

# **DCCC Apologetics Course II**

## **CANONICITY AND PRESERVATION**

### **OF THE OLD TESTAMENT Lesson**

#### **23**

CANONICITY AND PRESERVATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

## **INTRODUCTION**

Many Christians do not see the need to study the Old Testament, but Romans 15:4 says, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” The inspired writers of the New Testament certainly thought the Old Testament was important to study because they quoted 1,072 verses of the Old Testament in the New Testament.

How were the books of the Old Testament selected, collected and preserved? This lesson gives a brief overview of how this process occurred.

## **LESSON AIM:**

To see, in a brief overview, how the books of the Old Testament were selected, collected and preserved.

## **LESSON OBJECTIVES: You will:**

1. Learn something about the term “canon” and how the books of the Old Testament were determined to be worthy to be

- included in the canon.
2. Consider the reasons why some books were included while others were excluded from the canon.
  3. Learn how the Old Testament books were copied and preserved through the years.
  4. See the attack against the authenticity of the Old Testament books made by critical scholars.

# THE PROBLEMS AND PROOF OF CANON-ICITY

## 1. Definition of Canonicity

1. The word, Canon, comes from the Hebrew word, kaneh, which means "a reed" which was used to measure the length, width and height of things as in Ezekiel 40:3.
2. The word, Canon in Greek (kanon), also means a reed, rod, ruler, staff, or measure.
3. The Canon means the Standard or Authority to determine what is correct in religious and moral matters.
  1. Deuteronomy 4:2 – "Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you."
  2. Deuteronomy 12:32 – "Do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it."
  3. Deuteronomy 32:46-47 – "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you– they are your life."
  4. Proverbs 30:6 – "Do not add to his words, or he will . . . prove you a liar."

#### 4. Six Tests to Determine The Canon in The Opinion of Geisler/Nix

1. Authorship: Was the author a man of God with the gift of inspired prophecy?
2. Genuineness: Was the alleged author actually the person who wrote it?
3. Authenticity: Does the book reveal only truth with no obvious errors?
4. Authority: Does the book demonstrate the authority of God's word?
5. Receptivity: Was the book received by God's people as God's word?
6. Influence: Does the teaching of the book demonstrate Divine Power to inspire faith, transform lives and encourage perseverance?

#### 5. Misconception of Most Scholars

Many scholars believe that the Canon was determined by Jewish councils of later ages who determined which of many books could pass the tests already mentioned, and thus which books should make up the Old Testament Canon or standard of religion.

##### 1. Old Testament's Own Testimony About its Canonicity and Preservation.

1. God calls the prophet and inspires his speaking and writing (Isaiah 6:1-11; 30:8).
2. God's 4-fold test for a true prophet.
  1. Test of the prophet's predictions: Do they come to pass? (Deuteronomy 18:21-22; 1 Samuel 3:19-20; Isaiah 30:8; Ezekiel 33:33)
  2. Test of the prophet's miracles: (Deuteronomy 34:10-12; Joshua 3:7; I Kings 17:22-24).
  3. Test of the prophet's teaching: (Deuteronomy 13:1-5).
  4. Test of the prophet's life: (Matthew 7:15-16).

3. God's people, through their high priest and king, recognize the genuineness and authenticity of the prophet and his writing: 1 Samuel 3:20 – "And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord."
4. All of inspired Scripture was written by men with the gift of prophecy, which signified that the Holy Spirit revealed the message and guided the writer, preserving it from error (2 Peter 1:20-21).
5. Even the historical books of the Bible were written by inspired prophets. The writer of 1 & 2 Chronicles was Ezra, a priest with the gift of prophecy. Ezra constantly referred to the contents of Samuel and especially 1 & 2 Kings, attributing the authorship of these books to different prophets (1 Chronicles 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29; 2 Chronicles 12:15; 13:22; 20:34; 32:32; 33:19).
6. The prophet gave his writing to the high priest who deposits the writing by the side of the ark of the covenant (Deuteronomy 31:24-26). – "After Moses finished writing in a book the words of this law from beginning to end, he gave this command to the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord: 'Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God.'"
  1. Each succeeding book that Moses and successive prophets wrote were added to the Canon as a part of God's word by being attached to the Book of the Law beside the ark of the covenant.
  2. The Hebrew word "and" (wah) connects all of the books through 2 Kings (except Deuteronomy).
  3. Isaiah knew that his prophecy would be added to the book of the Law (Isaiah 34:16).

