

The Old Testament Canon

Definition and Usage of the Word “Canon”

- Greek for “straight rod” or “ruler”
- meaning *rule* or *norm*.

Early uses of the word:

- Galatians 6:16 – “and those who will walk by this *rule*, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God”.
- church fathers used it to mean “*rule of truth*” and “*rule of faith*” as a norm of church doctrine and practice

Modern meaning:

- The writings which we consider to be *Scripture* with the *authority* worthy of the word of God.

The basic questions

- What books belong in the Old Testament Canon?
- How do we determine which books belong in the Old Testament – i.e. by what standard do we judge?
- Is there a unified theology to the Canon?

Approaches to confirming the O.T. Canon that we have, 39 Books:

- What did the Jews throughout history consider to be sacred writings?
- What did Jesus refer to as Scripture?
- What did the apostles use as Scripture?
- What did the church consider to be the Canon through its history?
- The witness of the Holy Spirit in the believer.

The Jewish Canon – Part 1

“Torah” - The Law of Moses (5 books)

- **Genesis**
- **Exodus**
- **Leviticus**
- **Numbers**
- **Deuteronomy**

The Jewish Canon – Part 2

“Nebiim” -The Prophets

- **4 Former Prophets**
Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings
- **4 Latter Prophets**
Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Minor Prophets
- **Minor Prophets (12) – Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi**

The Jewish Canon – Part 3

“Kethubiim” The Writings

- Psalms, Proverbs, Job
- “Megiloth” (scrolls) – Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther.
- Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles

Tanakh = Torah + Nebiim + Kethubiim

Jews have 24 books from which we get our 39 O.T. books though in different order.

History of Compiles of Hebrew Bible

- Torah - Deuteronomy 31:24-26 – the complete work of Moses ~1500 B.C.
- Maccabees 2:13 (not in the canon) says that Nehemiah, around 400 B.C. founded a library and collected books about the kings and prophets (Nebiim) and the writings of David (Kethubiim).
- Book of Sirach, 180 B.C., also not in canon. Included a list of names of great men found in the Torah and Nebiim, suggesting that the author considered them authoritative books. He did not include names from Ruth, Song of Songs, Esther, Daniel, or Job. Perhaps the books of the Kethubiim were not yet included in the canon yet.

History of Compilations of Hebrew Bible

- Septuagint – translation of Hebrew Bible into Koine Greek probably between 200 and 100 B.C. was used by writers of New Testament. Torah and Nebiim are established as canonical, but Kethubiim not yet definitively canonized.
- Dead Sea Scrolls (Qumran) – show that the Torah and Nebiim were already canonized before 68 A.D. Also included Psalms, Daniel and Job. 500 documents, 100 were copies of books – existence of commentaries implies these books were considered Scripture. But also included Tobit, Jubilees and Enoch fragments, not considered canonical by Qumram community.

History of Compilations of Hebrew Bible

- Josephus – 1st century Jewish historian – lists 22 books in Hebrew Canon, essentially equivalent to today's Hebrew Canon.
- Mishnah – compiled between 100 and 200 A.D. describes some of the debate over the status of some books of the Kethubiim.

Exercise 1: What Scriptures did Jesus use?

Mathew 4:4

It is written:

“man shall not live by bread alone but every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”

O. T. source - Deuteronomy 8:3

Exercise 1: What Scriptures did Jesus use?

Mathew 4:10

It is written:

“You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.”

O. T. source - Deuteronomy 6:13

Exercise 1: What Scriptures did Jesus use?

Matthew 5:4

“blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

O.T. source - Isaiah 61:2

Exercise 1: What Scriptures did Jesus use?

Matthew 5:5

“blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth”

O. T. source - Psalm 37:11

Exercise 1: What Scriptures did Jesus use?

Matthew 12:39-41

“.. an evil generation craves for a sign, and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

O.T. source - Jonah 1:17

Exercise 1: What Scriptures did Jesus use?

Mathew 15:3-6

“.. for God said ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother let him be put to death...’”

O. T. source Exodus 20:12, Leviticus 20:9

Exercise 1: What Scriptures did Jesus use?

Mathew 19:3-6

“He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said ‘For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh..what therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

O. T. source - Genesis 1:27, 2:24-25

Exercise 1: What Scriptures did Jesus use?

Mathew 24:15

“Therefore, when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”

Daniel 9:26-27

Exercise 1: What Scriptures did Jesus use?

Summary

“Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was with you, that all things which are written about me in the **Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms** must be fulfilled.’”

Luke 24:44

Jesus affirms the authority of all of the Old Testament

Exer. 2: What Scriptures did the Apostles Use?

- Where does Peter reference Genesis?
- Where does Peter quote Isaiah?
- Where does Paul quote Genesis?
- Where does Paul reference Daniel?
- Where in Acts is Genesis referenced?
- Where in Hebrews is Exodus referenced?

Hint: Use a concordance and a reference Bible.

Is there a Unified Theology to the Old Testament?

- By this we mean is there a unified theme or set of related themes?
- We approach this question using the method of induction, i.e. observing widely to look for a pattern.
- Are there hints in the way the Jewish Bible is structured?
- We can also approach this question using the New Testament as a guide, since it refers to the O.T. so much (>200 direct quotes, >2000 ref.)

Main Themes of the O.T.

- By Induction
 - ❑ The Bible is primarily about what man must believe about God and what God requires of man (Westminster Short Catechism). This would include God's nature.
 - ❑ The O.T. shows God's purpose fulfilled throughout history through one man (Abraham), through one family (Jacob) and one nation (Israel) to bless all the peoples of the world. The New Testament then shows God's purpose fulfilled in the gentile nations.
 - ❑ Other subjects – the origin of earth, the universe, man and sin. Wisdom for life and worship.

Main Themes (Continued)

- By Hebrew O.T. order – apparently more related to the needs of Israel at the time than anything else.
- By New Testament Guides – the revealing of:
 - ❑ The 7 “I AM”s of Jesus reflect the character of God
 - ❑ Justification by faith – Abraham
 - ❑ Salvation through the Christ – foretold in O.T., fulfilled in N.T.
 - ❑ Salvation extending to the gentile world
 - ❑ The coming of the kingdom of God – foretold in both O.T. and N.T.

The Seven “I AM”s of Jesus

- “I am the Bread of Life..” John 6:35
- “I am the light of the world.” John 8:12
- “...before Abraham was, I AM.” John 8:58
- “I am the Good Shepherd..” John 10:11
- “.. I am the resurrection and the life..” John 11:25
- “..I am the way, the truth and the life.” John 14:6.
- “I am the vine, you are the branches. John 15:5

Conclusions

- There is a sound basis for believing the Protestant Old Testament is God's word.
- The purposes of God and what He requires of man is clear in the Old Testament.

There is not complete consensus among scholars about how the canon came about, or a unified theology, but we are responsible to obey what we know.

Deuteronomy 29:29 – The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this Law.