

**WHAT'S THE
POINT?**

The Bible
is GOD's
completed
Word.



2. WHERE DID THE BIBLE COME FROM?

PART II (CANON)



PETE

Reenie was making the dinner as Pete sat at the kitchen table reading his paper,

'I need to give you your dinner early tonight darling. I'm going to go to the Bible study at the chapel.'

Pete looked up from his paper. *'You don't want to be paying too much attention to what that lot says. I was watching a documentary this week, a historical thing, about how the Bible was just made up of a bunch of myths and legends. Bits they pinched from different religions and the people from them days. They said it's like they took all the best bits and mushed it together to make up their own thing. I'm telling you, Reenie, it's all a bunch of baloney.'*

STOP

What do you think? Where do you think the Bible comes from?

It's little wonder Pete is confused. He watched a documentary where the host claimed that the 66 books of the Bible were put together by a secret council with a hidden agenda in the 4th century. In fact, according to this TV show, there are other books out there that tell a different story and that are being suppressed by the church.

The 66 books of the Bible are also known as the ‘*canon of Scripture*’. That’s canon, with one ‘n’ not two. This is a Greek word that means ‘*measuring stick*.’ A measuring stick was used to test if an object was up to standard. When we say something is canon now, it’s merely a way of saying ‘it’s legit’.

STOP

You getting that? It’s a weird word right but canon = legit. What makes something legit? What makes it trustworthy? Can you think of some reasons why the 66 books of the Bible are recognised as legit?

There are two common mistakes and misunderstandings when it comes to canon. The first one is to assume that somewhere around AD96, when the Apostle John writes the Book of Revelation on the Island of Patmos, the entire 66 books of the Bible fell out of the sky and were handed out to the church the following Sunday, in the same way as we stick Bibles on the seats in our churches.

The second mistake is to assume that up until the 4th century, some old dudes with beards simply decided to cut lots of books out of the canon just to suit their own agenda.

STOP

Why do you think it matters that we know how the Bible was put together?



ILLUSTRATION

Reenie has a thing for jigsaws. She likes the 2500-piece ones and has a bit of a thing for kitten pictures. She buys loads of them and is always searching the charity shops to find cheap second-hand ones. To be honest, Pete’s had enough and banned her from

framing and hanging anymore of them in the house. *‘There is only so much fluffy kittens one man can take!’*

Once, Reenie was feeling adventurous, and had three jigsaws on the go at once, a nice country scene, the London Eye, and a dolphin. She was working on all three at the dining room table when the boys got into one of their fights, banging into the table and sending everything flying. All the pieces were completely mixed up. Realising what they’d done, the boys helpfully scoop up all the bits into one massive pile in the centre of the table. Where does she start? How was she going to sort the pieces back into their own boxes? Pete, always ready with an opinion, said, *‘I would try two things: Test if the edges fit together and check if the picture it makes is complete and makes sense. You’ve got to ask yourself: “Does it fit together?” and “Does it make one coherent picture?”’*

STOP

Think about the Bible, the canon. How can the jigsaw illustration help us think about how it should piece together?

As we think about recognising the true canon of Scripture it is helpful to remember that the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures is present and at work through the ages, granting the wisdom and discernment needed to separate truth from falsehood. We should also remember that God is the Lord of history and the sovereign ruler of all things.



‘I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and no one is like me. I declare the end from the beginning, and from long ago what is not yet done, saying: my plan will take place, and I will do all my will’ (Isa. 46:9-10).

The task of recognising the canon was not accomplished by men alone. Instead, it was accomplished by God through His people.

So how exactly was this accomplished? We are going to look at this in two parts. Firstly, the **Old Testament** and, secondly, the **New Testament**.

OLD TESTAMENT CANON

STOP

Do you know what the first five books of the Bible are?

The first five books of the Bible are:

Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

They were written by a dude called Moses. Moses is the most significant and important human being in the Old Testament. His writings are the foundation of the Scriptures. These 5 Books of Moses, when grouped together, are known as the Torah, a Hebrew word which means Law. The Torah, or Law, was given to Moses directly by God on a mountain called Horeb in the Sinai wilderness after God had rescued His people, Israel, from slavery in the land of Egypt.

STOP

How wild is that! God Himself gave Moses the Law. What do you think was going through Moses' head at that moment?

These 5 books chart,

the history of the world from creation

through the fall

the beginnings of the story of redemption

the call of Abraham

the birth of the nation of Israel

their coming to Egypt

deliverance from slavery

the giving of the Law at Horeb

the construction of the tabernacle

the formation of the Levitical priesthood

and the journey to the Promised Land.

The Torah is made up of 613 commands given by God for His people. They are concerned with the promise of *life* and *blessing* for **obedience** and **covenant faithfulness** on the one hand. On the other, they talk of *judgement*, *curse* and *death* for **disobedience** and **covenant unfaithfulness**.



