

We accepted questions from the congregations for a few weeks and now we are beginning a series of Sunday evenings answering these questions. The answers will be by Randy Ballard, Heath Hines, Bill Money and me. I will begin and the question I will deal with tonight is two-fold but related.

**QUESTION:** *What and Why are 19 books left out of the Bible or do they really belong? Then there is a follow-up question. What 7 books did the Protestants remove from the Bible and are they important to us today?*

As I begin answering this question, I want to define a few terms that you will frequently encounter as you study the matter of the books of the Bible and how we got them.

**CANON.** The word **canon** comes from the root word *reed*, which was used as a measuring rod and came to mean “*standard*.” As applied to Scripture, canon means “*an officially accepted list of books*.”

**CODEX.** The **codex** is simply a book form of the Scriptures.

**TALMUD.** The **Talmud** is an ancient collection of rabbi laws and comments on the Law of Moses preserves the oral tradition of the Jewish people.

**APOCRYPHA.** Apocrypha are works of unknown authorship or doubtful origin.

**SEPTUAGINT.** The **Septuagint** is the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek.

**LATIN VULGATE.** The **Latin Vulgate** became the official version of the Bible used by the Catholic Church.

**PSEUDEPIGRAPHA.** Pseudepigrapha means “written under a false name.”

**HERETICAL:** Heretical is believing or practicing religion heresy.

*Who decided which scriptures were included in the Bible?* To answer this question, we have to look at the biblical canon, the officially accepted list of books. But the real question is what has made some books “*acceptable*” — and others not?

Why did these 66 books of our Bibles become the canon? It is not because the early Christians particularly liked these books. And it’s not because they were widely accepted, or because some church council decided to make them authority. Rather, it is because the early church recognized that these books had an inherent authority for how Christians live and what they believe. They believed that these books would have that same authority through all generations. The church understood them as Scripture—as the authoritative words of God, given through human authors. ***Zechariah 7:12*** ***Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the***

**words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts.**

***1 Peter 1:8-10 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: (9) Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. (10) Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you:***

Some mistakenly think the Roman emperor Constantine simply made the decision of what to include when he commissioned 50 copies of the Bible for churches in his capitol city, Constantinople. But Constantine played no role in the Bible's formation, despite what Dan Brown asserts as historical "fact" in his novel, *The DaVinci Code*. The 39 books of the Old Testament form the Bible of Judaism; the Christian Bible adds the additional 27 books of the New Testament. This complete list of books was found "acceptable" because the church deemed them to be divinely inspired books. They possess the stamp of God's authority.

The canon wasn't a quick decision by one man, but the product of centuries of reflection by the Church. From the writings of biblical and church history we can discern at least five principles that guided the recognition and collection of true, divinely inspired books. Let's review them.

### **The Canon's Guiding Principles**

1. Was the book written by a prophet of God? If it was written by a spokesman of God, then it was the Word of God.
2. Was the book confirmed by acts of God? Often, miracles separated true prophets from false ones. Examples of true prophets: Moses, Elijah, Jesus, and the apostles. Miracles are acts of God to confirm the Word of God given through a prophet of God to the people of God. They were signs that substantiated God's message.
3. Did its message tell the truth about God? Church fathers maintained this policy: "*If in doubt, throw it out.*" This policy enhanced the validity of their discernment of the canonical books. Does it come with the power of God?
4. The early church leaders believed the Word of God was alive and active (as it remains today), and thus would be a transforming force for edification and

evangelism. In other words, if the message of a book did not have the power to change a person, then God was apparently not behind its message.

5. Was it accepted by the people of God? When a book was received, collected, read, and used by the people of God, did they regard as canonical.

Let's consider the Old Testament and then the New Testament canon's

### **Old Testament Canon**

The Old Testament canon is basically the treaty document that God made with Israel and is the single most important theological structure in the Old Testament. The **Talmud**, an ancient collection of rabbinical laws, helped to establish the Jewish canon by rejecting later writings. Evidence supports the theory that the Hebrew canon was established as early as the fourth century BC.

A major reason for this conclusion comes from the Jews themselves, who from the 4th century BC onward were convinced that "*the voice of God had ceased to speak directly.*" In other words, the prophetic voice had been stilled. No word from God means no new Word of God. While there were other writings, they were not recognized as the Word of God. We know that Jesus often referred to the Old Testament; there is no evidence that He found fault with the canon of any Old Testament book.

The Hebrew Bible contains 24 books or scrolls. The Christian OT divides these 24 books up into the 39 books we have today. There is significant evidence that Jews understood these 24 scrolls to be Scripture in a way that other writings were not. On the other hand, there is very little evidence that any major Jewish group accepted any of the apocryphal books as part of the Jewish canon from between the third century before Christ and possibly as late as the second century after, well after Malachi (fifth century BC) who was the last inspired prophet. What Christians call the Old or First Testament contains the same material as the Hebrew Bible – the Scriptures of Jesus' day.