4. The discovery of the "Book of the Law" in the temple during Josiah's time shows the priests were to guard the sacred canon in the temple (2 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 34-35).
5. Jeremiah was a priest as well as a prophet. In Jeremiah 36:4-6 he told his scribe, Baruch son of Neriah, "Go to the house of the Lord . . . and read to the people from the scroll the words of the Lord that you wrote as I dictated."
6. True prophets were a part of the Sanhedrin "council" and recognized as true prophets by the people (Ezekiel 13:9). Josephus says that the "high" priest, the prophet and the Sanhedrin (judges) resolved the most difficult Jewish problems. [\[i\]](#)
7. Ezra, who likely wrote 2 Chronicles 35:26-27 considered the books of 1 & 2 Kings to

also be part of God's Law and God's Book.

7. The priests became the guardians of the holy covenant, as was Ezra in Nehemiah 8:1-3.
8. A copy of the inspired writing was also deposited with the king (Deuteronomy 17:18-19).
  1. This copy left with the king served as a second witness and a second preserver and protector of the sacred canon.
  2. Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, carried Jeremiah's scroll to the Temple and read the prophecies to all of the people (Jeremiah 36:4-10).
  3. Then, Baruch took the scroll to the palace of king Jehoiakim and deposited it with Elishama the king's secretary (Jeremiah 36:11-20)
  4. The king sent Jehudi to get Jeremiah's scroll and

listened as Jehudi read. The king was so angry with Jeremiah's prophecies that he cut the scroll in pieces and burned them in his fire place (Jeremiah 36:20-23).

5. God commanded Jeremiah to take another scroll and write all of the former prophecies, plus additional prophecies. (Jeremiah 36:28-32).

## 9. Close of The Canon And its Confirmation

1. The Old Testament prophets predicted a time when prophecy would cease (Amos 8:11-12) and prophets would no longer speak for God (Zechariah 13:2-5; Amos 8:11-12; Zechariah 13:2-5). These prophecies were fulfilled about 400 B.C., when prophecy ceased and no new inspired books were added to the Canon of the Old Testament.
2. 1 Maccabees was written about 150 B.C., in this 400-year period between the Testaments. It denies that it is inspired because 1 Maccabees 4:45; 9:27; 14:41 report that during this time period people were waiting "until a prophet should rise." Only prophets can inspired literature.
3. Jesus Christ confirmed the Old Testament Canon, accepting the Scriptures that the Jews accepted in the first century A.D.

1. Matthew 23:35 – "And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar." The story of Abel's murder is recorded in Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament The story of the murder of Zechariah is recorded in 2 Chronicles, the last book of the Hebrew Old Testament Jesus thus placed His stamp of approval on the entire Canon of Old Testament Scripture.

2. Luke 24:44 – "He 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.’” The Jews divided their Hebrew Bible into 3 sections, differently than our English Bibles. The first section was Moses’ writings (the first 5 books of the Old Testament). The second section was the prophets, which included Joshua through 2 Kings (because they were written by prophets) and all of the prophets except Daniel. The third section, which Jesus entitled, “The Psalms,” included the other writings of the Old Testament that were not written by Moses or the Prophets, but was written by men who had other professions, but also had the gift of divine inspiration, such as Job, David (Psalms), and Solomon (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon), who were rulers or kings, not full time prophets. Daniel also was a full time government official, not a full time prophet. The books of Ezra and 1 & 2 Chronicles were written by Ezra, a full time priest and scribe, not a full time prophet. The same is true of the books of Nehemiah and Esther.

