

An oil painting of an open book resting on a wooden table. The book is open to a page with dense text, and its pages are illuminated by a warm, golden light. In the background, a lit candle in a holder casts a soft glow, and the scene is set against a dark, textured background. The overall mood is quiet and contemplative.

The Canon of Scripture

CGYG Topical Program

January 21, 2005

Agenda

I. Introduction

- a. Overview of the Bible
- b. The importance of Scripture

II. How the Bible came to us

- a. Revelation & Inspiration

III. Canonization of Scripture

- a. What is the Canon of Scripture?
- b. Old Testament Canon
- c. New Testament Canon

IV. Attacks on Scripture

V. Summary

VI. Sources

Introduction

Overview of the Bible

- “Bible” derived from “Biblia” (Greek), meaning “book”
- Consists of 66 books, 39 Old Testament & 27 New Testament
- OT books: ~1400 – 400 B.C.
- NT books: ~ 50 – 80 A.D.
- Jews: Hebrew Bible (Law, Prophets & Writings)
- Christians: Hebrew Bible + New Testament
- “Testament” (diatheke – Greek, berith – Hebrew): covenant between two parties

Mosaic Covenant (Ex. 24:8) → Old Testament, or book of the Old Covenant

New Covenant (Jer 31: 31-4, Matt 26:28) → New Testament of Jesus Christ

Introduction

Foundation: for Christians, Christ is the theme of both covenants:

In the Old Testament, Christ is:

In shadow
In pictures
In type
In ritual
Prophesied
Implicitly revealed

In the New Testament, Christ is:

In substance
In person
In truth
In reality
Present
Explicitly revealed

“(Jesus) said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” – Luke 24:44

Introduction

The Importance of Scripture

- The Bible points us to Jesus Christ; Christ was “the Word made flesh” (John 1:14)
- The Bible is the infallible Word of God, and is His instruction on how we are to live lives that please and glorify Him
- God uses Scripture to work powerfully in our lives to instruct us, guide us, admonish us (Psalm 119:97-104, 1 Thes 2:13)
- The Bible is the central point of attack for enemies of Christ, but Jesus is clear: “... Scripture cannot be broken.” (John 10:35). It is the eternal Word of God.

How the Bible came to us

I. All Scripture is God-breathed

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...” – 2 Timothy 3:16

- “All Scripture” means just that... Old and New Testament
- “Inspired” literally means that God breathed out Scripture: Form and content of Scripture are the very words of God

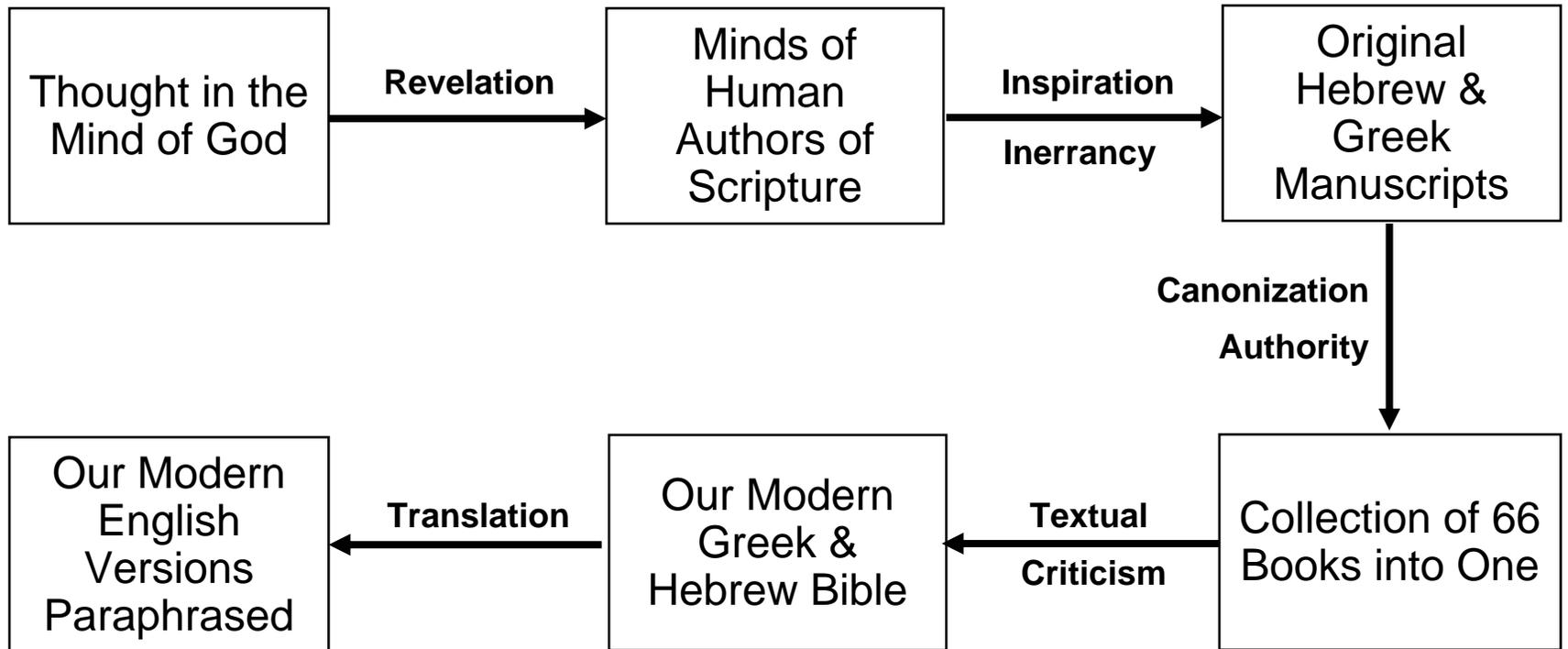
II. Writers of the Bible were led by the Holy Spirit

