

**Institutes of Theology | Session 20**  
**Bibliology: The Canon of Scripture**  
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I'm excited to be back with you, and especially excited about what we're going to be looking at this evening on the canon of Scripture. Now, it may be something you've never thought about before, or never really had to reckon with, but it's a question that's an important question for our faith, and you need to know what the issues are, and you need to know how to address them. Because in the end, you know, as we come to the issue of why we trust the Bible as God's Word, the canon that we've been given, the 66 books that are the Word of God, it's important to acknowledge that lying back of every claim of truth in the world is a foundational authority. You thought about that? Back of every truth claim, everybody who says this is what's true, there is a foundational authority, the place where that philosophy or that religion really stands. The person or the writings or the ideas to which they ultimately appeal as their authority. In fact, honestly, I think it's helpful when you're talking to someone, sharing your faith, it's important to really ask them this key question. Who or what is your authority for what you believe? On what person or persons or thing are you basing your view of reality? There's always one. Everybody has an authority.

Now, there are many different sources of authority in our society. Many in our country embrace naturalism. And naturalism says that the ultimate authority is really just the cosmos. It's what is and has been and always will be. And they would say that that's really the ultimate authority is matter and earth. Others' rationalism is king. They would say that human reason is the foundational authority. But many, frankly, and this is probably what you'll encounter more than anything else, is they are their own authority. They just pick and choose kind of like the pieces of a quilt, and put together their own idea, their own philosophy, their own view of life. And really, when you do that, you're your own authority. And can I say it? Only a fool has himself for his own authority. But that's the reality.

But most people in our world base their authority on some collection of sacred writings. When you look at the world as a whole, you look at the fact that seven out of eight people on this planet believe that there is a supreme being. That's because God has planted it in the soul. Romans 1. Man knows there is a God. He may have a wrong view of that God. He may have the entirely wrong God, but he understands there is a God who created all things. And so because of that, most base their authority on some collection of sacred writings. Buddhism, for example, bases its authority on the collected sayings of Buddha. Islam, on the prophecy of Mohammed in the Koran. The Jews, of course, on the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament. The Roman Catholic Church bases its authority on the magisterium, that is, the Pope in concert with the cardinals, interpreting the Scripture and adding to the Scripture. The cults also have authorities. I mean, think about the Mormons, for example. They base their beliefs on the writings of Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, and the doctrines and the covenants, along with a sort of token gesture toward the Scripture.

There have always been sacred writings that have claimed to be from God. You understand that? I mean, travel, as many of you have had the chance, as I've had the chance to do, around the world, and you'll find people there who say, this is what God has said, this is what the divine being has said, and they'll point to some set of documents. So the question for us men is, why do we accept the Bible as our authority and reject all others? Why do we accept these 66 books that are bound into the Old and New Testament, and why do we accept only these 66 books? It's really right that we address this issue, because as you can see, this is the foundation of our faith. It frames the very foundation. The issue at stake, and what I'm really leaning or directing us toward tonight is what theologians call the canon of Scripture. The canon of Scripture.

Now, let me give you an overview of where we're going tonight. These are the issues we're going to cover. We're going to look at the meaning of canon. We're going to look at the criteria for the official church recognition of certain books as part of the canon of Scripture. We're going to look at the biblical criteria, and then we're going to look at the reality of a closed canon, that there's no more revelation. There's not going to be a 67th book someday in your Bible. It's been closed. So, that's the overview of where we're going. In the process of this, we'll deal with how we can trust the Old Testament, how we can trust the New Testament, and why we don't trust the Apocrypha. So we're going to deal with all those things as we go along.

Let's start then with the meaning of canon. Our English word canon comes to us through the Latin, ultimately tracing back to the Greek word *canon*. Originally, the Greek word meant a straight rod or ruler that was marked in the units. I mean, you have one, you know, in your home, in your garage. That's the idea. That's what the word originally meant. Eventually, the word came to be used not only for the rule or standard, that ruler, but even then, the marks on that ruler. And eventually, you can see where that led to a definitive series or lists, the measurement of something, right? I mean, that's where this idea of canon came from. It came to refer to this definitive series or lists.

Now, when we use the word canon of Scripture, we mean two things. We mean the list of books which are acknowledged to be inspired by God, and therefore, in light of that, those books are the rule or standard of our belief and practice. Let me say that again. This is crucial to where we're going tonight. The canon of Scripture refers to that list of books acknowledged to be inspired by God, to be God-breathed, to *theopneustos* in 2 Timothy 3, the idea of they are the product of the very breath of God, just like your words are the product of your breath. And because those words are the product of God's breath, they become the standard. They become the rule, the measuring stick against which everything we believe and everything we practice is measured. That's the canon of Scripture.

Now immediately, as I say that, you can see a key difference between the Protestant view of the canon and the Roman Catholic Church view of the canon. Rome is willing to admit that there is a list or rule of inspired writings, although it adds to that list, as we'll see tonight. It has added to that list. In addition, it even adds tradition to that list. You read the Catholic Catechism. It's very clear. There are two sources of faith and practice. One of those is the Scripture, including the Apocrypha in their minds, and the other is oral tradition, as it's been passed down through the Church. So they're willing to admit there is such a list or rule with some wiggle room, but Rome sees itself as the only authority in determining what those books are, and it's not willing to accept that Scripture alone is the sole rule of faith and practice. So this becomes really important. The practical implication of the canon.

Listen carefully. The reason this matters is whatever books are determined to be inspired are God's rule, they're God's measuring stick for determining what we should believe and how we

should live. They become the ruler of your life in every sense of that word. They become the rule, the measurement of what you should think and believe and how you should live. In other words, those books, whatever those books are, that are recognized as inspired by God, should be authoritative in every issue of doctrine and practice. This is important. Why? Because as we study throughout these years, as you walk through the doctrines of the Bible, let me tell you something that's going to happen. Your firmly held beliefs are going to be challenged because you're going to have been taught something that when you really stop and look at the Scripture, you're going to say, that isn't what the Scripture teaches. And so what is your right response in that moment? It's not to say, well, that's what I've always been taught. No, the right question, the key question is always this, for me, for you: what does the Bible teach? What does the Bible say? Be a Berean. Why? It comes back to the issue of canon. If these books are inspired by God, they become the measuring stick for what we believe and how we live. So that's the meaning of canon.

Now let's move on from there to consider the official church recognition of the canon. What were the criteria used to determine that? And how did this come to pass? Well, it was in the 2nd century AD that the first attacks on the canonicity of certain biblical books came. Came originally from a man named Marcion in about 160 AD. He was a Gnostic heretic. He rejected the entire Old Testament. He accepted as his canon of inspired books, his list or series of inspired books, only a heavily edited form of Luke and Acts and 10 corrected epistles of Paul. That was his canon. I was just recently with my family in Williamsburg, and I was reminded I have on my shelf Thomas Jefferson's Bible. You know, and it's edited down to a very non-supernatural version of the Scripture. That's what happened in the second century AD. And because of attacks like Marcians and others, the leaders of the church began to be concerned about defending the inspired books, about this issue of the canon. So they determined, in light of that, a set of criteria for supporting the authenticity of the books that had already been almost universally accepted by the church.

What were those criteria? Here they are. First of all, apostolicity. That is, was the book written or endorsed by an Apostle, either written directly by an Apostle or written with his approval, with his endorsement? Secondly, antiquity. Was it written during the apostolic age, since only books from that era should be considered? Thirdly, orthodoxy. Is it doctrinally correct? And by that,

they meant, is it in agreement with previous revelation, with the apostolic faith? And especially, concerning Christ. So apostolicity, antiquity, orthodoxy, and then catholicity. That is, was it universally accepted throughout the believing churches as an inspired book? Those were all criteria as they're dealing with this issue. Theology often comes from this. You know, when doctrines of the Scripture are challenged, the church says, wait a minute, we need to look more closely at what the Scripture teaches about this. And the same thing was true when Marcion and others started coming along and saying, this is, these books are not inspired. So these are the first of the criteria. There are a couple more. Lection. That is, was it widely read and used in the churches? Was it part of the lectionary of the church? Was it read in the church as that which is to instruct a church? And then inspiration. And by that, they meant, does it have the qualities of an inspired writing when it's compared with other writings that have already been accepted as inspired? Does it have the same qualities?