4. Writings that did not follow this canonical process were rejected as uninspired.
  1. The Jew wrote many books during the period between the Testaments that were not inspired and were rejected by the Jewish priests.
  2. In this manner, the Jews were “entrusted with the oracles of God” (Romans 3:2)
  3. The Pseudepigraph and Apocrypha were all written in the Greek language during the

period between the Testaments.

4. The Jews rejected these books as being inspired literature and did not include them among their sacred Scripture.
5. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, book I, chapter 8 substantiates this view among the Jews. “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; . . . no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them or take anything from them, or to make any change in them; but it becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their very birth, to esteem those books to contain divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them.”

## **THE DISPUTED BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: ANTILEGOMENA, PSEUD-EPIGRAPHIA AND APOCRYPHA**

1. The Homologomena (same work) – 34 of the 39 Old Testament books were accepted by all Jews of all generations without dispute.
2. The Antilegomena (spoken against)

These were disputed by some of the rabbis centuries later after the books had already been accepted into the Canon.

1. Song of Solomon: too sensual, some thought.
2. Ecclesiastes: too skeptical, some thought.
3. Esther: God’s name not mentioned.
4. Ezekiel: thought to contradict Pentateuch.



5. Proverbs: thought to contradict itself (Proverbs 26:4-50).

1. The Pseudepigrapha (false or spurious writings)

1. These are books which both Jews and Christians of all ages rejected from their Canons of Scripture.

2. Yet, some are thought to have been used by Jude (book of Enoch, 1:14 and the Assumption of Moses, 1:9); and by Paul, (Penitence of Jannes and Jambres, 2 Timothy 3:8).

2. The Apocrypha

1. Meaning: "hard to understand" or "hidden" – applied to these books (not known by the church and thus not openly approved by God).

2. Arguments in favor of including them:

1. The Alexandrian Canon, represented by a fourth century manuscript contains all of the apocrypha (15 books).

2. The New Testament refers to 2 Maccabees 7, 12 in Hebrews 11:35.

3. The New Testament quotes the LXX which contained the Apocrypha.

4. Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria accepted these books as canonical.

5. Catacomb scenes depict episodes from the Apocrypha.

6. Greek manuscripts (Aleph, A & B) interpose the Apocrypha among the Old Testament books.

7. Syrian church accepted them in the 4th century.

8. Augustine and Councils at Hippo (393) and Carthage (397) accepted them, as did also the Greek church.

9. The Council of Trent (1546) pronounced them canonical.

10. Protestant Bible contained them until the

19th century.

11. Some written in Hebrew were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

3. Refutation of the above arguments:

1. There are no quotations in the New Testament from these books as "Scripture."

2. The Roman Catholic Church does not accept all of the Alexandrian Canon.

3. No one knows that earlier manuscripts of the LXX contained the apocrypha because our only copy is of the 4th century.

4. No council of the entire church favored them.

5. Scenes from the catacombs were only that of historical events.

6. A 4th century canon doesn't prove a first century canon.

7. The Syrian church of the second century did not include them in their canon.

8. The Greek church didn't accept the Apocrypha in early centuries.

9. Council of Trent was the first council to pronounce them canonical, almost 1500 years after the apostolic age.

10. The Apocryphal books in Protestant Bibles appeared in a separate section to distinguish them from Canonical books.

11. The existence of some Apocryphal books among the Dead Sea Scrolls does not indicate they were thought to be inspired.

4. Arguments opposing the Apocrypha and supporting the Hebrew Canon.

1. God entrusted the "Oracles of God" in the Old Testament to the Jewish nation (Romans 3:2).

2. The Jewish nation, under its high priests and judges, never accepted any of the

Apocrypha into the Canon of Sacred Scripture.

