

Is Our Bible Complete? #1

Introduction. In recent years we have seen an explosion of material alleging that our Bibles are not complete. Many theories have been advanced that speak of all kinds of other books that were "banned" from the Bible, "taken out" of the Bible, and other ideas; and that this was done by Catholics in the fourth century. These ideas, which have been circulating for some time, have received renewed interest on account of the popularity of Dan Brown's book, *The Da Vinci Code*, the movie based on the book, and the unveiling of the discovery of the "lost" Gospel of Judas.

Many television channels and book publishers, taking advantage of the popularity of this subject, have aired stories and published books discussing the discovery of lost books in the Bible. In fact, when you pick up certain Bibles in bookstores, you will see several more books in them than the one in your lap. Is it possible that our Bible is incomplete? Many books claim to be written by the authority of God. The Bible did not fall from heaven all in one piece. So how can we know what is scripture and what is not?

I. **What Is The "Canon"?**

- A. "Canon" referred to a reed or a tool used for measurement, much like our rulers (Ezekiel 40:3; Galatians 6:16).
- B. The third-century "church father" Origen used the word "canon" to denote what we call the "rule of faith," the standard by which we are to measure and evaluate. Later, the term meant a "list" or "index." As applied to scripture, "canon" means an officially accepted list of books. Certain books that complied with the correct standards were accepted as inspired in our Bible.
 1. Inspiration is what God did. He "breathed out" the scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16-17). This refers to the authority of scripture.
 2. Canonization is the determination of which books God inspired. This refers to the acceptance of scripture. Inspiration determines canonization.
- C. There is a difference between the canonicity of a book and the authority of that book.
 1. A book's canonicity depends upon its authority. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, his letter was to be acknowledged as possessing divine authority (1 Corinthians 14:37). This letter had authority from the moment he wrote it, yet it could not be referred to as canonical until it was received in a list of accepted writings.
 2. A book first has divine authority based on its inspiration, and then attains canonicity due to its acceptance as a divine product. No "church council" can make the books of the Bible authoritative by virtue of its decrees. The books of the Bible possess their own

authority and had this authority long before there were "church councils."

D. There are two ways to look at the canon.

1. The church is determiner of the canon vs. the church is the discoverer of the canon.
2. The church is the mother of the canon vs. the church is the child of the canon.
3. The church is the master of the canon vs. the church is the servant of the canon.
4. The church is the regulator of the canon vs. the church is the recognizer of the canon.
5. The church is the judge of the canon vs. the church is the witness of the canon.

II. ***The Old Testament Canon***

A. The Old Testament Apocrypha.

1. The word "apocrypha" has come into the English language from the Greek and means "hidden." It was used very early in the sense of secretive or concealed, but it was also used in reference to a book whose origin was doubtful or unknown. In the fourth century A.D., Jerome was the first to name this group of literature Apocrypha.
2. The Old Testament Apocrypha were written in the period of 200 B.C. to A.D. 100. They covered a broad variety of literary forms including historical, legendary, prophetic, and ethical. The Eastern Orthodox Church has some that are distinct from the Roman Catholic Church. So, the number of apocryphal books vary to some degree. The following are the major books in the Old Testament Apocrypha.
 - a) 1 and 2 Esdras.
 - b) Tobit.
 - c) Judith.
 - d) Additions to the Book of Esther.
 - e) The Wisdom of Solomon.
 - f) Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach.
 - g) Baruch.
 - h) The Letter of Jeremiah.
 - i) The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men.
 - j) Susanna.
 - k) Bel and the Dragon.
 - l) The Prayer of Manasseh.
 - m) 1 and 2 Maccabees.
 - n) Psalm 151.