So these were the criteria that the church began to use as heretics came up and said, oh, that book doesn't belong in the Bible. They said, well, let's talk about the sort of criteria we're going to use to determine which ones should be and why have they already been. It wasn't that they were voting to say, well, we don't all believe these books belong, but let's vote and see if we think they should. No, they were saying, these have already been accepted by the church, and we want to ask why. Why have we accepted these books, and these are the reasons that the church has accepted these books.

Now, the issue of canonicity was already in process in the age of the Apostles. In other words, don't misunderstand. Don't have this idea that three or four hundred years after Christ, a bunch of Christians got together and said, let's vote about what books are in our Bible. Absolutely not. I'm going to show you tonight that is a flawed idea. All the church did, three and four hundred years after Christ in the councils we're going to talk about, in those councils, all they did was affirm and confirm what the church had already embraced and believed. So even back in the age of the Apostles, the books of the Bible that we embraced had already been confirmed by the church. When you look at the age of the Apostles, you see Paul, for example, recognized Luke's writing as equal to the Old Testament. Turn to 1 Timothy. First Timothy chapter five. And look at verse 18. It's in the context of saying that there are going to be some elders who are paid, who make their living, paid by the church to be able to minister, verse 17. And then here's his defense from

the Scripture, verse 18. “For [the first verse, if you have a marginal note on verse 18], you shall not muzzle the ox while he's threshing,” is from Deuteronomy 25. And Paul adds, here's another something the Scripture says, “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” And you'll notice that that is from Luke, chapter 10, verse 7. And what does Paul say? Remember, Luke is a contemporary of Paul. Same time period. And Paul says, what Luke wrote is as much Scripture as what Moses wrote in Deuteronomy. So, in the New Testament era, there's already the recognition that there are books being written in their time that are part of the canon.

Peter acknowledged that Paul's letters were Scripture. Turn over to 2 Peter, familiar passage. Second Peter chapter 3, verse 15. He says, middle of the verse, “Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote to you as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort.” Now watch the end of verse 16. He's just been talking about Paul's letters, and he says they distort Paul's letters as they do also—what?—“the rest of the Scriptures.” The Apostle Peter points to Paul's letters, his contemporary, and he says, those are Scripture as much as any other book is Scripture. So even in the era of the Apostles, they were already affirming their contemporaries as having written Scripture. And the churches were reading these letters to their congregations and circulating them.

Look at Colossians. The churches recognized that these were to be received with the authority of Christ Himself, that they were in fact God's word. In Colossians chapter 4 verse 16, Paul writes, “When this letter is read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and you for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.” Read it as part of the Scripture reading in the church. We're going to look at some other texts in a moment that only confirm that.

So even when you look at the Bible, when you look at the age of the Apostles, they're already saying books belong to the canon. So it wasn't three, four hundred years later that some Christians got together and said, “Hey, let's decide what books belong there.” No, they belonged there in the first century, the very time they were written. But when you look at the post-apostolic period, that is the early church fathers, those men who led the church after the death of the Apostles, they also referred in their writings to New Testament books as part of the canon of

Scripture. For example, Clement of Rome, writing at about 95 AD, mentioned eight of the New Testament books as belonging to the Scripture. Ignatius in 115 AD mentioned seven books in his writings, referring to them as Scripture. Polycarp, who was a disciple of John, writing early in the 2nd century, acknowledged 15 letters as belonging to the Scripture. Irenaeus, writing in 185, or in the time period, about 185 AD, listed 21 New Testament books. 21 of the 27 New Testament books he refers to as Scripture.

Hippolytus, later in the 2nd century, lists 22 books. By the way, the *antilegomena*, that word is a Greek word that means “spoken against.” There were some books that ended up in our New Testament that there was uncertainty in some churches about whether they should be included in the canon. We'll talk about why that is in a minute. But the *antilegomena* at that point were Hebrews, James, 2nd Peter, and 2nd and 3rd John. But the other books, he affirmed as belonging to the New Testament canon. The Muratorian canon was a compilation of the books acknowledged as canonical. At that time, about 170 AD, universally, it included all of the New Testament except Hebrews, James, and the Epistles of John, particularly the 2nd and 3rd Epistles of John. Athanasius, writing a little later in 367 AD, cited the 27 books of the New Testament as the only true New Testament era books that were from God, all 27 of them.

Several church councils affirmed it. Council of Laodicea in 363 stated that only the Old Testament and the 27 books in our New Testament were to be read in the churches. Council of Hippo in 393 AD affirmed the 27 books of the New Testament. The Council of Carthage in 397 again affirmed that only those canonical books, the ones in our Bible, were to be read in the churches. Now the decisions of those church councils were made by measuring the individual books against the criteria that I showed you a few moments ago. But they were, notice, one of those criteria was, were they accepted as inspired by the church in earlier times? So they weren't deciding. They weren't having like a, okay, let's create our own little Bible here. No, they were simply affirming what the church had already affirmed.

Although those tests are helpful to some degree, and this is where I really want you to go. Those tests don't decide the issue decisively. Those who believe that church councils did not merely affirm what the church had already believed, but the church councils actually determined which books were to be in the canon, think about that. They believe that mere men subjectively decided

what is and isn't the Word of God several hundred years after a book was written. That's really a bad process. Honestly, that process isn't much different from the Roman Catholic Church deciding which books to grant its authority, or the guys a number of years ago in the Jesus Seminar voting for what Jesus did and didn't say. There was, listen carefully, there was, has been, and there is another and a better way. It's the way that those who first received these 66 books knew in their lifetimes that they were, in fact, the Word of God. That's where I want to go.

So that's helpful. What we just covered is helpful, but that's not the reason we accept the Bible. So let's look not at the church's criteria, but let's look at the biblical criteria for the canon. Now, let me start by admitting to you that much of what I'm going to share with you in this portion of our evening comes from an excellent book that I would highly recommend to you. It's, this is adapted from R. Laird Harris, a book called "The Inspiration and Canonicity of the Scriptures." It was the Book of the Year, the Christian Book of the Year in 1969. I think it's still unsurpassed. It's excellent in laying out what I'm about to lay out to you.

So, what are the biblical criteria? How do we know from the Bible itself what books are a part of the Bible, that God intended to be a part of the Bible? Let's begin with the Old Testament. The Old Testament. The Jewish canon of the Old Testament contains exactly the same content that's in our English Old Testament, the one that's in your Bible. If you look at your Old Testament, the content that's in your Old Testament is exactly the same as the Jewish Bible, the Hebrew Bible, although the Jews list the books differently. We have 39 books in our Old Testament. They originally counted only 24, and that's because they combine some. They combine 1 and 2 Samuel into one book, 1 and 2 Kings into one book, 1 and 2 Chronicles into one book, Ezra and Nehemiah into one book, and the 12 minor prophets all into one book. And that's how the math works. That's why they came up with 24, and we come up with 39. But it's exactly the same content.

Now, by the time of Christ, the Hebrew Scriptures were divided into three parts. There was the Law, that is, the first five books of our Old Testament, all of which were written by Moses. And that's affirmed throughout the Scripture. Our Lord affirmed that Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament. Secondly, there was the Prophets. That consisted of all those books that

were written by those who actually held the prophetic office. And then, finally, there was the Writings.

The Writings were composed. They were subdivided based on their contents or the purpose for which they were used. So you had, first of all, the poetical books under the writings, the books of Job, Psalms, and Proverbs. That's how they listed the poetic books. You had the Megilloth, which were those books intended to be read at Jewish feasts. And here are those books. Song of Solomon at Passover, Ruth at Pentecost, Lamentations on the Fast of the Ninth of Av, the fifth month in the Jewish calendar, similar to our July. Ecclesiastes was read at Tabernacles, and Esther was read at Purim. So those were the Megillot under the writings. And then under the Writings, you also had the non-prophetical historical books. That is, written by men who were prophets by function, but didn't officially occupy the office of prophet. Those were Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles. The author of Chronicles.

