



# Canon: Which Books Belong?

## Lesson Five: The Necessity of Canon

Many religious books were written during the years in which the Old Testament and New Testament were composed. Which of these religious books are the product of Inspiration and which are not? This is where the question of Canonicity applies. The basic meaning of this term refers to “a standard or measuring rod.” When used in reference to the Bible it means a list or index of books that are recognized as “Holy Scriptures.”

### **SIGNIFICANT POINTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CANON**

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- Canonicity is inseparably linked with Inspiration—the Holy Scriptures must only contain “inspired” texts (2 Timothy 3:16a).
- Canonicity is NOT decided by human votes.
- Canonicity is determined by the book’s authority (1 Corinthians 14:37).
- Canonicity required time to elapse before the Book was recognized.
- Canonicity was an issue decided long ago but whose conclusions were unsettled by liberal philosophies of the Modern Era (the early 1900's).

### **WHY IS AN ACCEPTABLE OR RECOGNIZED CANON NECESSARY?**

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- Because only the Canonical are “profitable” (2 Timothy 3:16)
- Because of heresy threatening God’s saints:
  - Marcion (c. 140 AD)
  - Montanus (c. 150 AD)
  - Christians were compelled to test false teachers (1 John 4:1) and the Canon was the best way they could accomplish this
- Because of persecutions
- Because of the codex form of binding writings
- Because of the Protestant Reformation

### **A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS OF CANONIZATION**

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- The Old Testament Canon is established with a solid foundation.



- The New Testament Canon was established by the fourth century and is summarized in five stages:
  - **THE FIRST CENTURY** - Within the writings are repeated exhortations for reading and study (1 Thessalonians 5:27; 2:13; 1 Corinthians 14:37; Colossians 4:16; Revelation 1:3). Writings from this period reflect influence from the books of Matthew, Luke, 1 Timothy, Titus, 1 Peter, Ephesians, and Hebrews.
  - **THE FIRST HALF OF THE SECOND CENTURY** - There is evidence that all of the Gospels, John's writings and Paul's Epistles were known and used in the centers of Christianity. The first three "Church Fathers" (Clement, Polycarp, Ignatius) used the bulk of the New Testament in ways that authenticated their origin.
  - **THE SECOND HALF OF THE SECOND CENTURY** - Christian writers quote from almost all of the New Testament asserts the Apostles' inspiration. By 170 AD The New Testament Canon is represented with no additions and only 2 Peter was not listed.
  - **THE THIRD CENTURY** - More come to accept the Books that had been questioned (Revelation, Hebrews, 2 Peter and Jude)
  - **THE FOURTH CENTURY** - Universally recognized were the four Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles which included Hebrews), 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation. Admitted as canonical by a majority, but disputed by some were James, 2 Peter, 2, 3 John, and Jude. In 367 AD Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria issued a letter eliminating the use of the Apocryphal books and listing the twenty-seven New Testament books as the final authority. At the close of the century (397 AD) The Council of Carthage decreed that the twenty-seven books were inspired and only these were to be read in the church.

#### **MAN NEEDED A CANON OF SCRIPTURE BECAUSE...**

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- He needed to know which books God inspired so he could gain the divine wisdom necessary for life and godliness.
- He needed a standard to reject error and follow Truth.

#### **GOD PROVIDED MAN THIS CANON BECAUSE...**

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- He knew that in future centuries man would not be able to distinguish between the divinely inspired books and the spurious books.
- He truly desires that man understand the divine wisdom and find the joys of salvation in Christ.