Now to our question, the Catholic Bible includes 14 books considered not to be in the OT canon, which are collectively known as the **Apocrypha**. I am assuming this is the 19 books referenced in our question. Apocrypha are works of unknown authorship or doubtful origin. List of books.

### **Books of the Apocrypha**

1 Esdras and 2 Esdras (150-100 BC)

Tobit (200 BC)

Judith (150 BC)

Additions to Esther (Vulgate Esther 10:4 – 16:24) (140-130 BC)

Wisdom of Solomon (30 BC)

Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), aka known as The Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach (132 BC)

Baruch (150-50 BC)

Letter of Jeremiah (300-100 BC)

Song of the Three Children (Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three Holy Children), an addition in the Greek version of Daniel 3 (170-160 BC)

Story of Susanna (Vulgate Daniel 13) (200-0 BC)

The Idol Bel and the Dragon (Vulgate Daniel 14) (100 BC)

Additions to Daniel, or the Prayer of Azariah (200-0 BC)

Prayer of Manasseh (100-0 BC)

1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees (110-170 BC)

These books were included in the **Septuagint** (the primary translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek) and the **Latin Vulgate**, the Catholic Church's Bible. They were flagged as questionable. Years later when Martin Luther translated the Bible into German in 1534, he moved the books to the end of the Old Testament, saying that though they were not equal to the Sacred Scriptures, although they were still "useful and good for reading." Many Protestant Bibles later omitted the books entirely. Jesus or any the New Testament writers never quoted from the Apocrypha. But many Christians find them of interest, as they contain historical information.

In addition to the apocrypha writings, there are also other ancient Jewish texts, collectively known as the Pseudepigrapha ( sudo-de-pig-gra-fa) (meaning 'written under a false name'), which are not included in any Bible. The Book of Enoch falls in this category. The Book of Enoch is considered a pseudepigraphic text and has been questioned for its authenticity and authorship due to its religious messages. The book's content, especially its detailed descriptions of fallen angels, may have also contributed to its rejection from the Hebrew canon along with its inconsistency with the Torah.

Notice how Jesus refers to the Scriptures as 'the Law and the Prophets' ***Matthew 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.*** On another occasion He referred to them as 'the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms' (Luke 24:44).

**New Testament Canon**

Early Christianity and the New Testament emerged as Christians of the early church regarded the Old Testament story as incomplete and in need of a proper conclusion. Because of Jesus, early Christians believed God was ushering in a new covenant. As they believed the apostles possessed the authority of Christ, the early believers received their writings as the very words of Christ himself. The apostles spoke with authority that was substantiated with miracles, but they always based their claims solely and directly upon their commission by the Lord.

The initial reason for collecting and preserving these inspired books was that they were prophetic. There was also during that time the rise of heretical movements with its own selected scriptures. The church needed to know which books should be revered, read in church services, and applied to life. Early Christians needed assurance of which books served as their source of authority.

Says scholar J.K. Elliot, *“It is likely that the **codex** (book form of the Scriptures) in which the Christian scriptures circulated helped to promote the establishment of the definitive, fixed canon of the 27 books we know as the New Testament. When each book circulated as a separate entity, obviously there was no limit to the number of texts that could be received. When certain, approved, texts were gathered into small collections this had the effect of ostracizing and isolating texts which were not deemed suitable for inclusion.”*

By the end of the fourth century the canon was definitively settled and accepted. The Council of Carthage established the orthodox New Testament canon in 397 AD; it was upheld at the Council of Trent in 1545. By the way, Protestants and Catholics are in agreement with their use of the same New Testament.

So to the question, **Which books were removed from the New Testament.** IT IS MISLEADING to talk of books being "removed" from the New Testament as many writings were being circulated prior to the accepted canon in AD 397. The accepted canon came about after a long and gradual process, and was in the form of an accepted consensus rather than a formal statement. Before this time, various lists of books had been in circulation in different areas. From these we can identify five principal "fringe" books later omitted from the canon proper. They are: the Didache (or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles), the Shepherd of Hermas, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Epistle of Barnabas and the Epistle of Clement. So these five books were not removed as much as there were omitted from the accepted canon.

Let me suggest that the 66 books of the Bible are the word of God, not because some church council decided they were, but because the Holy Spirit guided the church to treasure them above all other writings and to accept the authority of God himself speaking through them.

At the time of Jesus and the apostles, the question of what constitutes ‘the Scriptures’ was basically settled. A key part of this was whether the texts had been written by an apostle or someone very closely associated with apostles (e.g. Mark and Luke). We don’t know who wrote Hebrews, but its contents are fully in line with the apostles’ teaching. The early church sensed God’s authority in these texts and not others.

***John 16:13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.*** When Jesus told the apostles that he would guide them in all truth via the Spirit of truth, I trust that that happened. If the truth was presented by divine intervention, I believe that divine intervention would play an active role in preserving the truth.