M04A1 Canon

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Sixty-six books form the canon of the Bible for Protestant Christians. The order of Old Testament books matches the order in the Greek translation, the Septuagint. The Protestant OT translation comes from the Hebrew Bible but the Hebrew Bible differs in order, names of books, and grouping (consolidating into only 24 books.) The Orthodox Bibles and Catholic Bibles more consistently contain books from the Septuagint not retained in Hebrew Bibles. <https://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Heb-Xn-Bibles.htm>

One might think of canon as a big gun, the modern equivalent of the double edged sword of the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Ephesians 6:17 “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

But the spelling for that kind of big gun has two n’s and is cannon. The applicable definition for canon from the Oxford dictionary is “the criterion by which something is judged.” Definition two from Oxford is “a collection or list of sacred books accepted as genuine” with the example phrase "the formation of the biblical canon." Vocabulary.com says “Canon (one “n”) refers to a collection of rules or texts that are considered to be authoritative.” Wikipedia says “The English word canon comes from the Greek κανών, meaning ‘rule’ or ‘measuring stick’.” I think in this context, rule is a synonym of measuring stick. In America we call a 12 inch measuring stick a ruler.

Those who attack the Bible don’t just attack the theology but may primarily attack the legitimate standing of the canon. They attack the foundation of authority of the canon. They try to expose a chink and hope to see the canon crumble, or to see at least unprepared defenders of the Bible foundation crumble.

In the relatively recent past the critiques of biblical histories seemed to have weight. But archeological and historical finds in the late 1800s and in the 1900s overwhelmed these anti-canonical diatribes. “Thousands of manuscripts, tens of thousands of references to the history recorded in the Bible, and even entire nations with their libraries have been discovered.” - this Calvin Research lecture/article.

Attacks against authority of scriptures come not only from what these articles call radical Christians and non-believers either atheist or agnostic, but also from Muslims who give secondary respect to Abrahamic traditions and Jesus as a prophet and not as the MESSIAH/God. I’ve also heard one Hindu declaim about Christianity. Mohamed lived 570 AD - 632 AD. His Koran has been available 1500 years, more or less, The printing press has been available almost 700 years. Muslims mostly reject translations of the Koran.

Arabic Muslims easily read and understand the classic literary language of the

Koran which is reputed to remain unchanged in it’s 1400 years. However, non-Arabic Muslims often attempt some basic understanding of this early Arabic language. But they struggle to fully comprehend, much like most seminarian students struggle and only marginally succeed in becoming conversant in Hebrew and Greek. Verb conjugation is unique in Arabic, it is written right to left, and has it’s own unique script. <https://www.learnreligions.com/arabic-language-in-islam-2004035>

Wikipedia says that “The largest Muslim population in a country is in Indonesia, a country home to 12.7% of the world's Muslims, followed by Pakistan (11.1%), India (10.9%) and Bangladesh (9.2%). About 20% of Muslims live in the Arab world.This suggests, to me at least, that few Muslims understand the Koran as effectively as the Christian can easily understand the Bible with many translations available. I personally prefer studying from multiple translations, which biblegateway makes so easy for the Christian.

Nevertheless, Christians go back perhaps 2300 years, according to Wikipedia, for our most recent Biblical Hebrew manuscripts and New Testament manuscripts come from nearly 2000 years ago. Still, we have nearly 20,000 New Testament manuscripts in Greek, Latin, and contemporary ancient languages. Portions of each Old Testament book have been found other than Esther among the Dead Sea scrolls at Qumran from quite possibly 150 BC. Muslims fault the Bible as faulty because we don’t have the original source from the original writer. The Christian Bible was written over centuries beginning more or less 2000 years prior to the Koran.

We are blessed to have so many ancient copies virtually 100% identical without the printing press to make reproduction easy. This link explains the careful process of ensuring accuracy in copying scriptures. <https://scottmanning.com/content/process-of-copying-the-old-testament-by-jewish-scribes/>

For us as believers, we should be confident in the Bible’s authentic authority as we read “All scripture is given by the INSPIRATION of God.” 2nd Timothy 3:16. Even the compromised prophet of the Lord Balaam told the king who hired him to curse Israel, the people of God, that “the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.” Numbers 22:38. He could not lie in the name of the Lord. He could not say what he’d been hired to say.

The omniscient Holy Spirit inspired scriptures written without error. While the early chapters of Genesis can’t be historically confirmed, the genuineness of the confirmed histories throughout the Bible can assure us of the truthfulness of these early chapters.