3. Another group of works is the Pseudepigrapha. Pseudepigrapha are falsely attributed works; a work, simply, whose real author attributed it to a figure of the past.
 - a) These are Jewish religious works written c. 200 B.C. to A.D. 200, not all of which are literally pseudepigraphical. Some pseudepigraphical works include 3-4 Maccabees, the Life of Adam and Eve, the Assumption of Moses, and the Ascension of Isaiah.
 - b) Some of these works were apocalyptic, a genre of prophetic writing that developed in post-Exilic Jewish culture and was popular among millennialist early Christians. Some apocalyptic works include the Book of Enoch, the Psalms of Solomon, 4th Ezra, the Book of Jubilees, and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs.

B. For as long as we have recorded history, the books of the Old Testament have remained consistent.

1. The Israelites tended to write on papyrus (a form of paper) which does not survive the centuries very well. Other societies used clay tablets, so we have older records. But our Hebrew records only reach back to about 200 B.C.
2. For years, critics of the Bible said that the books in the Old Testament were revered because they were old. They claimed that the Israelites did not have much in the way of writings so what did exist was treasured.
3. What we now know is that there were plenty of books written by the Israelites, but only a few were treasured as God's word. The status of the scriptures is what caused them to be carefully preserved and frequently copied. Other books existed but they were allowed to decay or be lost in antiquity.

C. The testimony of historians.

1. A list was made in the late fourth century by a Jewish rabbi named Baba Bathra.
 - a) He used the threefold division of the Old Testament: The Law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), the Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve), and the Writings (Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, and Chronicles).
 - b) There are only 24 books listed. This is because today we divide the books differently today. Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles are divided into two books each. The Twelve are the minor prophets which we have separated each into separate books. Ezra contains both Ezra and Nehemiah, which we separate today.

Some lists have 22 books listed. These combine Lamentations with Jeremiah and Ruth with Judges.

2. Even earlier is a statement by the Jewish historian Josephus in A.D. 70.
 - a) He wrote, "For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us disagreeing from and contradicting one another (as the Greeks have), but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times, which are justly believed to be divine. And of these, five belong to Moses, which contain his laws, and the tradition of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years. But as to the time from the death of Moses til the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life."
 - b) Josephus' statement is valuable because of its age and because when Titus conquered Jerusalem in A.D. 70, he took the items in the temple back to Rome, but gave the sacred scrolls to Josephus.
 - c) Josephus was not the source of the canon, but a mere recorder of what was accepted by the Jews. The historians tell us what was accepted but not how these books came to be accepted.
 - d) Josephus knew of other Jewish writings, but did not regard them as having equal authority with the canonical works. He never quoted the Apocrypha as scripture. He wrote, "It is true our history hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time."
3. Philo, Alexandrian Jewish philosopher (20 B.C.-A.D. 40), quoted the Old Testament prolifically, and even recognized the threefold classification, but he never quoted from the Apocrypha as inspired.
4. The Jewish scholars at Jamnia (A.D. 90) did not recognize the Apocrypha.
 - a) Starting in 1871, liberal scholars concluded that there must have been a late first century Council of Jamnia which had decided the Jewish canon. This became the prevailing scholarly consensus for much of the 20th century, but from the 1960s onwards it came increasingly into question.
 - b) The fact is that the Old Testament canon had been set long before the time of Jesus. The Jews were very meticulous about the preserving and studying the inspired writings. The Hebrew

writings ended with Malachi, just as our Old Testament canon also ends with Malachi.