3. The authors of these books were not approved as prophets of God.
4. No testimony of reliable history can establish the authors of these books as true prophets of God.
5. These books do not claim to be inspired literature.
6. Jesus Christ accepted the Canon of the Jews of his day, referring to the same divisions of the Old Testament as they did (Luke 24:27,44).
7. The Jewish Council of Jamnia (A.D. 90) confirmed this same Canon of Palestine as the only inspired Scriptures.
8. The Babylonian Talmud (book of tradition among the Jews) says, "After the latter prophets Haggai, Zechariah, . . . and Malachi, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel" (VII-VIII, 24. cited from Geisler and Nix, p. 174).
9. The Catholic Church did not accept the entire Apocrypha in the Alexandrian Canon, but only 12 of the 15 books.
10. Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate, the official Roman Catholic Bible, refused to include the Apocrypha in the Vulgate because they were not a part of the Hebrew Canon.

#### 5. Value of the Apocrypha.

1. These books reveal the beliefs and history of the Jewish people during the inter-testamental period.
2. I and II Maccabees contain material that shows the fulfillment of two important prophecies of Daniel (chapters 8 and 11-12).

6. The Copies of Scripture Used by the Priests and the Kings Were Made by Trained Scribes
  1. Deuteronomy 17:18-19 – “When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites.”
  2. We know that these scribes were well trained. The Massorettes, a Jewish school of priests and scribes that lived in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. meticulously counted every letter in every line and every line on every page and pages with mistakes were burned and rewritten.

## **THE COPYING AND PRESERVATION OF THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE**

1. Our Greatest Confidence That the Original Old Testament Cannon Was accurately and completely preserved is God’s promise to preserve it
  1. Psalm 119:89 – “Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.”
  2. Psalm 119:152 – “Long ago I learned from your statutes that you established them to last forever.”
  3. Isaiah 40:8 – “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.”
2. Moses Required in Deuteronomy 17:18-19 that their future kings should write “on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites.” and the king was to read that scroll “all the days of his life.”

3. Jeremiah Was A Prophet and A Priest; His Scribe, Baruch, Was Likely A Levite
4. God Commanded Priests, Levites and Elders to Teach Israel His Law (Leviticus 10:11; Deuteronomy 4:9; 17:9-11; 31:9-11)

It was therefore necessary that copies of the Law be made so they could study God's Law and teach it.

1. Numerous Old Testament references indicate the kings of Israel appointed special priests and secretaries (likely Levites) to copy, as well as interpret the Scriptures (2 Samuel 8:17; 20:25-26; 1 Kings 4:3; 2 Kings 22:3, et. al.)
2. Many of the Levites and priests were inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit to copy the Scriptures accurately.
3. When the Canon was closed about 400 B.C., uninspired scribes, who were well trained in their profession, continued to make copies of the Scripture.

## **ANCIENT TEXTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT**

1. The Masoretic Texts Were Translated by Hebrew Scribes Called the Masoretes
2. The Greek Septuagint Was Translated from the Hebrew in 285-246 B.C.
  1. The name Septuagint means "70" and got its name because 70 Jewish scholars were involved in the translation.
  2. The earliest known complete copies of the Septuagint translation are found in the following manuscripts: Sinaiticus (4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), Vaticanus (4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) and Codex Alexandrinus (5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.).

3. The Septuagint has many differences with the Massoretic Text, because translations are actually interpretations of the Hebrew copies.

1. **The Dead Sea Scrolls Were Discovered in 1947** – They represent the oldest Hebrew manuscripts ever found.

1. 200 Old Testament manuscripts have been carbon-14 dated from 250 B.C. to 100 A.D.

2. Every Old Testament book has been found except the book of Esther.

3. The Dead Sea Scrolls confirm 95% of the Massoretic Text where it differed with the Septuagint Greek translation.

4. In a few cases the Dead Sea Hebrew Scrolls agreed with the Septuagint against the Massoretic Text and specifically in instances where the New Testament quotes the Septuagint Greek instead of the Hebrew text.