Interestingly, the Bible reveals the good and the bad in the actions of it’s heroes. Paul in Acts 13:22 tells us that God said to the prophet Samuel, “‘I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart’.” Yet David is recorded to have committed adultry and murder. This fact that God tells all, not just the good about believing Bible heroes convinced my friend Michael to abandon atheism and become a Christian minister. God so called this former atheist that although gifted mathematically in high school that he could not get a passing grade in a mathematics class at Michigan State University. He surrendered to the will of God and attended a Christian university graduating with a degree in Theology and preaches today in Colorado.

God did not inspire fairy tales and majestic legends, he inspired flesh and blood human beings who, although sometimes faulty and failing God’s high standards, aimed to live for God, get up after a fall, and live for God again. After David’s adulterous sin with Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan, in the name of God, reproved David for his grievous sin. And David, in repentance and gratitude for his Lord’s forgiveness actually names one of his and Bathsheba’s sons Nathan after this prophet. (1 Chronicles 3:5)

Roman rule lasted hundreds of years, beginning well before Christ and extending hundreds after. Jesus probably spoke Aromaic, another Semitic language like Hebrew and I believe Arabic. After AD 70 after the destruction of Jerusalem (foretold by Jesus in Matthew 24:15-21, the Hebrew people had dispersed through the empire. This had begun well before Pentecost, necessitating God’s gift of tongues so that both gentile and foreign Jews could hear and understand the gospel. Hebrew as a language died out.

Hebrew Scriptures “used all capital letters, without spacing, without word-divisions, and without vowels.” This challenged people unfamiliar with the language. God written as GD could be read as God or guide or perhaps even good. “The vowels were supplied by the reader at the time of reading.” (Lecture/article) Massorates, students of Hebrew and scripture began about 500 AD to carefully copy these traditional texts but adding in the vowels according to the traditional, historic understandings. They followed stringent rituals to prepare themselves to faithfully copy texts and afterwards even measured the length of lines horizontally and the vertical lines, discarding any minimally divergent pages.

The King James Version was written from these Massoretic texts. The Dead Sea scrolls, found in 1947, predate the Massoretic texts by 1200 years, yet they remarkably compare favorably in consistency.

While many critics attack the accuracy of the canon, others attack the scope. Muslims want the Gospel Of Barnabas included in the canon. Others want to removes books from the canon. I on occasion see Paul attacked by people who deny his epistles.

During the centuries in which much of the Old Testament was written there was generally agreement on the canon. Believers knew the writers and recognized the way God spoke with them. Although Josiah’s reforms did uncover the loss of a part of the scripture known as the law or covenant. The prophet Hulda validated it as part of the canon. (2 Chronicles 34)

Jewish leaders carefully guarded the scrolls of the canon. They didn’t add to the canon simply because a new writer claimed to be inspired. The Jewish leaders used the canon to judge claims, preventing fraud. Jesus and the apostles accepted the established canon, quoting from them.

In 320 AD the Roman Emperor Diocletian in his 13 years intensely persecuting Christians ordered religious works destroyed. It was essential that believers especially protect the scriptures making up the canon.

As Jews lost their Hebrew language skills, dispersed throughout the empire, the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into the then universal language of Greek. Also translated into Greek were other study helps, appended to the scriptures. Much like people recognize the additional explanations in study bibles, ie Scofield’s, today as distinguishable from the actual scriptures, the people generations ago knew what was scripture and what was additional readings. This translation from Hebrew to Greek is known as the Septuagint.

When the reformers challenged the Roman church it discovered that some of their doctrines came from the apocrypha, these additional writings in the Septuagint that until then were acknowledged as additional, non-canonical. Therefore in 1545 at the Council Of Trent the Roman Church added these apocryphal books to the canon to justify these heretofore non-canonical doctrines. The first Vatican Council held 1869-70 reaffirmed this action.

Protestant reformers strictly held to the fundamental of Sola Scriptura. Some errors emanating from the apocrypha are

1. Praying and alms giving for moving the dead from purgatory, itself non-canonical, to heaven.
2. Preexistence of souls.
3. The Doctrine Of Emanations which I don’t understand. Might it relate to pantheism?
4. Suicide not a sin.
5. Cruelty to slaves justified. Note that the current pope, at least, seems to oppose social injustice.
6. Magic incantations, assassination, the power of angels to intercede for man, and other non-canonical doctrines.

“The Canon of God is pure, free from error, and preserved for our instruction and edification.” -lecture/article.

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