Now in the New Testament, the books we refer to as the Old Testament, were also called the Law, the Law and the Prophets. Sometimes the Law is the whole Old Testament. We're going to see that even in, as we get into Matthew 5, in the next couple of weeks. So sometimes it's the Law. Often, it's the Law and the Prophets. The Law being the first five books, the books written by Moses, the Prophets being everything else. And then sometimes the Old Testament is broken into, and this is Luke 24, Luke 24:44, the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Psalms standing as the sort of, the placeholder for the writings. So that's how the Old Testament was broken down.

Now this Old Testament canon, the one I just described to you, multiple witnesses confirm that the Old Testament canon matches our Old Testament, and, and this is key, that it was settled as the Word of God before the time of Christ. This is the common view of Jewish scholarship. A couple of Jewish scholars, David Kimchey, who wrote in the 1100s and early 1200s, and Elias Lavita, who wrote in the 14 and 1500s, both of whom were, were accepted and, and appreciated Jewish scholars, and they taught that the final collection of the Old Testament canon was essentially finished by Ezra and the members of the great synagogue 500 (ed. 400) years before Christ. In other words, the Old Testament was settled 500 (ed. 400) years before Jesus came on the earth. But not just Jewish scholarship. This was the widely held view of the Jews in the first century.

Josephus, a Jewish general who was captured, became a friend of Rome. He actually wrote the history of the Jewish nation for the Romans. We quote Josephus. That's how we got those writings. He wrote in the middle of the first century. So shortly after Christ, he includes this same threefold division of the Old Testament. And Josephus, writing in the middle of the first century, lists the same books that are included in our Old Testament. And he argues that the canon was completed during the reign of Artaxerxes, in other words, corresponding to the life of Ezra in Old Testament times. And I think Ezra was a likely candidate. When you study his life in Nehemiah 8, in Ezra 7, I think it's very likely that Ezra was a key part of bringing these books together. Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi were contemporaries. In fact, Jewish tradition says that Ezra and Malachi were part of the great synagogue, and that they were part of a group who collected and preserved what we would call the Old Testament Scriptures. So the Old Testament canon, men, was closed by 400 BC. Let me say that again. The Old Testament canon, any debate about what books belonged in the Hebrew Scriptures, that was resolved and settled 400 years before Jesus came. There was no question in the New Testament era of what the Hebrew Scriptures were, what God had said in His word.

Now, more importantly, Christ endorsed this canon as the Word of God. Turn with me to Matthew, and let me just warn you, I was telling Lance, let me just warn you that you're going to get this material that we're covering tonight and in a couple of weeks, you're going to get it reinforced shortly from Matthew, because we're going to walk through, and God's providence is all coming together, so I guess we all need to study and hear this a lot. And I think it is important, because it's foundational to our faith.

Matthew chapter 5 and look at verse 17. "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law and the Prophets." What did we just learn? What is He talking about? The Law, the first five books of the Old Testament, and the Prophets, the rest of our Old Testament. He's talking about the content we call the Old Testament. He says, do not think that I came to abolish the Hebrew Scripture, the Old Testament. "I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill." Now watch verse 18. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the law until all is accomplished. Now that is a, in a nutshell, that's Jesus' view of Scripture. We're going to unfold that and unpack that, both in our next session here in Institutes and in a different way as we walk through this text in the weeks ahead.

And it is confirmed in other places. Turn over to Luke, Luke chapter 24. After His resurrection, verse 44, Luke 24:44. He said to His Apostles, “These are my words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things that are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms.” Now He uses that threefold division, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (Psalms standing for the Writings). Then He opened their minds to understand what? The Scriptures. Jesus affirmed that the 39 books you have in your Old Testament are, in fact, the Word of God. That's why we believe it. These are just a couple of representative texts. We're going to look at others before we're done tonight. But he endorsed this canon. During Jesus' lifetime, the exact books that are identified as the Old Testament in the Bible you hold were considered to be the inspired Scriptures. This was the canon of Scripture. And he unequivocally affirmed them to be true.

But the question I want to back up and consider is, how is it that those Old Testament Scriptures that Jewish writers, Josephus, and our Lord Himself all confirmed were in fact the canon of the Old Testament Scriptures, those books were the words of God, how did they come to that conclusion? Why 400 years before Christ did they believe that to be true? You ever thought about that? They didn't have a council to vote. How did they receive those books? That's what I want us to consider. How did these books, the 39 books of our Old Testament, come to be so universally accepted as the inspired word of the living God? Let me give you your first hint. Jewish theologians describe those writings that are authoritative as from Sinai. They're from Sinai. Now, why does that matter? Well, because of what God did with Moses. How was the Old Testament universally accepted 400 years before Jesus? Let me give you the progression of thought. Stay with me. This is really important.

First of all, Moses was unmistakably and undeniably validated as God's mouthpiece. Unmistakably, undeniably. Let me show you this. Go back to Exodus 19. Now, prior to Exodus 19, and we'll get there, God had given Moses the capacity to perform miracles, you remember, back in the early chapters when He called him, and Moses did perform those miracles, and that validated him. But nothing like this. Exodus 19 and look at verse 10. You remember the story. They've taken the journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai. The people are now camped at the foot of Mount Sinai.

Verse 10, “The Lord said to Moses, go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments, and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day, the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Beware that you do not go up to the mountain or touch the border of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through. Whether beast or man, he shall not live.’ When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain. So Moses went up from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people. They washed their garments. He said, be ready for the third day.”

Verse 16. “So it came about on the third day when it was morning that there were thunder [now get the scene here. Put on a sanctified imagination. You're in camp at the base of Mount Sinai, a place you can still visit to this day] there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now, Mount Sinai was all in smoke because Yahweh descended upon it in fire, and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him with thunder.”

I mean, can you imagine this scene? You would have been terrified. These people were terrified. Two million Jewish people at the foot of Mount Sinai experienced this dramatic display, this storm that hovered over the mountain, this trumpet sound that grew louder and louder and louder. And what happened? Then, chapter 20, verse 1, “Then God spoke all these words.” If you were gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai, you not only saw that incredible display on the mountaintop, you heard the voice of God as He recited the Ten Commandments. That was dramatic. Go down to chapter 20, verse 18. “All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking. And when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. And they said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen, but let not God speak to us again or we will die.’ Moses said, ‘Don't be afraid, for God has come in order to test you and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you so that you may not sin.’ So the people stood at the distance while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.”

So let me ask you a question. Was there anybody of those 200 (ed. 2) million Jews gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai who doubted that Moses was God's man? No, I mean, God proved it beyond a shadow of a doubt to them. He was God's spokesperson. In fact, Numbers chapter 12, remember, God calls Miriam and Aaron out, and He says, “You two come here. He calls them over. (You ever called your children over? “Come here.”) God calls them over. And He says, “What did you think you were doing?” You know, if I speak to a prophet, “I do so in visions and dreams, but when I speak to Moses, I speak to him face to face as a man speaks with his friend.” That's how the people understood what was going on with Moses. He really spoke for God. Then Moses wrote what God told him.

We'll talk more about that in a moment. God directed him to write; the people were first-hand witnesses. This is what I want you to get, that Moses was God's man, and that he wrote the first five books of the Old Testament from God's mouth. They knew that. Nobody doubted it. People knew without question that what they had in the first five books of our Bible was the Word of God, because it came from Moses, the clearly authenticated mouthpiece for God. Throughout the Old Testament, there is constant testimony that those first five books came from the pen of Moses, merely an instrument in God's hand. For example, Joshua chapter 8, verse 31, refers to Deuteronomy and says it was written in the law of Moses. Moses was universally accepted as God's mouthpiece and what he wrote, the Pentateuch, the first five books, as the literal words of God. That's the foundation for everything. That's why the Jews talk about the authoritative words of God coming, what, from Sinai. That's where they start. Nobody doubted.