- c) The discussion centered not on whether certain books should be included in the canon, but whether certain ones should be excluded. In any case, those present recognized what already had been accepted long before. They did not bring into being what had not previously existed. The evidence clearly supports the theory that the Hebrew canon was established well before the late first century A.D., more than likely as early as the fourth century B.C. and certainly no later than 150 B.C. Therefore, the council had access to the same Old Testament canon that we have today.
 5. Many of the "church fathers" of the early church spoke out against the Apocrypha (i.e., Origen, Melito, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Athanasius).
 6. Jerome (A.D. 340-420), the translator of the Latin Vulgate, rejected the Apocrypha as part of the canon.
 - a) He said that the church reads them "for example of life and instruction of manners," but does not "apply them to establish any doctrine." He disputed with Augustine across the Mediterranean on this point.
 - b) At first Jerome refused even to translate the Apocrypha into Latin, the common tongue of the day, but later he made a hurried translation of a few of them. After his death and "over his dead body" the Apocryphal books were brought into his Latin Vulgate directly from the Old Latin Version.
 7. Many Roman Catholic scholars through the Reformation period rejected the Apocrypha. Luther and the Reformers rejected the canonicity of the Apocrypha.
 8. The Apocrypha was not fully accepted by the Roman Catholic Church until A.D. 1546 at the counter-Reformation Council of Trent. Up to that time, the view of Jerome dominated that Apocryphal books were not considered fully inspired, but were "second canon" (Deuterocanonical) and the Catholic Polyglot Bible even left the Apocrypha out after the Council of Florence in 1451.
- D. In fact, our only complete history of the Jews is the Old Testament itself, and it is from there we must learn how a book was accepted as divine in origin. There were several standards for inclusion in the Old Testament canon.
1. Was the book accepted in past Hebrew collections?
 - a) The Talmud (a collection of ancient rabbinical writings) accepts the same 39 books as are in our current Bibles. It says, "After the latter prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the Holy

Spirit departed from Israel." They believed that there was no prophet in Israel after Malachi.

- b) The oldest copies of the Septuagint (dating to the fourth century) do not include them. We do not know if earlier copies (versions that Jesus and the apostles used) included them.
 - c) The Apocrypha were also at the end of a biblical manuscript called Codex Sinaiticus about the 4th century A.D., but the presence of the Apocrypha in any of these documents does not necessarily mean that they were regarded as scripture. Regardless, modern Catholic Bibles now contain the Apocrypha -- as did the KJV in 1611 A.D., and early editions of the Geneva Bible.
 - d) The community who copied the Dead Sea scrolls never gave the same authority to books of the Apocrypha as to the Old Testament books.
2. Was the book referred to by Christ?
- a) In Luke 24:27, 44, He referred to the three sections: the Law (Torah), the Prophets (Nebhim), and the Writings (Kethubhim). He never considered the Apocrypha as part of the scriptures.
 - b) He endorsed Genesis through Chronicles (our Genesis to Malachi), including persons, events, and books that modernists reject (Matthew 23:35; Luke 11:51). These seem to point to the final order and arrangement of the books in the Old Testament canon.
 - c) In John 10:31-36, He referred to the Psalms.
 - (1) The term "scripture" had come to mean a fixed body of divinely inspired writings that were fully recognized as authoritative.
 - (2) Jesus disagreed with the oral traditions of the Pharisees, not with their concept of the Hebrew canon. Young wrote, "There is no evidence whatever of any dispute between Him and the Jews as to the canonicity of any Old Testament book."
 - (3) He never indicated or suggested that any of our 39 canonical books be removed or added. In fact, He used them.
 - d) Titles, such as "scripture," "holy scriptures," "sacred writings," "law," and "law and prophets," though they do not define the limits of the canon, certainly assume the existence of a complete and sacred collection of Jewish writings which are already marked off from all other literature as separate and fixed.
3. Was the book referred to by the apostles and other New Testament writers?
- a) There are hundreds of quotes and references to almost all of the canonical books of the Old Testament. They never quoted from

the Apocrypha. Jude 14 perhaps alluded to it, but not as authoritative. However, this alone would not disqualify them for the Old Testament canon (Acts 17:28, Aratus; Titus 1:12-13, Epimenides).