“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were *carried along by the Holy Spirit.*” – 2 Peter 1:20-21

Inspiration: Process by which Spirit-moved writers recorded God-breathed writings

How the Bible came to us

Divine Communication



How the Bible came to us

How did God communicate to man? (General and Special Revelation... we focus here on the special)

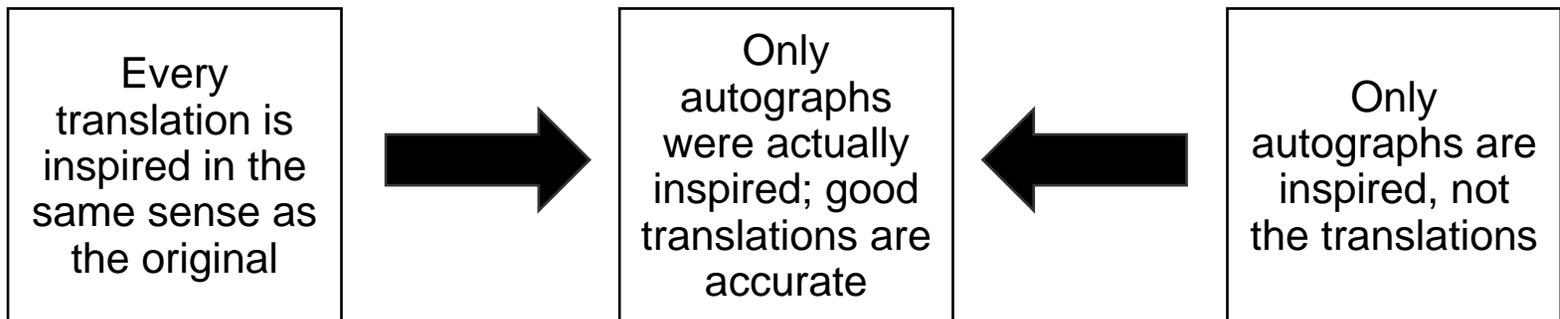
In the Old Testament, through prophets; In the New Testament, through Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2)

God spoke to prophets in the Old Testament...	
Through angels...	Genesis 18, 19
In dreams...	Daniel 7:1, Numbers 12:6
Through visions...	Isaiah 1:1, Ezekiel 1:1
Through miracles...	Exodus 3:2, Jonah 4:6
In audible voice...	1 Samuel 3:4
Through inner convictions of the Spirit...	"Thus saith the Lord..."
By speaking in their very words...	2 Samuel 23:2

How the Bible came to us

About Inspiration...

- Refers to the one-time work of God in producing original manuscripts of Scripture
- God reveals truth from His Word to us by *illuminating* truth through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:14-16), not by giving us new revelations or inspiration
- Inspiration and infallibility in the complete sense can only be applied to the original manuscripts of the Bible
- This does NOT mean that our translations aren't reliable:



How the Bible came to us

About Inspiration...