Second, in this process of understanding, is Moses predicted—Moses, God's authenticated, undeniable spokesperson—he predicted that other prophets would speak for God. Turn to Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy chapter 18. Now, in verses 15 to 19, you have prediction of the Messiah. Verse 15, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet, like me from among you, you shall listen to him. This is according to all that you ask of the Lord your God, saying, don't let God speak to us directly anymore.” But the Lord said, “I'm going to raise up [verse 18] I'll 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.” The New Testament makes it clear that this is a prophecy about Jesus our Lord. So, the great prophet is the Messiah, but look at

verse 21, because it's clear that Moses is also describing an institution of prophecy, where other human prophets would continue to come.

Verse 20. “But the prophet who speaks the word presumptuously in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. You shall say in your heart, how shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?” In other words, there are going to be prophets who are going to come, human prophets, not the prophet, not the Messiah, but there are going to be human prophets who are going to come. How do you discern if they are really coming from God? How do you know? So He is letting us know that there are going to be other prophets who would come. But here this invites an important question. How do you know? How do you know if it's a prophet? Well, first of all, make sure you know what a prophet is. The distinguishing characteristic of a prophet was that God would speak to them and through them.

Turn back to Exodus. Here's a definition of a prophet. Exodus chapter 7. Verse one, “The Lord said to Moses, ‘See, I make you as God to Pharaoh [He's using an analogy here] I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh, that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land.’” You see what God is saying? He says, think of it this way, Moses, it's like you're in the place of God, and Aaron's like your prophet. So for Aaron to be Moses' prophet, Aaron could not speak for himself, and he had to speak only on behalf of Moses, who was in the place of God to him. That's what a prophet does. In short, the prophet was God's messenger. Jeremiah 1:5, “I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Jeremiah 1:9, “I have put my words in your mouth.” That's a prophet. I have put my words in your mouth. That's what constitutes a prophet. The prophet's message may include preaching about contemporary sins, or it may include predictions about the future. But the primary reality of a prophet was that he spoke revelation, new revelation from God, something God revealed to him directly. That was what Moses predicted. There would be men who would come who would speak for God.

Third part of this argument is Moses then said, okay, how are you going to discern the false from the true? How are you going to know if it's a true prophet or a false prophet? Well, Moses provided two criteria to judge future prophets. First of all, if they're true prophets, their

predictions always come true. We just read that a moment ago in Deuteronomy 18:21. Don't believe them, he says, if they say something, it doesn't come true. In fact, kill them, stone them. A lot of prophets in the charismatic movement would be dead today. In fact, they all would be dead because none of them have been 100% right, if that standard were used. They're not true prophets. You're not a true prophet if you're ever wrong, Moses says.

Second criteria. Their message will always agree with previous revelation. Look at Deuteronomy 13. Deuteronomy 13:1. "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or wonder," so here's someone who says, I'm a prophet, and they actually perform a sign or a wonder, and it comes true. Now we're not talking about it's not being true. It actually comes true, concerning which he spoke to you. But he says, in conjunction with that miracle he performs, "Let us go after other gods whom you've 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 Him with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow Yahweh 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's 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."

Do you hear what Moses is saying? He's saying, listen, if somebody came in this room and set up here on this stage and they performed a verifiable miracle, but what they said was contrary to the Word of God, they're a false prophet, and in Biblical terms they should be killed. True prophets are determined in two ways. Their predictions always come true, never an exception. And number two, their message will always agree with previous revelation. In addition to that, Moses also stated that God would often, not always, but He would often authenticate true prophets with miracles. You see that with Moses himself in Exodus 4, and you see that hint to that in, here in Deuteronomy 13. So that is a possibility that God validates based on and enables him to work miracles. In fact, go back for a moment.

Let's look at Exodus 4, because I want you to see how this plays in, how miracles play into this, the role of miracles. Verse 1 of Exodus 4, Moses said, God, what if they will not believe me or

listen to what I say? For they may say, the Lord has not appeared to you.” I mean, that's a viable question, right? Who said, who made you a prophet? “The Lord said, ‘What is that in your hand?’ He said, ‘A staff.’ ‘Throw it on the ground.’ He threw it on the ground. It became a serpent. Moses fled from it. The Lord said, stretch out your hand and grasp it by his tail. So he did. [And verse five] that they may believe that Yahweh, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to you.” In other words, these, the miracles I'm going to let you do prove that you are My prophet, that you are speaking on My behalf.

Go over to chapter four, verse 27. “Now the Lord said to Aaron, go to meet Moses in the wilderness. He went, Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord and all the signs that He had commanded them to do. [They] went and assembled the elders of the sons of Israel, so they go to Egypt, they assemble the people. Aaron spoke the words the Lord had spoken. Then Moses performed the signs and the sight of the people, so they believed.” They believed that they were God's representatives, they were God's prophets. That's the purpose of miracles, to authenticate true revelation, those who are speaking on God's behalf.

Now, the true prophets' words, word was immediately accepted because of this. As Arlen Harris writes, kings were humbled by their messages, battles were won or lost at their word, the temple was not built by David, but by his son Solomon, and rebuilt by Zerubbabel all at the word of the Lord through the prophet. In their time, contemporaneous, they knew God was speaking. Why? Because they knew they were prophets by the standard Moses had laid down. Now, the prophets also wrote, and what they wrote was added to what earlier prophets has written. Let me say that again. This is really important. When the prophets wrote, they just added to what had already been written. That's how the Old Testament was constructed. Moses writes in the scroll, Deuteronomy 31. Remember, he takes the scroll, he writes down the law of God, and he puts it in the ark. He deposits it there, and he dies. Well, guess what happens next? Joshua adds to that scroll. Go to Joshua 24. Joshua 24 and verse 26, Joshua wrote these words—where?— in the book of the law of God. He takes the scroll that Moses has started, and Joshua now has the authority to add to that scroll.

The account of Moses' death and the following events that are recorded in the book of Joshua. That's very surprising in light of the command by Moses and the Lord in Deuteronomy 4. Don't

add to these words. But he adds to these words. Why? Because he was authorized by God to do so. Samuel does the same thing. Look at 1 Samuel. First Samuel chapter 10 and verse 25. It says, "Then Samuel told the people the ordinances of the kingdom and wrote them in the book. [What book? Same set of scrolls] and placed it before the Lord." This is what happens throughout Old Testament history. It's also interesting that the clearest, the most direct testimony of this line of writing prophets is found in Chronicles. I'm not going to take you through all those verses in Chronicles, but this chain of verses shows us the tradition of a series of writing prophets in Israel. They run from before David to virtually the end of the kingdom of Judah. So, more than 500 years.

And then, of course, you have what we call the major and minor prophets. By the way, we call them that because the major prophets are longer. They each take their own scroll. And the minor prophets are short. They're all in one scroll. So, the major and minor prophets, as we call them, are our Bibles. Here's the important point, though. The prophets wrote, and what they wrote was immediately accepted by the people as the Word of God, even if the people hated the message, because the messenger met the criteria that Moses had laid down for true prophets. They knew they were God's men speaking for God. Moses' writing was accepted because he was accepted as God's messenger in an undeniable way. Those two million people knew Moses spoke for God. God made that very, very clear. In the same way, all those prophets who followed Moses, once they were authenticated to be God's true prophets, that is, they met the criteria that Moses, God's prophet, had laid down, their message was accepted. It was immediate. Joshua accepted the writings of Moses. Micah quotes Isaiah, his contemporary, as speaking on God's behalf. Isaiah quotes Micah, in the same way. Daniel accepts Jeremiah, his older contemporary, as speaking God's truth. In Daniel chapter 9, verse 2, Daniel 9:2 refers to the writing of Jeremiah as the word of the Lord, because Jeremiah was God's prophet.