- b) Every book is quoted except Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Ezra, Nehemiah, Obadiah, Nahum, and Zephaniah.
 - (1) These exceptions are not serious. The minor prophets were always treated by the Jews as one canonical work; hence, if one of the twelve were quoted all were recognized.
 - (2) Furthermore, the fact that 2 Chronicles 24:20-21 is quoted in the New Testament presupposes also the canonicity of Ezra-Nehemiah, as originally these books were one with Chronicles, though they may possibly have already been divided in Jesus' day.
 - (3) As for Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon, it is easy to see why they are not quoted: they probably failed to furnish New Testament writers material for quotation. The New Testament writers simply had no occasion to make citations from them. What is much more noteworthy, they never quote from the Apocryphal books, though they show an acquaintance with them.
 - c) As a witness, therefore, the New Testament is of paramount importance. For though it nowhere tells us the exact number of books contained in the Old Testament canon, it gives abundant evidence of the existence already in the first century A.D. of a definite and fixed canon.
4. Does the book claim to be the word of God or the work of the prophets?
- a) Unlike the Old Testament prophets, none of the books of the Apocrypha ever claimed divine authority.
 - b) First Maccabees is perhaps the most valuable book in the Apocrypha. It describes the exploits of the three Maccabean brothers (Judas, Jonathan, and Simon). Along with Josephus, it is our most important source for the history of this crucial and exciting period of Jewish history.
 - c) However, the book itself and other books of the Apocrypha say there were no prophets at that time. Without a prophet, the book cannot be accepted as the word of God. It might be a good history book, but it is not God's version of history.
 - (1) 1 Maccabees 4:46: "And stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them."

- (2) 1 Maccabees 9:27: "So there was great distress in Israel, such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them."
 - (3) 1 Maccabees 14:41: "The Jews and their priests have resolved that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise"
 - (4) Baruch 85:3: "The prophets have fallen asleep."
5. Does the book contain internal evidence of inspiration?
- a) The Apocryphal books lack the distinctive elements that give genuine scripture its divine character, such as prophetic power and religious feeling.
 - b) One book that the Catholic church wants in the canon, but has never been accepted by most religious groups are the books of Maccabees. However, the book of 2 Maccabees even admits that it is not a perfect history: "Thus went it with Nicanor: and from that time forth the Hebrews had the city in their power. And here will I make an end. And if I have done well, and as is fitting the story, it is that which I desired: but if slenderly and meanly, it is that which I could attain unto. For as it is hurtful to drink wine or water alone; and as wine mingled with water is pleasant, and delighteth the taste: even so speech finely framed delighteth the ears of them that read the story. And here shall be an end" (2 Maccabees 15:37-39).
6. Is the book free from contradictions and absurdities?
- a) They abound in historical inaccuracies and anachronisms.
 - (1) Tobit claimed he was alive when Assyrians conquered Israel in 722 B.C. and when Jereboam revolted against Judah (935 B.C.), yet lived for only 158 years (14:11; 1:3-5).
 - (2) Judith has Nebuchadnezzar reigning in Nineveh (1:1).
 - (3) Judith 9:12-13 claimed that God assisted her in a falsehood.
 - b) They teach doctrines that are false and foster practices that are at variance with inspired scriptures (cf. prayer for the dead, 2 Maccabees 12:44-45).
 - c) They resort to literary types and display an artificiality of subject matter and styling out of keeping with inspired scripture.
7. Was the author a known prophet of God?
- a) Moses was recognized as the founder of the Jewish religion. Many miracles were witnessed by millions of people showing that God's power was with the prophet.
 - (1) Moses was commanded by God to make a record (Exodus 17:14; 24:4-8; 34:27-28 Numbers 33:2; Deuteronomy 31:9-12, 22-26).

