

The Canon of Scripture

Lesson 3

I. Jesus & The Hebrew Scriptures

- a. Jesus regularly appealed to the Hebrew Scriptures to **validate** his mission, his words and his actions. According to Mark, he began his ministry in Galilee with the announcement: *Mark 1:14 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand'.*
- b. Those who heard him and who were familiar with the book of **Daniel** would not have missed the fact that he was referring to the prophecy of the coming kingdom which would never be destroyed' *Dan 2:44 And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. KJV*
- c. The implication of Jesus' announcement was that this time had now **arrived**. Jesus encouraged his disciples with the words of that prophecy and affirmed to them their place in the kingdom. *Luke 12:32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. KJV*
- d. In the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus announced his ministry by reading from **Isa 61:1**. *Luke 4:17-21 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. KJV*
- e. This emphasis on Scripture characterized Jesus' ministry and provided the **framework** for all that he did. *Luke 24:44-48 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. KJV*
- f. It is for this reason the church uses and relies upon the Hebrew Bible. As converts **searched** the Scriptures further, they discovered increasingly how much they revealed Christ to them and authenticated the preaching of the disciples. *Acts 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. KJV*
- g. They discovered that the Old Testament was a book about **Jesus**. While both Jews and Christians read the same Bible, their different understanding of what it said was so stark that they might have been using two different Bibles instead of sharing one.

II. The Canon of The Old Testament

- a. The Hebrew Tanakh required very little **official** action to indicate that it should be accepted as the authoritative and inspired Word of God.
- b. In the case of the Law, everything that Moses wrote down and gave to the Israelites was immediately accepted on the basis that he was a **prophet** and had received special revelation from God concerning the five books he wrote.
- c. In much the same way, the Prophets - were accepted as the **direct** revelation of God to his chosen people. This not only included the works of the major and minor prophets, but also the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings.
- d. Because prophets wrote them, they were received immediately **as if** they had been written at the very throne of God. The early Hebrew Scriptures were viewed as holy even during the periods of widespread apostasy in Israel.
- e. During the reign of King **Josiah** of Judah, the Temple of Solomon was being restored and, among the ruins, the workers found a scroll - the book of the Law, which has since been identified as the Book of Deuteronomy.
- f. When King Josiah heard the words written within this book, he was grieved seeing how far the Kingdom of **Judah** had gone from the Law of the LORD.
- g. In order to make certain that this was, indeed, the Word of God, however, Josiah sent the scroll with some of his chief men to the house of the prophetess **Huldah** (2Kings 22:14); she confirmed that it was the holy Word of God.
- h. She was the **first** person in recorded history to state that the Torah was "set apart" from other writings. So the Torah and the "Law and the Prophets" were accepted as canon centuries before Christ.
- i. The Psalms, the Proverbs, and even the Book of Daniel were **not** considered canon from the day they were given. Their acceptance into canon followed a somewhat different course.
- j. Before the first century A.D., the Psalms were well established in the Hebrew community – and were used by all the people for the worship of God. The teachers of the people used them to **encourage** them and often spoke concerning them.
- k. Much the same was done with the books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the book of Daniel. Even the Song of Songs had a place in Hebrew worship - being read often along with the book of Ruth at **weddings**.
- l. 1 & 2 Chronicles and the books of 1 & 2 Kings, were used by the scribes and scholars for reference and as a general **history** of the monarchy. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah which relate to events of those four books were always included in canon.
- m. The book of Esther was read yearly with the celebration of **Purim** while Lamentations was read on the Ninth of Av - a day of mourning for all the Hebrews remembering the sack of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

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- n. Thus, the books were treated as canon for many years. In 90 A.D., however, the Council of Jamnia formally adopted them as canonical Hebrew Scripture and declared that the Tanakh was complete. The entirety of the revelation of God to His people concerning His promise was finished.

III. Discussions At Jamnia

- a. The *Septuagint* is the Old Testament translation into Greek from Hebrew, which the Jews completed at Alexandria in the second century B.C., and it had all the Hebrew books including the Deuterocanonicals, or those 'belonging to the second canon'.
- b. Deuterocanonicals books is a term used since the sixteenth century in the Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Churches to describe certain books and passages of the Christian Old Testament that are not part of the Hebrew Bible.
- c. The Apostles and Christians in general, used the Greek '*Septuagint*', also called LXX, as their Bible in the first century. This upset the Jews, so they decided to call a council to deal with the matter and to counter Christianity.
- d. Keep in mind that the Jewish temple was completely destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., and the Jewish priests were killed. Now they were fearful that Christianity would overtake them. So, to distinguish themselves they felt compelled to act.
- e. The 'Council of Jamnia' was not a Christian council, but a Jewish one, and it resulted in the removal of seven books from the Bible in 90-95 A.D.
- f. The council set up four criteria that all books had to meet in order to be included in the Jewish Bible:
1. The books had to conform to the Pentateuch (the first 5 books).
 2. The books had to be written in Hebrew.
 3. The books had to be written in Palestine.
 4. The books had to be written before 400 B.C.
- g. Seven books failed to meet all four criteria.
1. Baruch was not written in Palestine and therefore was disqualified on that basis.
 2. Sirach and 1Maccabees were written after 400 B.C. and were disqualified.
 3. Tobit and parts of Daniel and Esther were written in Aramaic and outside of Palestine, which disqualified them.
 4. Judith was written in Aramaic and was disqualified for that reason.
 5. Wisdom was written in Greek which meant that it was not to be included.
 6. 2Maccabees was written after 400 B.C. and in Greek and for those reasons was eliminated from canon.

IV. Josephus

- a. Josephus, the Jewish historian, in the first volume of his treatise Against Apion, written in the nineties of the first century AD devised a somewhat different division of the accepted books.
- b. When Josephus speaks of twenty-two books, he probably refers to exactly the same documents as the twenty-four of the traditional Jewish reckoning, Ruth being counted as an appendix to Judges and Lamentations appended to Jeremiah.
- c. His three divisions might be called the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. The exact organization of his divisions is uncertain because he does not specify the books of the three divisions one by one.
- d. It is unlikely that Josephus's classification of the books was his own; he probably reproduced a tradition with which he had been familiar for a long time, having learned it either in the priestly circle into which he was born or among the Pharisees with whose party he associated himself as a young man.
- e. Perhaps Josephus's chief contribution was his contrast with the many conflicting accounts of Bible origins given by Greek historians. Whereas they had little to no understanding of the Hebrew Bible and disparaged it, he said: *We have not myriads of books, disagreeing and conflicting with one another, but only twenty-two, containing the record of all time, and justly accredited.*

V. Application

- a. What is your personal view of the Old Testament?

Irrelevant Boring history Interesting stories Useful context information Essential to daily living God Breathed

- b. Now compare where you marked it on the continuum above with how often you read the Old Testament? Are you consistent?
- c. If you are not consistent, what seems to prevent you from appreciating the Old Testament as much as you enjoy the New Testament? What do you need to do to change your attitude?