So, now you see why the Scriptures, when you come to the New Testament, the Old Testament Scriptures are called the Law and the Prophets, right? It's because the law comes from the authority of Moses as God's verified messenger, and the divinely appointed, recognized prophets that followed him, that met the criteria that He laid down. It's because of that, that the Old Testament, as we know it, was essentially universally accepted by the time of Jesus Christ. It was because they knew Moses was God's man, and Moses said, Let me tell you how you can

recognize the men who come after me, who are really God's men. And they simply had to check them against those standards, and they did it immediately. They accepted them as God's prophet in their own generation, and they accepted their words and allowed them to add to the scrolls that were in the Ark of the Covenant before God Himself. This is why 400 years before our Lord, nobody doubted the content of the canon of what we call the Old Testament.

But that raises a question about those books that are commonly called the Apocrypha. Why do we accept the Hebrew Old Testament and don't accept those 14 books that appear in the Roman Catholic Bible? We're headed, obviously, to the New Testament eventually. We looked at the Old Testament. Why do we embrace the Old Testament? And ultimately, the answer is what? Because Jesus, our Lord, embraced it as the canon of God's Word. But there are reasons that others did even before Him, and that's what I wanted you to see.

So let's look at the Apocrypha. Why don't we accept those books that are called the Apocrypha? First of all, let's consider what we mean by the Apocrypha. The Greek word, Apocrypha, simply means things that are hidden. But no one knows why the Apocrypha ended up with that title. So we don't know. Jewish authors continued to write after the last prophet, Malachi. And what they wrote about Jewish history between the Testaments, those 400 silent years, such as in the books of Maccabees, it's interesting reading. At some point, if you haven't, you should read it.

By the way, I should also mention that in addition to the canonical books, the Old Testament Scriptures, the 39 books of our Old Testament, and the Apocrypha we're looking at now, there are also other books written by typically Christian authors that claim to be authoritative. These authors borrowed the identity of someone else, so they are called pseudepigrapha from the Greek for falsely inscribed. So, just be aware of that.

But when we use the word Apocrypha, we refer to those books that are included in the Septuagint. The Greek translation, let me make sure you know what the Septuagint is, okay? The Jewish people slowly lost the ability to know and to speak Hebrew on a daily basis. It became more of an educated language, not the common language of the people. The people spoke Aramaic or even Greek. Many of them spoke Greek. It was like English in the first century. It was the trade language. It was the widely known language. And so, there was a decision made about 200 years before Christ to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. And tradition says

that was done by 70 men in 70 days, something like that. So it was called the Septuagint. And that was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament that Jesus and the Apostles quote from most frequently. In the Septuagint is the canonical books that we call our Old Testament, and there is the Apocrypha. And so when we define the Apocrypha, we say that it's the Septuagint minus the Jewish Old Testament. It's the books you're left with. These books were written between 200 BC and 100 AD. The Apocrypha includes these writings, and I'm not going to go through all of them. You can look them up in various sources. They include these books. Most of the Apocrypha was originally written in Greek and existed at first in that language alone. Some of the first written, some were first written either in Hebrew or Aramaic, and then were translated into Greek. So that's what we're talking about. Those books that are listed there on the screen, we call the Apocrypha.

Those books are what we're discussing. Now, let's talk about then the arguments that some use for including the Apocrypha in the canon. Why should we include these books in the canon? There are two essential reasons that are given. First of all, some say, well, the early versions of Scripture included them or contained them. The truth is, only one ancient version included these books, and that was the Septuagint. And we'll talk about that in a moment. The other argument that's given is the Church Fathers quote from these books as authoritative, and I'm going to answer that shortly. So those are the arguments that are used for including the Apocrypha in the inspired writings.

But let's look at the arguments against, against including the Apocrypha in the canon. There are several reasons and compelling reasons. First of all, the Apocrypha's own statements deny that it is canonical. In other words, the assertions within the Apocrypha about its relationship to the law and the prophets makes it clear. Let's look at a couple of them. Here's 1 Maccabees 4, verse 45. "They tore down the altar and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until [notice this] there should come a prophet to tell what to do with them." In other words, when the person wrote Maccabees, there was no one, including its author, who could speak as a prophet with God's authority.

Here's another example, 1 Maccabees 9, verse 27. "In the time of the Maccabees, there had been no prophet for a long time, speaking of a time of great distress," the author writes, "such as had

not been since the time that prophets [notice this] ceased to appear among them. It's clear that even within the apocryphal books, they are admitting that they're not prophets, and there are no prophets speaking for God.

A second argument against including the Apocrypha in the canon is the Jews never accepted them as canonical, as a part of the canon of the Old Testament. I've already mentioned Josephus. He was born in AD 37-38. He had and used the Septuagint, which had the Apocrypha attached to it. But here's what Josephus writes. He writes, "We have not tens of thousands of books, discordant and conflicting, but only 22 which have been justly believed to be divine." He's talking about, again, what we call the Old Testament. "From Artaxerxes [he goes on] from our Artaxerxes to our own times, a 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." In other words, they don't measure up. The greatest Jewish historian of the first century knew about the books of the Apocrypha, but he and his contemporaries did not consider them to be equal to or to have the same authority as the Hebrew Scriptures.

Josephus goes on to add that no words of God had been added to the Old Testament Scripture since about 435 BC. This was the view of a practicing Jew in the first century who had the Septuagint, who used it, and even though the Septuagint had attached to it the Apocrypha, this was how he saw the reality. The rabbis often said that the Holy Spirit in the function of prophecy departed from Israel. Here's the Jewish Talmud. "After the latter prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi had died, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel," meaning in giving prophecy. It was done with those books that end our Old Testament, that end the Hebrew Scriptures.

Another argument against including the Apocrypha in the canon is the New Testament authors never once cite the Apocrypha, even though it was included in the Septuagint that they used and quoted most. Think about that. There were 14 books attached to their Bible, and they never once cite the Apocrypha. By Roger Nichols Count, a New Testament scholar, Jesus and the New Testament authors quote portions of the Old Testament as divinely inspired over 295 times. In other words, the New Testament quotes the Old Testament almost 300 times. But not once do they quote any other writing as authoritative.

You know, there are a couple of extra biblical quotations in the New Testament that aren't called the Word of God. For example, Jude 14 and 15 quotes 1 Enoch, and Paul quotes two pagan authors in his sermon at Mars Hill in Acts 17, and then again in Titus 1:12. But only for the purposes of illustration, not for proof. But those citations, although they're outside of the Old Testament, they're not from the Apocrypha. In fact, listen carefully, not once in the New Testament do its authors cite a single statement from the books of the Apocrypha, even though they most often quote from the Septuagint, which had those books attached.

Number four. We already looked at this. I'll just remind you of it. Jesus affirmed the Jewish canon, but not the Apocrypha. Again, He never quotes it, never mentions it, although He refers to the books of our Old Testament many times and in many different ways.

Number five. Church history argues against including the Apocrypha as part of the canon. The earliest Christian list of Old Testament books comes from Melito, Bishop of Sardis, writing about 170 AD. He includes all of our Old Testament except Esther, but He doesn't include a single book from the Apocrypha. That's the earliest list, Christian list of Old Testament books. Eusebius, writing in 325 AD, quotes Origen as affirming that list and not including anything from the Apocrypha. Not a single book from the Apocrypha. Athanasius in 397 confirms the books in our Bible, all of them except for Esther. That was still one question. He mentions several Apocryphal books, but says of the Apocryphal books, "These are not indeed included in the canon, but appointed by the fathers to be read by those who newly join us and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness."

In other words, they're helpful books, but they're not in the canon. They don't measure up to be included in the Scripture. In fairness, however, there was one voice among the early church fathers who did quote the apocryphal books authoritatively, and that was Augustine. In his list of the canonical books, he includes most of the apocryphal books. But listen carefully. His other writings show that he distinguished between the canonicity of the Old Testament and the kind of secondary canonicity of the Apocrypha. Here's what he wrote. "They are not found in the canon which the people of God received, because it is one thing to be able to write as men with the diligence of historians and another as prophets with divine inspiration. The former pertain to the increase of knowledge, the latter to authority in religion in which authority, the canon, is kept."