- No major doctrine rests on any one minor detail
- A good translation will have doctrinal authority, although actual inspiration is reserved for the autographs

The Canonization of Scripture

Which books were inspired? What books were in God's mind for the Bible?

- Inspiration: how Bible received its authority, Canonization: how Bible received its acceptance
- “Canon” derived from Greek, meaning “measuring rod”, “standard” or “norm”
- To say a book is canonical is to say that it is to be authoritative and a standard rule for faith and practice in the church
- Canonicity is determined by God, and recognized by men of God
- A book is canonized because it is God inspired, not vice versa!

“The Church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity. God gave us gravity, by His work of creation, and similarly He gave us the New Testament canon, by inspiring the individual books that make it up” – J.I. Packer

The Canonization of Scripture

Wrong View of Canonicity	Proper View of Canonicity
<p data-bbox="224 482 782 525">Age determines canonicity</p> <p data-bbox="110 544 891 601">- Some of oldest writings not in OT canon, e.g. The Book of Jasher (mentioned in Joshua 10:13)</p>	<p data-bbox="1030 489 1702 586">A book is valuable because it is canonical</p>
<p data-bbox="125 689 877 732">Hebrew determines canonicity (OT)</p> <p data-bbox="106 753 896 789">(Hebrew was considered the “sacred language of Jews”)</p>	<p data-bbox="1020 689 1711 786">A book is canonical because it is inspired</p>
<p data-bbox="100 853 902 951">Agreement with the Torah necessarily determines canonicity</p> <p data-bbox="110 972 891 1022">-Books that contradicted the Torah were not canonical, but not vice versa</p>	<p data-bbox="1001 918 1728 961">Propheticity determines canonicity</p>
<p data-bbox="158 1096 845 1193">Religious community determines canonicity</p>	

The Canonization of Scripture

Principle 1: Was the book written by a prophet of God?

- A prophet was the mouthpiece of God
- “And the word of the Lord came to the prophet...”, “The Lord said unto...”
- A prophet was called:
 - “man of God” (1 Kings 12:22) → chosen of God
 - “servant of the Lord” (1 Kings 14:18) → occupation
 - “messenger of the Lord” (Isa 42:19) → his mission for God
 - “man of the Spirit” (Hos 9:7) → by whose promptings he spoke
- God said of His prophets, “I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him” (Deut 18:18)
- Thus, only the prophetic writings were inspired → canonic

The Canonization of Scripture

Principle 1: Was the book written by a prophet of God?

To be sure, there were many who claimed to be prophets, but who were not

Tests of a prophet included:

- Did God confirm their authenticity through divine miracles? (next principle)
- Do they ever give false prophecies? (Deut 18: 21, 22)
- Do they contact departed spirits, or use mediums and witches? (Deut 18:11)
- Do they follow false gods or use idols? (Ex. 20:3-4)
- Do they confess the humanity of Jesus Christ? (1 John 4:1-2)
- Do the prophecies centre in Jesus Christ? (Rev. 19:10)

The Canonization of Scripture

Principle 1: Was the book written by a prophet of God?

In the New Testament, the same principle holds:

- The church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” (Ephesians 2:20)
- The early church continued in the “apostle’s teachings” (Acts 2:42), who were given special signs (miracles) to confirm their message (Heb 2:3-4).
- These were not one-off miracles, but rather, a special gift of miracles
 - **“The things that mark an apostle – signs, wonders and miracles – were done among you with great perseverance.”** – 2 Cor 12:12
- Some of these signs included raising the dead (Acts 20:10-12), healing the lame (Acts 3:1-10), healing the sick (Acts 28:8-9)
- All books in the NT are either prophetic (apostolic teaching) or apostolic (apostolic authorship)

The Canonization of Scripture

Principle 2: Was the writer confirmed by acts of God?

God used signs and wonders to confirm the prophetic claims of men:

- Moses (Exodus 4:1-9), Paul (2 Cor 12:12), Jesus Himself (Acts 2:22, John 3:2)
- However, not all prophetic revelation was confirmed by a specific miracle

Principle 3: Did the message tell the truth about God?