'Keep my statutes and ordinances; a person will live if he does them. I am the LORD' (Lev. 18:5).

The Torah is really important because so many of the people who wrote the Bible, refer back to it time and again in their writings.

STOP

Let's stop and think it through because there is a lot going on here. Why do you think the Bible authors refer to the Torah so much?

This idea of reflecting back and referencing is known as *self-reflection* and this is one of the ways we recognise true Scripture.

Think back to Reenie's jigsaw illustration. Does it fit together, and does it produce one coherent picture? Likewise, the Scriptures connect to each other to make a complete picture.



'Above all, be strong and very courageous to observe carefully the whole instruction my servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or the left, so that you will have success wherever you go. This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to meditate on it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do' (Josh. 1:7-9).

This pattern continues as the Old Testament unfolds. It builds upon the foundation of the Torah, reflecting back upon it and shows us the promises unfolding from it. As the prophets arrive on the scene we find them preaching the Law, calling the disobedient nation to repent and return to the Lord, by obeying His commands.

The consequences for rejecting the Law were clear:



'As the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom go up like dust; for they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel' (Isa. 5:24, ESV).

The poetic and wisdom books, like the Psalms and Proverbs, also reflect and build upon the Torah as the authors consider what

it looks like to live in obedience to God's Word or ponder the consequences of sin.

Here are two examples:

'The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple' (Ps. 19:7, ESV).

'Those who reject the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law pit themselves against them' (Prov. 28:4).

NEW TESTAMENT CANON

As we move into the New Testament, we find the Old Testament again being referred to and reflected upon. In fact, the New Testament begins with the family tree of Jesus and charts it back through the centuries and story of the Old Testament. So, for example, we read in Matthew 12:17, *'This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah' (NIV).*



'Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled' (Luke 4:21).

After His death and resurrection, Jesus meets with His disciples, and as He leads what was likely the best Bible study in history, He refers to the completed Old Testament.



'He told them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures' (Luke 24:44-45).

This phrase, *'Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms'* refers to the 3 parts that make up the Hebrew Bible of our Old Testament. Again, this pattern of reflecting upon and referencing the Old Testament is continued throughout the whole of the New

Testament as the apostles explain how Jesus is the Messiah and seek to instruct the church in wise living.

So, what about the New Testament? How did that come about? Who or what decided which books should be in the New Testament and which books shouldn't? Again, as with the Old Testament, *self-reflection* is key to understanding the process.

In the letter of 1 Corinthians (AD 53-54) we see Paul referencing the events of the Lord's Supper as recorded in the Gospels. At the end of 2 Peter 3, the Apostle Peter discusses the writings of Paul, stating that even though his letters can be difficult to get our heads around, the church must not ignore them because they are Scripture.

The church developed 4 criteria for deciding whether a book was to be accepted as part of the canon of Scripture. Think of them as the four 'A's:

Ancient

Apostolic

Agreement

Acceptance

ANCIENT

Does the book come from the right time?

APOSTOLIC

Was it written by one of the apostles or a companion of the apostles?

AGREEMENT

Does the book teach doctrine that agrees with the rest of the Scriptures?

ACCEPTANCE

Is the book accepted as Scripture across the universal church?

Let's take a look at an example of some writing that wasn't accepted into the New Testament canon. In a book called **The Gospel of Thomas** we read, *'Jesus said: When you bring forth that in yourselves, that which you have will save you. If you do not have that in yourselves, that which you do not have in you will kill you.'*

Now compare that with teaching from two books that were accepted into the canon:

'But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this defiles a person. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, slander' (Matt. 15:18-19).

'The mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it is unable to do so. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God' (Rom. 8:7-8).

The so-called Gospel of Thomas teaches that we can save ourselves by looking inside, whereas the true Scriptures explain that we are utterly unable to save ourselves, as all that comes from within us is evil. Clearly, we can see why the Gospel of Thomas was not included in the canon. Oil and water don't mix. The pieces of the jigsaw don't fit together and so the picture doesn't make sense. The same is true with the so-called Gospel of Mary, or the Gospel of Judas and all the other spiritual writings that sprang up between the 2nd and the 4th century.

By AD 367 we find the first completed list of all 27 New Testament books. Then, in AD 397, at the Synod of Carthage, a meeting of important figures from across the church formally recognised all 66 books of our Bible, which is now considered closed and complete.



SUMMARY

Don't believe what you read online. There is no great conspiracy and hidden agenda behind the canon of Scripture. The books that make up the Bible were recognised because they are legit. The ones that were rejected didn't make the cut because they either lied about their authors, the dates didn't match and, most importantly, they lied about Jesus. We can have 100% confidence that what we have in our hands today is God's revealed Word to the human race.



MEMORY VERSE

'All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work' (2 Tim. 3:16-17).