In other words, he understood a difference, although he quoted them in an unhelpful way, I think, as having some authority. He admitted they were not equal to the authority of the Scriptures themselves.

What about Jerome? About 404 AD, he completed the Latin Vulgate. He did include in the Latin Vulgate the Apocrypha. That's why it ends up in the Catholic canon. But even Jerome did not believe they were part of the canon. In his famous Helmed prologue to the books of Samuel and Kings, he lists exactly the same content of our Old Testament books. And then he finishes with this, "Whatever is not included in these is to be placed among the Apocrypha."

And then in his preface to the wisdom of Solomon, one of the Apocrypha books, he writes this, "Just as the church reads Judith and Tobias and Maccabees, in public worship he meant, but does not receive them into the canonical Scriptures, so let it read these two books also for the edification of the people, not for the establishing of the authority of the doctrines of the church." So even though I think, again, he errs in giving them too much weight, he doesn't equal them to the authority of Scripture.

Ironically, Gregory the Great, Pope about 600 AD., quotes 1 Maccabees and says, "We address a testimony from books, though not canonical, yet published for the edification of the church." And then just before the time of the Reformation, Cardinal Ximenes says in his preface to the Complutensian polyglot, which was dedicated to Pope Leo X and approved by him, he says the apocryphal books printed in it were not in the canon but were used for edification. You say, "Wow!"

So when did that happen in the Roman Catholic Church? Well, I'm glad you asked. The Roman Catholic Church adds the Apocrypha to the canon of the Scripture. When? During the Council of Trent on April 8, 1546. That is the first time that the Roman Catholic Church recognizes the Apocrypha to be of equal authority to the Scripture itself. So for 1,500 years, the Apocrypha was not believed to be part of the canon, but in 1546, the Roman Catholic Church says it now is. Why? The answer is expediency.

There were three reasons. The Roman Catholic Church needed to give canonicity to the Apocrypha to defend its use of the Apocrypha in public worship. To admit that it wasn't part of Scripture would seem to the people a serious error. Secondly, it had to become part of the canon

to defend its doctrine, the church's doctrine of purgatory. The only place anywhere in any of the writings the Roman Catholic Church can claim purgatory is represented in 2 Maccabees 12. And so to defend their doctrine of purgatory, there it's reported that Judas prayed for the dead, and so they included the Apocrypha to defend that terrible doctrine. It's a weak argument, but it's all the scriptural support they could muster. And then finally, they did it to defend its support, the church's support for the teaching of justification by faith plus works and not by faith alone. There are a couple of texts in the Apocrypha that yield weight to that argument.

By the way, Luther in his 1534 German version of the Bible included the Apocrypha in a section at the end of the Canonical Old Testament, and there described them as the Apocrypha. But of those books, he wrote this. "These books are not to be regarded as equal in esteem with the sacred Scriptures but yet are useful and valuable for reading." The custom of separating out the Apocrypha became then the common approach as the Bible was translated. That even was true in the King James version of 1611. It has the Apocrypha, had the Apocrypha. But separated out, treated differently, not equal to the Scripture itself.

So here's a summary of what we learned about the Apocrypha then. It's not inspired, it's not canonical, it's not part of the canon of Scripture, it's non-authoritative, and it's not to be used differently from any other human writings. That's the Apocrypha. Now you understand why our approach to the Old Testament canon is so important. You see, these books were not immediately received by the Jews as inspired. Why? Because there was no accepted prophets after Malachi who met Moses' standard. So these books weren't included. You remember, He laid down two basic rules for a prophet who claimed to speak for God. Deuteronomy 18, his predictions will always come true. Deuteronomy 13, his message will always be in complete doctrinal agreement with previous revelation. And God may give them power to work miracles. There was nobody like that by common admission. And so, that's why the true prophet's word was immediately accepted, but that's why the Apocrypha was not. Okay? So that's the Old Testament. That's the Apocrypha. Let's move on then to the New Testament canon.

By the way, there's a book I would recommend on this front as well. In addition, by the way, I hate that the book I recommended is so expensive. It's out of print. You can get it on Amazon, the Arlen Harris book, for like 43 bucks for a paperback book. If you're really serious about studying

this out, it's worth the 43 bucks, but I get it. That's a lot of money. So, you can borrow somebody else's if you're not willing to, to, you know, let go of those coins. As far as the New Testament, there is a very helpful book called *The Question of Canon*. *The Question of Canon* by Michael Krueger, and he will prove that the canon of the New Testament didn't get framed up 300, 400 years after Jesus. Instead, the canon was being shaped in the first century as the books were being written. He does a great job of presenting the evidence for that.

Now, several factors created a need to codify the New Testament books that were to be accepted as canonical. I mean, there were spurious writings, like the Gnostic Gospels. There were attacks on the genuine, like Marcion. I already mentioned the heretic. There was a need for uniformity of what was read in public worship in all the churches. In addition to that, the edict by the emperor Diocletian in 303 AD that all sacred books be burned forced the Christians to agree on what books should be protected at all costs, ironically. And so it drove this discussion of what constitutes the New Testament canon.

Let's look at the history of this. First of all, in New Testament times, in New Testament times, the books we call the New Testament were immediately accepted as the words of God. I already showed you 1 Timothy 5:18. Paul says, what Luke, my physician, my traveling companion wrote, that is the Scripture, that is the Word of God. In 1 Corinthians 14, in fact, turn there. First Corinthians 14, in the whole section about tongues, he says this in 1 Corinthians 14:37, "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not to be recognized." In other words, what I write, what I've written here, what I write, that frames up the truth of what's to be believed and embraced. Churches must acknowledge that the Apostles wrote the commands of Christ.

Look at 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. Second Thessalonians 2 and verse 15. "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught" [that word came to mean those things that you have received from the Apostles] whether by word of mouth or by letter from us." There is an authority that comes with what the Apostles spoke, and it's to be accepted. Churches are bound to obey the Apostles' commands, including the written word. Look at 2 Thessalonians 3:6. "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away

from every brother who leads an unruly life, and not according to the tradition which you receive from us.” There's that description again, meaning that the truth, the treasure that we have passed down to you. There is a responsibility to respond.

Those who refuse to obey the Apostles' words are to be put out of the church. Look at verse 14. “If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person. Do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame.” So, clearly, even in the first century, as the Apostles wrote, their message was accepted as the Word of God. Look at 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 13. “For this reason, we also constantly thank God that when you receive the Word of God which you heard from us [notice it's the Word of God which you heard from us.] You accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is the Word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.” This was the claim from the very beginning from the Apostles. Their message was God's word.

You fast forward to the post-apostolic period, the early church fathers, and you find that they also affirmed the writings we call the New Testament books as the Word of God. Clement of Rome in 95 AD mentions eight New Testament books in a letter as God's word. Doesn't mean that's all he believed were God's word. It means those are the ones he mentions. Ignatius of Antioch mentions seven books. Polycarp, a disciple of John, 15 New Testament letters. Irenaeus, 21 books. The Muratorian Canon, a list of all of those books thought to be at the time in the canon, included our entire New Testament, except for Hebrews, James, and one epistle of John, which were still debated by some. Athanasius listed the 27 books of our New Testament as the only New Testament books from God. During that same time frame, the Council of Laodicea, the Council of Hippo, the Council of Carthage, all affirm the 27 books of our New Testament. So that's the history.

But why? What's the biblical criteria for the New Testament canon? We talked about Moses and the prophets in the Old Testament. What's the biblical criteria for the New Testament canon? Well, it's this. Jesus pre-authenticated the New Testament books. You say, what does that mean? It means he made it clear that what certain men would write would be His words to be preserved, to be obeyed. You see, the canon of the New Testament was not determined by church councils. Roman Catholic doctrine basically makes the Scripture dependent on the church for its authority.