- That is, to test the authenticity of the book.
- Does the book tell the truth about God and His world as known from previous verified revelations?
- God cannot contradict Himself and cannot lie (2 Cor 1:17-18, Heb 6:18)
- Prophets who spoke false claims were to be put to death (Deut 18:20)

The Canonization of Scripture

Principle 4: Did it come with the power of God?

- Word of God is “living and active” (Heb 4:12).
- A canonical book needed to come with a real transforming force for edification, a real sense that God’s might accompanied it

Principle 5: Was it accepted by the people of God?

- This was the seal of canonicity... was it accepted by the large majority of Spirit-indwelled people of God?
- Both initial acceptance and subsequent recognition were important
- Was the book accepted by its intended audience? (e.g. Paul’s letters)
- Is the regarded as inspired and quoted by early Christians, and in other early Christian writings?

The Canonization of Scripture

The Canon of Scripture is closed

Theologically, it is closed.

- The apostolic age ended with the death of the Apostles.
- No apostles → no apostolic authority → no new revelation from God.
- Does not mean there can't be new understanding (illumination) of God's truth, only that there is no new revelation for the church.

Historically, it is closed.

- No evidence that any such special gift of miracles has existed since the death of the apostles.
- Immediate successors of the apostles did not claim new revelation, nor did they claim these special confirmatory gifts (see apostolic Fathers below)

The Canonization of Scripture

The Old Testament

Three main steps in canonization:

1. Inspiration by God:

- God inspired 39 books → hence, 39 books in the OT

2. Recognition by men of God:

- Men of God assented to the authority of an inspired book by their recognition of it as a prophetic word upon completion
- In a sense, the Old Testament books were canonized (i.e. considered sacred and divine) as they were written

3. Collection & Preservation:

- E.g. Moses' books were immediately collected and preserved beside the Ark (Deut 31: 24-26)

The Canonization of Scripture

The Old Testament

- Various theories as to when the OT canon was actually completed
- Based on early church writings, and evidence from the NT books, the OT canon was actually completed when the last book (Chronicles) was written and added to it by 4th century B.C.
- Jesus affirmed the Old Testament books, and validated His own ministry from it (e.g. Luke 4:17-21)
- Jesus Himself confirmed the scope of the Old Testament when he condemned the Pharisees of martyring all of the prophets that God had sent. (...the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah..." – Luke 11:51)
- Abel: Genesis 4 (1st book OT), Zechariah: 2 Chronicles (last book, chronologically, of OT – last book in the Hebrew Text)

The Canonization of Scripture

The Hebrew Old Testament Arrangement

The Law (Torah)	The Prophets (Nevi'im)	The Writings (Kethuvim)
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Genesis2. Exodus3. Leviticus4. Numbers5. Deuteronomy	<ol style="list-style-type: none">A. Former Prophets<ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Joshuaii. Judgesiii. Samueliv. KingsB. Latter Prophets<ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Isaiahii. Jeremiahiii. Ezekieliv. The Twelve	<ol style="list-style-type: none">A. Poetical Books<ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Psalmsii. Jobiii. ProverbsB. Five Rolls<ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Ruthii. Song of Songsiii. Ecclesiastesiv. Lamentationsv. EstherC. Historical Books<ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Danielii. Ezra-Nehemiahiii. Chronicles

The Canonization of Scripture

The Old Testament

- Critics of the Bible: the canon of the OT was not finalized or determined until after Jesus' earthly ministry (e.g. so-called "Council of Jamnia" – 90 A.D.)
- In fact, up until the 4th century A.D., there were debates and discussions surrounding the enduring validity of a few of the OT books (e.g. Ecclesiastes & the Song of songs)
- Debates centered around having enough original evidence to the book's prophetic credentials
- The canon of the Old Testament, however, was in reality already established well before the birth of Christ, as we've seen

The Canonization of Scripture

The New Testament

- Early church gave final recognition to the NT canon in late 4th century A.D.
- However, as with the OT books, books that were written with Apostolic authority widely accepted by early Christians as the inspired Word of God as they were completed
- Determining factor in NT canonization was inspiration
- Primary test was apostolicity (not necessarily authorship, but authority)
 - E.g. Mark, Luke, Jude and writer of Hebrews (Heb 2:3) not part of the original 12 apostles, but their writings had apostolic authority → they were prophetic
- Declaration of the Canon was a 'rubber stamp', per se, making official the books that had already been widely accepted for several centuries

The Canonization of Scripture

The New Testament

NT books themselves indicate that prophetic writings were being sorted from among non-prophetic ones, and that a canon was being formed during the apostolic times