5. For example, Hebrews 1:6 quotes the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 32:43, “Let all God’s angels worship him,” which is omitted in the Massoretic Hebrew text. However a Dead Sea Scroll has the same words of the Septuagint in Hebrew, confirming the Septuagint and Hebrews 1:6 rather than the Massoretic text.[\[ii\]](#)

6. Exodus 1:5 in the Massoretic text says “70” Israelites descended to Egypt, and the Septuagint text says “75” Israelites entered Egypt. Luke in Acts 7:14 agrees with the 75 number found in the Septuagint, thus giving an inspired judgment that the Septuagint is correct on this verse. A Hebrew fragment of Exodus among the Dead Sea Scrolls also has “75,” indicating that the original Hebrew also had 75 and that a latter scribe of the Massoretic text accidentally wrote 70 instead of 75.[\[iii\]](#)

2. All of God's Word in the Old Testament Has Always Been Preserved Either in the Massoretic Text or the Septuagint Text

# HIGHER CRITICISM OF THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

## 1. Egyptian History and Palestinian Archaeology

As presently dated by scholars, they contradict most of Old Testament history from Genesis to the time of David & Solomon.

## 1. Liberal Scholars Propose that the Pentateuch Was Not Written by Moses

But by 5 Different Authors called J (Jehovah writer), E (Elohim writer), P (Priestly writer: Ezra), (Prophetical writer) and R (Redactor).

1. Jesus Christ believed that Moses wrote all five books of the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy).

2. Matthew 8:4; 19:8; Mark 7:10; 12:26; Luke 24:27; 24:44; John 5:46; 7:19, 22.

## 1. Critical Scholars Claim That Isaiah Was Written by at Least 2 Authors, Writing in 2 Different Periods of Hebrew History

### 1. Arguments of the Critics:

1. Isaiah's predictions are too detailed and historically accurate; therefore, they must have been written after their fulfillment on the basis that miraculous predictions are impossible.

2. Critics propose that Isaiah 1-39 was written by the Isaiah of 2 Kings 19-20 and that Isaiah 40-66 was likely written by an

unknown author after the Babylonian Exile, hundreds of years after Biblical Isaiah died.

2. But Jesus believed in a God that predicted the future miraculously. See Luke 24:27; 24:45 and John 5:46.
  3. Jesus and His apostles believed that Isaiah 1-39 and Isaiah 40-66 were written by the same Isaiah.
  4. Matthew 3:1-3 reports that John the Baptist fulfilled the prediction of Isaiah 40:3, which "was spoken by the prophet Isaiah."
  5. Matthew 4:14-15 says that "the prophet Isaiah" predicted the words of Isaiah 9:1,2.
  6. Matthew 8:17 quotes Isaiah 53:4 as "spoken through Isaiah the prophet."
  7. Matthew 12:17-21 quotes Isaiah 42:1-4 and writes that is "was spoken through the prophet Isaiah."
  8. In Matthew 13:14-15 Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 and attributes the words to "the prophecy of Isaiah."
  9. In Matthew 15:7-9 Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13 and says, "You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you."
2. Critics Say Daniel Was Not Written in the 6th Century B.C., as He Claimed, but in the 2nd Century B.C.
1. Again critics do not believe in miraculous predictions.
  2. Daniel's predictions are so amazingly accurate that critics, who do not believe that God can reveal the future to His prophets, are forced to date the predictions after their fulfillment.
  3. Daniel 2, 7, 9 clearly point to the Roman Empire, the birth of Christ and the Destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. as the time of the fulfillment. Dead Sea Scrolls of Daniel date back from 100 to 150 B.C., proving that the book of Daniel existed before the fulfillment of some of its prophecies.



# SELF EXAM FOR LESSON TWENTY-THREE

1. Define the word "canon" and tell how it relates to the biblical text.

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2. Give the six tests to determine the Canon in the opinion of Geisler/Nix.

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3. How did the Old Testament books qualify to be a part of the Canon?

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4. What two people/s became the guardians of the “holy covenant”?

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5. What are the books of the Apocrypha?

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6. What are the two ancient texts heavily relied on for the Old Testament?

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7. The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947. Why are they important in relation to the veracity of the Canon?

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[\[ii\]](#) NIV Study Bible on Heb. 1:7, footnote d.

[\[iii\]](#) Geisler and Nix, General Introduction to the Bible, p. 374.