would be included in the Canon of Scripture, and what process did they use to make this determination? Also, can we be certain that the books contained in the Bible are actually the inspired, infallible Word of God?

NOTES: We believe that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant word of God. The words contained in it are truth. They are the final authority on every subject of which they speak. We base our views and our lives on what the Bible says.

Men, throughout the ages, have argued points of morality and doctrine from the Bible, taking its words as authoritative. With the Word of God carrying this much weight, the need for assurance that what is contained in the Bible is indeed the inspired word of God is obvious.

DEFINE “CANON”: We usually think of the Bible as one book. Actually, it is a collection of 66 separate books. We call this collection of books the *canon* of Scripture.

The term “canon” comes from a Greek word that means “measuring rod,” “standard,” or “norm.” Those books included in the canon are those that are divinely inspired by God.

The Bible represents God’s speaking to men, His communication to us.

The Apostle Peter, in 2 Peter 2:16-21, placed revelation from God as more dependable than even his own personal experiences (and he had many). He concludes these verses by saying, “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

THE NEED FOR A CANON: The 66 books that make up the Bible were not the only accounts and letters that were in circulation in the first century. Spurious writings which were akin to fiction were being produced, as well as attacks on genuine writings. Obviously, there was a need for determining which of these accounts and letters were written by men who were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

There were those like Marcion, a Bishop in the early church, who developed his own canon which supported his own view of theology. Many Eastern Churches were using books in their services that were questionable. Also, Apostolic writings were being circulated and used in public worship. It became vital to determine which of these writings were God-breathed.

All of this made it clear that a defined Canon of Scripture needed to be established. Not an easy task, and one not to be taken lightly.

WHO DETERMINED THE CANON: The Bible doesn't simply give us a list of the books that belong in it. The canon of the Old Testament was determined by Jewish rabbis and scholars, and the New Testament by the early Christian leaders. No one council or group was responsible for determining either Canon, but the process took several years, being determined by several councils, applying several tests.

The position of those who made these determinations was that they had no power to cause any books to be inspired. They, rather, recognized, through a process, which books were God-breathed.

Since AD 397 the Christian Church has considered the canon of Scripture to be complete. F. F. Bruce wrote that when "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."

TESTS FOR DETERMINING THE CANON:

TEST ONE - AUTHORSHIP: The Church councils that met to determine which books were inspired by God followed similar principles as they worked their way through the process.

Perhaps the first consideration had to do with authorship. With the Old Testament it was considered whether or not the author was a recognized spokesman of God. Was he a prophet? Did the book indicate that God was speaking through the writer?

With the New Testament, they would consider whether or not the author an apostle, or had the endorsement of an apostle. For example, the gospels of Matthew and John would not be questioned because both of these writers were Apostles. In the case of Mark and Luke, both had the endorsement of an Apostle. Mark with the endorsement of Peter, and Luke with the endorsement of Paul.

TEST TWO - INTERNAL EVIDENCE: A key element in determining whether or not a particular book belonged in the Canon of Scripture would be its consistency with the rest of Scripture. Did the book give internal evidence that it was divinely inspired? Did it teach, instruct or present what it contained in a manner consistent with known Scripture? Was it doctrinally consistent with known Scripture?

It should be obvious that any book, writing or letter that contained information that contradicted what was known to be God-breathed would have to be rejected.

TEST THREE: HISTORICAL ACCURACY: Another test that was applied to the books that were under consideration for inclusion in the Canon of Scripture concerned its historical accuracy.

Certainly if a book were truly inspired by God, one would assume that it would be historically accurate. Any book that contained factual errors could be, and was, rejected.

It's important to note that over the years the historical accuracy of the Bible has been questioned and challenged. But there are several examples where modern archeology has verified the Bible's accuracy, in some cases where the Bible has stood alone in contradiction to the rest of supposedly-known history.

For example, Isaiah 20:1 speaks of Sargon, a king of Assyria who fought against the city of Ashdod and took it. This reference was the only known mention of Sargon's name in ancient literature, and the Bible was considered to be in error. But, in 1842, the ruins of the Sargon's palace in Nineveh were discovered, revealing Sargon to be one of Assyria's greatest kings. An inscription was also found that verified what the Bible said of him.

TEST FOUR - ACCEPTANCE AMONG THE CHURCHES: Universal acceptance of a book among the churches was important factor in determining the Canon of Scripture. Was the book, on the whole, accepted by the Church at large? This test, in particular, aided in the elimination of a number of books. A particular book may have been read and used in one Church, but its lack of universal acceptance caused it to be eliminated.

The Old Testament Canon had been set by the time of Jesus, and was accepted by the early church fathers as containing the Words of God. Jesus Himself endorsed various books as God-breathed by direct quotation. And, by not bringing correction to the Canon as it stood, the whole of the Old Testament.

