

Christian Doctrine

The Bible (Part 5)

How Our Bible Got to Be as It Is Today

The Idea of a Canon

The term “Canon” refers to the collection of books that were approved to be included in the Bible. The purpose of the canon was not to “make” books God’s Word (for they were God’s Word the moment they were written), but rather to give recognition to the fact that they were God’s Word.

Which Books to Include?

Principles that guided which books belonged in the canon:

1. Was it written by a prophet or apostle?
2. Does it speak with authority from God?
3. Does it speak truth about God, man, the world, (etc.)?
4. Is it able to transform lives?
5. Is it accepted and used by the church?

The Formation of the Old Testament

As God spoke through individuals in Israel’s history, their writings were recognized as being prophetic. Their writings made up the Hebrew Bible (or what we now call the Old Testament). Jesus Christ and the NT writers accepted these books as inspired from God ([Matt. 5:17](#); [II Tim. 3:16](#)).

The Formation of the New Testament

The writings of the apostles and other NT writers were recognized as from God ([I Cor. 14:37](#); [I Thess. 2:13](#); [4:15](#)). The writings of the 2nd century church fathers show that all 27 NT books were recognized as Scripture, though some books were debated (such as 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Hebrews). A letter by Athanasius in 367 AD mentions all 27 books. And at the Council of Carthage in 397 AD, all the books were closely examined and the NT canon was confirmed and became fixed just as it is today.

The OT was embraced by the Jewish people and the early church just as the NT was received by the 1st century believers. In the same way, we can have confidence that the Bible is exactly as God intends it to be ([I Pet. 1:23](#)).