Alan Cairns writes, “Inspired Scripture has its authority inherent in itself direct from its divine author. Just as Moses provided evidence of those who would follow him as the conduit for divine revelation, Jesus did as well. He pre-authenticated the books of the New Testament, and here's how He did it. First of all, He chose His Apostles. He chose 12 men to be His Apostles. The word Apostle means a sent one, an official messenger. We could say a legal representative, a proxy. That's who they were. They were Jesus' official representatives. An Apostle is the direct representative of the one who sends him, and in that person's place can act in a way that is authoritative and legally binding. An authorized messenger, an authorized official representative. Christ chose the Apostles to be proxies for Him, and I've given the text, excuse me, where that's recognized in the New Testament. Then, and this becomes crucial, you know that, but here's crucial, He gave these Apostles, these official representatives authority to write on His behalf.

Turn to John. There are several key texts in John where we learn about this reality. Let's start in John. This is in the Upper Room Discourse the night before our Lord's crucifixion. Look at John 14, verse 26. He says, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, [watch this] He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” Notice He promises the Apostles. This isn't all of us. This isn't if you're a student that, you know, God's going to help you remember what you didn't study. This is not that. No, this is to the Apostles. He's saying the Holy Spirit is going to teach you all things, things that I haven't had the opportunity to teach you, and He's going to bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. How in the world could the Apostles write their gospels years after their interaction with Jesus and get it all right? It's because of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that they would be equipped to do that.

Look at chapter 15, verse 26. “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about me, and you will testify also.” So He's going to teach you, He's going to bring your remembrance, and you will testify on my behalf as the Spirit empowers you to testify. Go over to chapter 16, verse 12. “I have many more things to say to you, but you can't bear them now. But when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth, the things that I haven't had time to speak to you. He will disclose to you what is to come.” Verse 14, “He will glorify me. He will take a mind and disclose it to you.” Verse 15, He makes the same point.

Now go over to chapter 17, chapter 17 and verse 20. Jesus is praying, and He says, “Father, I'm not asking these things on behalf of the 11 alone. Judas is gone at this point. I'm not asking this on behalf of the 11 alone, but for those also who will believe in me [how?] Through their word. Jesus was authorizing the Apostles to speak on and to write on His behalf. Like the Old Testament prophets, God also authenticated the Apostles by giving them the power to work miracles.

Second Corinthians 12:12, Paul talks about the signs of an Apostle were given to him. This was the test for inspiration in the New Testament age. The teaching of an Apostle was received immediately. Why? Simply because he was an Apostle commissioned personally by Jesus Christ, authorized to speak on Jesus' behalf, to write on Jesus' behalf. Because of Christ's pre-authentication, the New Testament books were immediately recognized as inspired. If they were known without question to be the work of His Apostles. These books were placed upon the church by the Apostles as having equal authority of the Old Testament Scriptures to be obeyed.

We saw several texts. They were circulated to the various churches throughout the lifetime of the Apostles. They were received as authoritative throughout the majority of the churches. In fact, a few of the disputed books were received by most Christians, I should say the few disputed books, were received by most Christians from the beginning. And the discussion about those books eventually led to a universal acceptance by the whole church that has been almost totally unquestioned since that time. Arlen Harris writes this, “The Lord did not give us a list of the 27 New Testament books. He did, however, give us a list of the inspired authors. Upon them, the Church of Christ is founded, and by them, the word was written.” How can you trust the New Testament? You can trust it because Jesus chose those 11 men to be His official legal proxies, to speak His word to all who would eventually believe in Him.

Now, with that background, let's look at the individual books. Twenty-two New Testament books have direct Apostolic authorship. In other words, there's no question, they're written by Apostles. Matthew obviously wrote Matthew's Gospel. John wrote his Gospel, the three letters that he wrote, and Revelation. Peter wrote 1 and 2 Peter. James wrote the letter that bears his name. Paul wrote Romans through Philemon. So, there you have those books. The 11 remaining Apostles,

however, the 11 who survived, they recognized two other men as having equal status to their own. And that's James, the half-brother of our Lord, mentioned in Galatians 1:19, as well as in 1 Corinthians 15:7, and Paul. Paul, of course, consistently claimed to be an Apostle. He saw the risen Christ. He was personally appointed to be an Apostle, and the other Apostles all affirmed that he was qualified to be an Apostle. Peter says Paul's writings are Scripture. So we can add to our list of New Testament books written by an Apostle, James and Romans through Philemon, all of the Pauline epistles. So those 22 books of the 27 New Testament books were written directly by an Apostle, and therefore, there is no question they should be received, and that's why the church did receive them.

That leaves only five New Testament books that were not directly written by an Apostle. What are those books? Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews, and Jude. So why were those books accepted if they weren't written by an Apostle? It's because they were written under the approval, endorsement, the auspices of an Apostle. Let's look at them.

First of all, there's Mark. Mark wrote his gospel under the direction of, in close association, with Peter. Papias, quoted by the church historian Eusebius, writes this, "The elder John used to say, Mark, having become Peter's interpreter, wrote accurately all that he remembered, though he did not record in order that which was either said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed Him, but subsequently, as I said, attached himself to Peter, who used to frame his teaching to meet the immediate needs of his hearers. And none is making a connected narrative of the Lord's discourses. So Mark committed no error as he wrote down some particulars just as he recalled them to mind. For he took heed to one thing, to omit none of the facts that he heard from Peter, and to state nothing falsely in his narrative of them." So why was Mark's gospel accepted? Because he wrote under the endorsement, the auspices of the Apostle Peter.

What about Luke and Acts? Well, Luke comes because of a close association, Luke and Acts, from a close association with Paul. Irenaeus writes that Paul was always attached to and inseparable from, I mean that Luke was always attached to and inseparable from Paul, and with him performed the work of an evangelist, and was entrusted to hand down to us a gospel. Tertullian called the gospel of Luke Paul's gospel, written by Luke. Origen writes that Luke composed for Gentile converts the gospel commended by Paul. But the best evidence for Luke

comes from Paul himself, because as we saw in 1 Timothy 5:18, he calls Luke's gospel what? Scripture.

What about Jude? Or let's go to Hebrews. What about Hebrews? Well, it's because of a close association with the Apostle Paul. It was apparently accepted because of that close association. Origen writes, "Who wrote the epistle? In truth, God knows." So they didn't know who wrote it. But in the same context, he says, "Not without reason have the ancients handed it down as associated with Paul." Clement argues that the epistle to the Hebrews is Paul's. We don't know who wrote Hebrews. But we do know that it was received because of its association with Paul. I personally think that it may very well have been Apollos, who's called mighty in the Hebrew Scriptures. And Hebrews certainly reflects that. But regardless, it was received early on by the church, long before the church councils, because of its association with Paul.

Justin Martyr provides us with the earliest record of a worship service, outside the New Testament, in a Christian church. He writes this, "On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gathered together to one place, and the memoirs of the Apostles, [that's the New Testament], or the writings of the prophets, [that's the Old Testament], are read." So the New Testament is called the memoirs of the Apostles.

That's what we have in our New Testament. So Jesus is the one who endorsed the Old Testament canon, recognized our Old Testament as God's inspired word, and He pre-authenticated what we call the New Testament by choosing the men and authorizing them to speak and to write on His behalf. That's why we accept the Bible you hold in your hands.

By the way, one other book I should mention is Jude, and that's because of its connection with James, the fact that he was a believing half-brother of Christ and was connected to James the Apostle. So it was really written under James' authority. Now, that brings us to one last issue, and that is the closed canon.

How do we know the canon of Scripture is closed? How do we know there are going to be no more writings that God intends to be added to the Scripture? Well, there are several arguments. First of all, the age of authenticated Old Testament prophets ended. That's freely acknowledged in the Old Testament and Jesus and the Apostles in the New Testament. And there are no more Apostles by the biblical standards of Acts 1. Read Acts 1. If you want, you can read my book,

The Biblical Case for Cessationism, where I talk about the end of the age of the Apostles. It's a chapter on that. No more prophecy, no more revelation, because there are no more prophets from the Old Testament era, and there are no more Apostles. We're done. The canon is closed for that reason.