The Apostle Peter, in 2 Peter 3:16, places Paul's writing as equal to Scripture.

THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON: By the time of Jesus, the Old Testament Canon had been established. By A.D. 250 there was nearly universal agreement on the canon of Hebrew Scripture.

The Old Testament was viewed by Hebrew scholars as consisting of three sections. First, there is the Law. These would include the Torah or the Five books of Moses. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The second section is the Prophets, and the third (consisting of the historical and poetic books) is the Writings.

Validation of the Old Testament Canon can be found in the New Testament. There are some 250 quotes from the Old Testament. Each Old Testament book, except Esther, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon, are quotes from.

But perhaps the strongest endorsement would come from Jesus Himself. In Luke 24:44, in speaking to His disciples after His resurrection, said, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

By recognizing the three categories of the Old Testament (with the Writings being referred to as the Psalms) He confirms the Canon as it was then set.

JESUS' CONTROVERSY WITH THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS: Jesus often quarreled with the religious leaders of His day and most of these quarrels had to do with Scripture. They were known as strict followers of the Law, yet Jesus condemned them many times for their words and actions. If the Old Testament Canon was indeed set in place, why this controversy?

The problems Jesus had with the religious leaders was two-fold. Although both Jesus and the religious leaders had the same Scriptures, and both recognized the authority and inspiration of the same books, they came into conflict because of a difference in interpretation. The religious leaders many times went astray because they missed the heart of what God was saying to men through His word. And by missing the heart, they missed His purpose as well.

Secondly, as a means of defining the Word of God, the religious leaders began adding many traditions and practices to it. Traditions and practices that were not only at variance with the purpose of God, but that they held on equal footing with Scripture.

THE APOCRYPHA: There are writings that, even to this day, are disputed by Protestants and Catholics as to whether or not they belong in the Canon.

These books, and in some cases additions to books, are called the Apocrypha. The vast majority of Hebrew scholars considered the Apocrypha to be good historical and religious documents, but not inspired by God.

They were excluded from the Canon for several reasons. Among them was because they contained historical or geographical inaccuracies.

They also presented doctrines and promoted practices that were contradictory to known Scripture. For example, in the Apocryphal book of Tobit 4:11 we read, "For alms deliver from all sin, and from death, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness." Scripture teaches us that it is the sacrificial work of Jesus on the cross, and that alone, that has the power to deliver from sin.

No council of the early Christian Church for the first four centuries recognized the Apocrypha as inspired.

Jesus, nor any of the New Testament writers, ever quoted from the Apocrypha, although they did quote hundreds of Old Testament references.

THE NEED FOR A NEW TESTAMENT CANON: The whole of the Old Testament pointed either explicitly or implicitly to Jesus Christ. With the coming of Christ the promise of God to redeem mankind was fulfilled. The sacrificial system had ended and a new covenant had been established.

There was a need for God's people to understand what the New Covenant entailed, how the Old Testament prophecies and promises had been fulfilled and why and how

the sacrificial system had become unnecessary.

Many books, letters and historical accounts were in circulation. It was vital that a determination be made as to which of these writings were the authoritative Word of God and which were not.

Marcion, a 2nd century bishop of Sinope, developed his own Canon, which rejected the Old Testament and much of the New Testament apart from the letters of Paul and the Gospel of Luke (which he altered to fit his views), and began to propagate it. This action revealed to the Church leaders the need for determining the Canon.

THE PROCESS FOR DETERMINING THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON:

For the New Testament, the process of recognizing and establishing the Canon began in the first centuries of the Christian church.

Very early on, some of the New Testament books were being recognized as having been Divinely inspired. For example, the Apostle Paul, in 1 Timothy 5:18, quotes both Deuteronomy 25:4 (an Old Testament book) and the Gospel of Luke 10:7 (a New Testament book) as equally being the word of God.

The Apostle Peter recognized Paul's writings as Scripture in 2 Peter 3:15-16.

Clement of Rome mentioned at least eight New Testament books in A.D. 95. Ignatius of Antioch acknowledged about seven books in A.D. 115. Polycarp, a disciple of John the apostle, acknowledged 15 books in A.D. 108. In A.D. 185, Irenaeus mentioned 21 books. Hippolytus, who lived between A.D. 170-235, recognized 22 books.

In A.D. 363, the Council of Laodicea listed, along with the Old Testament, the 27 books of the New Testament as those to be read in the churches. The Council of Hippo, in A.D. 393, and the Council of Carthage, in A.D. 397, both gave ascent to the same 27 books as being God-breathed.

These councils had no authority, nor did they claim it, to cause a book to be inspired by God. Rather, they simply recognized those books that God had inspired. The books were inspired at the moment they were written

RESOURCES: RC Sproul