1. Selecting process among the apostles

- Many writings about Christ circulating (John 20:30, 21:25)

“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” – Luke 1:1-4

- Implies that there were accounts about Christ that weren't entirely true

The Canonization of Scripture

The New Testament

2. Circulating procedures

- Writings considered authoritative to the early church were circulated among churches of Asia Minor (Rev 1:11, Col 4:16)

3. Apostles clearly considered inspired early NT writings to be on same level as the divine OT Scriptures

- Peter places Paul's letters on the same level as "the other Scriptures" (i.e. Old Testament) that unbelievers distorted— 2 Pet 3:14-16
- Paul quotes from Gospel of Luke as he does from the Old Testament (1 Tim 5:18)
- Note: book wasn't automatically canonical if it was quoted by an already received book

The Canonization of Scripture

The New Testament

4. New Testament books were regarded and quoted as canonical by others in the early church
 - Virtually all 27 books in NT were quoted in the writings of the early church Fathers (e.g. Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas, the Didache, “Interpretations of the Oracles of the Lord” by Papias – 70-163 A.D.)
 - Polycarp (A.D. 150) - younger contemporary and disciple of the apostle John, Polycarp quotes from 15 of the NT books
 - Justin Martyr (A.D. 140) – considered all gospels as Scripture, plus most of Paul’s letters, 1 Peter and Revelation.
 - Irenaeus (A.D. 170) – quoted almost every book of the NT in his writings. First great missionary to France.

The Canonization of Scripture

The Apocrypha & other extra-Biblical writings

- All of Scripture (OT & NT) can be categorized into 1 of 4 categories
- These categories articulated by Eusebius of Caesarea in 4th century A.D.
 1. **Homologoumena**: Books accepted by all
 2. **Antilegomena**: Books disputed by some
 3. **Pseudepigrapha**: Books rejected by virtually everyone as unauthentic (in some cases, even spurious)
 4. **Apocrypha**: Books accepted by some as canonical or semicanonical

The Canonization of Scripture

1. Homologoumena: Books accepted by all

- These are books that have been universally acclaimed as canonical from the beginning, and have appeared in virtually every ancient version and orthodox canonical list, as well as having been widely quoted as Scripture

Old Testament (34/39)			New Testament (20/27)	
Genesis	Ezra	Amos	Matthew	1 & 2 Thessalonians
Exodus	Nehemiah	Obadiah	Mark	1 & 2 Timothy
Leviticus	Esther	Jonah	Luke	Titus
Numbers	Job	Micah	John	Philemon
Deuteronomy	Psalms	Nahum	Acts	1 Peter
Joshua	Isaiah	Habakkuk	Romans	1 John
Judges	Jeremiah	Zephaniah	1 & 2 Corinthians	
Ruth	Lamentations	Haggai	Galatians	
1 & 2 Samuel	Daniel	Zechariah	Ephesians	
1 & 2 Kings	Hosea	Matachi	Philippians	
1 & 2 Chronicles	Joel		Colossians	

The Canonization of Scripture

2. Antiegomena: Books disputed by some

- These books were initially and ultimately considered canonical, but for one reason or another, at one time or another, were disputed

OT Book	At Issue	NT Book	At Issue
Song of Solomon	-It seemed too 'sensual' to some	Hebrews	-questioned because of its anonymity -received in the East as Pauline
Ecclesiastes	-Book seemed too skeptical to be inspired -Book itself comes to spiritual conclusion: "Fear God and keep His commandments..." (12:13)	James	-questioned as to its veracity, in particular relating faith with deeds -Luther questioned its inspiration during the Reformation period
Esther	-conspicuous absence of the name of God, seemed unspiritual -Powerful presence of His power and grace in the deliverance of His people	2 Peter	-the genuineness of 2 Peter was questioned; its style was dissimilar to 1 Peter -enough internal evidence of its authenticity
Ezekiel	-apparent anti-Mosaical teaching, 1 st 10 chapters had gnostic tendencies -no specific examples identified	2 & 3 John	-genuineness also questioned; author identified himself as an elder, not apostle -however, elder is used elsewhere in 1 Peter 5:1 to describe an apostle
Proverbs	-seemed illogical in 26:4-5, to answer a fool according to his folly, then not to do so	Jude	-Authenticity questioned, because of its references to Book of Enoch
		Revelation	-Authenticity was challenged over doctrine of millennialism

The Canonization of Scripture

3. Pseudepigrapha: Books rejected by all

- These books were obviously false and spurious writing, many of them folklore. They were flatly rejected by the early Jews, and early Christians as inspired.