Number two, church history affirms the close of the canon. By the second century, the 66 books of our Bible were affirmed as the only true Scripture and later were officially affirmed and confirmed by the church councils of the fourth century.

A third argument I would give is Hebrews. Turn to Hebrews 1. Hebrews 1:1, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers, in the prophets, in many portions, and in many ways." What is he talking about? He's talking about the Old Testament. He spoke long ago to the fathers, in the prophets, in many portions, and in many ways. Verse 2, "In these last days, has spoken to us in [or by] His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world." Notice the contrast between God speaking long ago to the fathers and the prophets, and in these last days. The clear implication is that God's revelation to us in His Son is, as one author put it, the culmination of His speaking to mankind, and is His greatest and final revelation in this period of redemptive history. Jesus is God's last word to us. That's the whole point.

There is unquestionable finality in the revelation of God that comes in and through the ministry of Jesus Christ. It's also clear that we shouldn't expect anymore. Where is the authorized record of God's revelation in His Son? It's in the men He handpicked to speak on His behalf. Look at Jude 3. Jude 3. "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write to you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you, appealing that you earnestly contend [now, notice what he says here] that you earnestly contend for the faith, the body of doctrine, which was once for all handed down to the saints.

The faith, the sum of what Christians believe, once for all refers to something done for all time with lasting results, never to be repeated, and it was delivered, past tense. By the time Jude wrote that faith had already been delivered to us by God, and now we are simply to contend for it, to defend it.

And then finally, Revelation 22. Turn over to Revelation 22. And look at verse 18. "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds to them, God will

add to him the plagues which are written in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city which are written in this book.” Now, you know, this isn't the first time that the readers of Scripture have come across this kind of warning. Deuteronomy 4:2, Deuteronomy 12:32 warns against adding or subtracting from God's word. When you come to Revelation 22, the passage we just read, obviously the primary reference is to what? It's to the book of Revelation. Don't add to or take away from this book, the book of Revelation. However, it is not coincidental that this warning comes at the end of the last book written by the last living Apostle, somewhere in the mid-90s AD. It's a strong warning added to the literal end of all the Apostles' writings. The prophets have ceased.

The Apostles now are going to be gone with this last book as John is soon to die. And God says, don't you dare add to My authorized representatives, the prophets that I empowered and called, and the Apostles that my Son chose to speak on His behalf. And this book you have, this is God's final word. “He spoke in many ways in different times through the prophets.” That's the Old Testament. But He has in these last days spoken His last and final word to us in His Son, and through those whom He appointed to speak and write on His behalf.

So what are the practical applications to us men of a closed canon? I just want to bring this home to you. I hope and trust you believe what I've taught you tonight. I think most of you do. Great. So what does that mean practically in your life? Let me give you some really rubber meets the road applicational points here. These aren't on the slide. You'll jot them down.

What are the practical applications of a closed canon? Number one, God has completed everything He wanted to tell us, and that means the Scriptures are sufficient, entirely sufficient. Guys, you don't need anything else for your spiritual life. You don't need to go find some self-help book in the local bookstore, if you can find a bookstore. You don't need to go online and find some TED Talk that's going to tell you how to straighten out your life. No, the Scriptures are sufficient. Everything God was convinced and was right that you needed to know for your spiritual salvation and your spiritual sanctification, everything is here in this book. Do you really believe that? Do you believe that that book you hold in your hand is God's word and it is all that you need for your soul? It's what you should believe.

Number two, there have been no additional writings from God. Now that's important because it helps us accurately identify the cults and other Christian aberrations. Because almost invariably, when cults come along, or aberrations come along, what do they claim? They claim some updated revelation from God. The moment you hear somebody say, "I have a message from God," run, don't walk. This is God's finished word. He has nothing else to say. And if that person is speaking, as someone speaking revelation, then guess what standard they need to be judged against? Are they always right every single time? If not, they're a false prophet. And does what they say, even if they can work miracles, does what they say reflect the previous revelation of God? And if not, they're a false prophet.

Number three, don't expect any additional revelation of any kind from modern day prophets. Don't be open to that stuff. Don't read some book, you know, where some guy went to heaven and is now going to tell you some fresh revelation God had. Or some woman who says that, you know, Jesus speaks to her.

And that brings me to number four, don't expect God to speak to you outside the Bible. You know, there's a really, there's a new trend coming out of the Northwest. A man who's up there who talks about prayer as listening to God. Well, first of all, that's biblically wrong. Prayer nowhere, nowhere do you find prayer said to be listening to God. He pulls a couple of verses out of context; taken in context they don't say what he makes them say. Prayer is talking to God. So how does God talk to us? His Word. Martin Luther said it beautifully. He said, the man who would hear God speak, let him read Holy Scripture. That's how God is spoken. You know, people, Christians get all caught up in this sort of mystical thing, you know, where "Well, I just feel like God's telling me..." Don't feel like God's telling you anything. You know what God has told you. And if it's not in here, then you have no confidence that it's God telling you that.

I remember a man sitting in my office. He's not in our church, so I can tell the story. But I remember a man sitting in my office who had moved his family here from the Northwest. And he said, I said, well, why did you move from, it was, I forget, Washington or Oregon, somewhere up there. And I said, well, why did you move your family? He said, well, he said, God told me to move my family here. I said, well, wait a minute. You mean like you heard God, like God's voice spoke out loud to you and said move your family from Oregon to Texas? Oh, no, no, I don't

mean that. I just mean I knew God was telling me. I said, well, how did you know God was telling you? I mean, how do you know that wasn't your flesh? Because it's a whole lot easier to live as a Christian in Texas than it is in Oregon. How do you know that it's not Satan? How do you know it's not the pizza you had last night for dinner? You don't have any idea that that's God speaking to you. And guys, you don't either. If it's not in the Bible, you can never be sure, and you can never say that God's speaking to you, because you don't know that that's God, and He hasn't promised to do that.

Number five, don't look for subjective impressions from God. That's a kind of revelation. It's not exact. I mean, most people wouldn't say that's revelation, but don't say, "Well, I just feel God wants me to..." Again, that's not how God speaks. Read holy Scripture.

Number six, men, this is a big book, but God's only given us one book. He's only given us one revelation of Himself and everything that we need to know. God's revelation is not a moving target. It's not something inside of you. You know, Luther used to refer to the Bible as God's external Word. It's outside of you. It's there in black and white, in words and sentences and paragraphs. You can know what God has said. And everything that God will ever say to you in this life is found between the covers of this book. So what does that mean for me and you? It means we had better become like Apollos, mighty in the Scriptures. We better become men of the word, because this is God's word. And this is what He intended to say to us. We have a closed canon, but a canon it is.

What's between the covers of this book? Ought to be the ruler against which you measure everything in your life. From what you love, to what you watch, to what you listen to, to what you believe about the Christian faith, to what you believe about God's sovereignty, to what you believe about election, to what you believe about everything, and how you live, how you treat your wife, and how you work on your job, and what you do as a student in school. This is the rule. This is the canon that shapes everything for us. And if it doesn't, then we're not following our Lord, as we'll see in Matthew chapter 5. May God give us the resolve to be men of the Word.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for our time tonight. Thank you that we have your Word. And we know we have your Word because of the way you framed it up through Moses, and the standard for

prophets, and the way that the Word was accepted as it was written, and the way our Lord confirmed and endorsed the Old Testament that we have in our Bibles and then gave us a list of those who would write the New Testament. He authorized them to speak and to write on His behalf with His authority.

Lord, thank you that we have your Word to us, and we can be confident of it. Lord, help us to love your Word. Help us to read it, to study it, to meditate on it, to feed our souls every day. Help us to treasure it. Help us to read it and teach it to our children. Father, help it to shape and frame what we think about everything. Help us to realize that in this book, we have the mind of Christ. And may His mind shape how we think about everything. Lord, we want to be like Him. We want to have His view of Scripture. Teach us. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen