



# Canon: Which Books Belong?

## Lesson Six: The Governing Principles of Canon

The accumulation of 66 Books in the Holy Scripture was no accident. The books were compiled only after close inspection acclaimed they were inspired. Our present lesson focuses upon the process by which books were accepted, or rejected, into the Canon of the Bible. The Bible student can be confident that the Holy Scriptures were not haphazardly thrown together. Three points provides the student with the assurance that the Bible contains only those books “inspired of God:”

- The Determining Tests
- The Writings Divided
- The Limit of 66 Books

### **CONFIDENCE IN THE TESTING PROCEDURE CAN BE CERTAIN**

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The Canon was decided early in history. The testimony of history verifies that absoluteness existed concerning the Canon. Early Church History testifies that the Canon was fixed and unaltered until later Church History (The Council of Trent, 1546).

The selection of books to be included in the New Testament Canon was achieved by a careful testing process applied to each book to determine its canonicity.

- **AUTHORSHIP**—The writing had to originate with an Apostle or one closely associated with an Apostle. This is known as the test of “Apostolicity.”
- **INTRINSIC WORTH**—If the message surpassed the normal standards, it was judged inspired.
- **CONSISTENCY OF DOCTRINE**—Any writing from God would be consistent in all aspects of doctrine and application.
- **ACCEPTANCE OF WRITINGS**—Were the writings universally accepted or were they restricted to a particular region?

“It is very remarkable that, fifty years after the death of the last apostle, there were found in the writings of the defenders of the faith and also in those of heretics exact quotations from the whole New Testament (except for six or seven of the very shortest letters); both groups referred to it for their authority” (Rene Pache, *The Inspiration And Authority Of Scripture*, 175).

### **TWO LARGE DIVISIONS APPEARED.**

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- **HOMOLOGOUMENA**—These were universally recognized as Holy Scripture.
- **ANTILEGOMENA**—These were debated and opposed in universal acceptance.
  - Those writings merely “disputed.”
  - Those writings considered “spurious.”

**SUSPICION IN SOME BOOKS IS UNDERSTANDABLE**

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- The Apostles had warned believers to be wary of teachers and writings (Galatians 1:8, 9; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2; 1 John 4:1).
- Internal evidence of these books often confused their status.

**THE NUMBER "66" BECAME THE ACCEPTED NUMBER FOR THE CANON**

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- The books were written for specific purposes.
- These books were not written to form a volume of 66 books.
- The deaths of the Apostles and inspired writers emphasized the urgency of keeping these letters safe.
- The present Bible has 66 books because the Old Testament and New Testament gradually developed into that number.
  - The Old Testament was divided into three parts by the Jews—The Law, The Prophets, and The Writings (sometimes called The Psalms). Each of these divisions was composed of books that were deemed “inspired.” The numbering of books varies—the Hebrew Bible has 22 or 24 books and the English Bible has 39. These contain the exact material but the Hebrew Bible combined some of the books that are separated in the English Bible.
  - The New Testament developed, as did the Old Testament, in three categories—The Gospels, The Pauline Epistles, The General Epistles. Their number (27) was decided early in Church History and was confirmed in the fourth century.

**CHRISTIANS CONFIDENCE THAT THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE CAN BE ACCEPTED AS GOD’S WORD CAN BE SUMMARIZED WITH THE FOLLOWING POINTS...**

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- Canon was not established by mortal wisdom that exalted man’s literature to a divine status but was determined by Inspiration’s quality.
- Providence guarded the Scriptures and prevented any illegitimate books from invading the Faith.
- Churches never put into the Canon any doctrine that was contrary.