- (2) Moses is never directly called the author of Genesis, but it is always included in his writings. It is believed that he compiled earlier writings into the book we know as Genesis, so he was not the direct author though it was part of his writings.
 - (3) Later books confirm the canon of Moses' work.
 - (a) Joshua was to learn the law Moses commanded (Joshua 1:7).
 - (b) Joshua copied the law onto stone and references Exodus 20:25 (Joshua 8:30-32).
 - (c) Israel was warned to follow the book of Moses (Joshua 23:6).
 - (d) David charged Solomon to keep what Moses wrote (1 Kings 2:3).
 - (e) David talks about what God made known to Moses in Psalm 103:7 and then quotes Exodus 34:6-7.
 - (f) Amaziah follows Moses' commandments, quoting portions of Deuteronomy (2 Kings 14:6).
 - (g) The book of Moses was found in Josiah's reign and the Passover was reestablished (2 Kings 23:21-25).
 - (h) Chronicles and Ezra reference the law of Moses given by God (Ezra 7:6).
 - (i) Daniel testifies that Moses' prophecies given by the Lord have come true (Daniel 9:11-13).
 - (j) We could continue on citing Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi all stating that Moses recorded the law of God.
 - (k) Christ and the apostles frequently quote from the works of Moses and interchangeably state that "Moses said" or "God said" or give it authority by saying, "It is written."
 - (4) The first five books were not canonized because of their antiquity, their linguistic style, or the beauty of their words. It was not by royal command or priestly decision. The books were accepted because they were written by God's spokesman, Moses. The human author, admitted by all to be a spokesman for the divine Author, guaranteed the writing.
 - (5) The law was certainly neglected, but its authority was recognized by Israel's spiritual leaders. It was the recognition of this authority that shook Josiah when he realized how long the law had been neglected (2 Kings 22:11).
- b) As we go through the Old Testament, only verified prophets' words were accepted as God's. The priests were teachers of the

words of God, but they were not the source of God's law (unless they happened to be prophets as well as priests).

- c) Prophets not only spoke God's words, but like Moses they also wrote the words of God (Jeremiah 36:1-8).
 - (1) Joshua wrote God's message (Joshua 24:26).
 - (2) Samuel wrote God's message (1 Samuel 10:25).
 - (3) The book of Chronicles lists the writers of Israel's history.
 - (a) The history of David was written by Samuel, Nathan, and Gad (1 Chronicles 29:29-30).
 - (b) The history of Solomon was written by Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo (2 Chronicles 9:29).
 - (c) The history of Rehoboam was written by Shemaiah and Iddo (2 Chronicles 12:15).
 - (d) The history of Abijah was written by Iddo (2 Chronicles 13:22).
 - (e) The history of Jehoshaphat was written by Jehu (2 Chronicles 20:34).
 - (f) The history of Hezekiah was written by Isaiah (2 Chronicles 32:32).
 - (g) The history of Manasseh was written by unnamed seers (2 Chronicles 33:19).
 - (4) The reason these histories were accepted was because they come from the pens of recognized prophets of God.
- d) Some books gain further verification because one prophet of God cites the work of another prophet.
 - (1) Daniel studied the works of Jeremiah (Daniel 9:2).
 - (a) If Daniel is accepted as a prophet of God, then Jeremiah must also be a prophet.
 - (b) Daniel's book has so many detailed, accurate statements about the future, that it must be from God. He passes Moses' test.
 - (c) Even today, we have copies of Daniel which date 200 years before Christ. Some of Daniel's prophecies were not fulfilled until the time of Christ or even after.
 - (2) Jeremiah quotes Micah (Jeremiah 26:18). Note the emphasis that it was true because a prophet wrote the words.

Conclusion. Norman L. Geisler wrote, "A book is not the word of God because it is accepted by the people of God. Rather, it was accepted by the people of God because it is the word of God. That is, God gives the book its divine authority, not the people of God. They merely recognize the divine authority which God gives to it." The church did not create the canon. It did not determine which books would be called scripture. Instead, the church

recognized which books had been inspired from their inception. It was accepted by the people of God because it was the word of God.

The next lesson will explore the New Testament canon. What we are seeing is that when we pick up our Bibles and begin to read, you can be sure that you have the literal and infallible word of God. Written by inspired men, handed down by faithful Christians, preserved by the Almighty God (James 1:21).