Before Christ	After Christ
<p>-Although claimed to have been written by Biblical authors, actually express religious fancy and magic from about 200 B.C – 200 A.D.</p>	<p>-By 9th century A.D., appx 280 non-canonical books circulating, among them >50 pseudo gospels</p>
<p>Examples: Book of Jubilee, Book of Adam and Eve, 1 Enoch, The Assumption of Moses, 3 & 4 Maccabees, The Psalms of Solomon, Psalm 151</p>	<p>Examples: Gospel of Thomas (early 100 A.D.) – contain fanciful stories of alleged childhood miracles of Jesus, reflected personalities of Jesus that were utterly different than those in the NT Gospels Gospel of Peter (2nd Century A.D.) – contains an embellished account of the resurrection of Christ</p>

The Canonization of Scripture

4. Apocrypha: Books accepted by some in the past

- Apocrypha means “hidden”, and were book whose canonicity were disputed in the past
- Some Apocrypha books provide accurate accounts of Jewish history and culture, for example, but are not God-inspired in any sense
- The Roman Catholic Bible contains at least 10 Apocryphal books

Old Testament Period	New Testament Period
<p>-Jesus and the NT writers never once quote the Apocrypha, although there are hundreds of quotes/references to almost all of the OT canonical books</p> <p>-Apocryphal books rejected by the early church as non-prophetic, hence not inspired</p>	<p>-Some NT period Apocrypha were quoted by the early church Fathers (post-apostolic age), and some were even considered canonical at certain times in history</p> <p>-All were deemed non-prophetic ultimately</p>
<p>Apocryphal books in the Catholic canon: Tobit, Judith, 1&2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiastieus, Baruch, Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon</p>	<p>Examples:</p> <p>Shepherd of Hermes (A.D. 115-40) – most well-known non-canonical book, quoted by Irenaeus & Origen, considered ethical & devotional, but not canonical. Some controversial doctrine, e.g. baptismal regeneration</p> <p>Didache (100-120 A.D.) – highly regarded by early church, but decided non-prophetic</p>

Attacks on Scripture

Enemies of Christ attack the Word of God...

- **Satan's plan was always to undermine the authority of God's Word:**
"...Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" – Gen 3:1b
- **Inerrancy of Scripture:** question the infallibility of the Bible, given its human authors
- **Canon of Scripture:** question the compilation of inspired books. Attack its credibility by claiming that men, not God, determined what should be canonized
- **'New revelations' about Christ:** Appeal to 'other gospels (e.g. Gospel of Thomas), despite clear rejection of the early church of all of these books as non-prophetic, even heretical (e.g. The Da Vinci Code)
- **Sufficiency of Scripture:** question the relevance and adequacy of the Bible in our 'modern' lives. But the Bible is clear:
"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. – 2 Peter 1:3

Summary

- Throughout history, we see the hand of God in directing the assembly of His inspired Word
- The Bible is at the same time a historical book, and a divine revelation from God to man about His tremendous plan of salvation for sinners
- This is what sets Christianity apart from all other religions... it is based on faith, that is based on the person and work of Jesus Christ: God becoming flesh, humbling Himself to die for our sins and subjecting Himself to suffering and death on a cross, all for our sake, and ultimately for the sake of His Glory.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” – John 1:1-5, 14

Sources

- Geisler N.L. & Nix, W.E., “A General Introduction to the Bible”. Moody Press
- Bruce, F.F., “The Canon of Scripture”. InterVarsity Press
- Bruce, F.F., “The New Testament Documents”. Eerdmans Publishing
- McRae, W.J., “A Book to Die For”. Clements Publishing
- Chadwick, H., “The Early Church vol. 1”. Penguin Publishing.
- Marshal, I.H., Millard, A.R., Packer, J.I., Wiseman, D.J., “New Bible Dictionary”. InterVarsity Press
- Sproul, R.C., “Essential Truths of the Christian Faith”. Tyndale Publishing.
- www.bible.ca
- www.biblegateway.net
- For an excellent summary: <http://www.biblebb.com/files/howbible.htm>