

Deep Question: **WHO DECIDED WHAT BOOKS ARE IN THE BIBLE?**

First Baptist Church • Dr. Nate Archer
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THE CANON

The **canon** (meaning “rule”) is the list of divinely inspired books that belong in the Bible.

-There are 66 books total: 39 in the OT and 27 in the NT.

Important: Early Christians did **not create** the canon. Early Christians **recognized** the canon.

Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit and is **self-authenticating**.

THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

The ancient Jews accepted the same material as the 39 books of the Protestant Old Testament, although the Hebrews put them in a different order and grouped them into only 24 books.

Jesus Christ accepted the Hebrew Old Testament and thus we should as well. (Luke 24:44)

Almost every Old Testament book is cited in the New Testament as Scripture.

The *Apocrypha* is the name for the additional books included in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) but not included in the Hebrew Bible itself.

- The Roman Catholic Apocrypha includes 7 additional books: Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, the Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Baruch; as well as additional material added to Esther and Daniel (Prayer of Azariah, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon).
- The Apocrypha was not accepted as Scripture by the early church.
- The Apocrypha was not officially included in the Roman Catholic canon until the Roman Catholic Council of Trent in 1546.
- Catholic Bibles refer to these books as “deuterocanonical” meaning “second canon.”

There are several reasons to reject the Apocrypha as Scripture:

- The ancient Jews did not include the Apocrypha in their canon.
- Jesus and the New Testament authors quote from the OT Scriptures over 295 times—but NOT ONCE do they quote from the Apocrypha.
- At the time of the NT there is no evidence that anyone considered them to be inspired works.
- The Apocrypha was rejected by many early church fathers.
- The Apocrypha contains errors and teachings inconsistent with the rest of the Scriptures.
- The writings of the Apocrypha do not claim for themselves the same kind of authority as the Old Testament writings.

THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

The NT canon was determined by consensus, not by a church council.

Over time the early Christians recognized as Scripture 27 books that met the criteria of being apostolic, orthodox, and catholic:

- **Apostolic:** Was this writing produced by an apostle or a close associate of an apostle?
- **Orthodox:** Does this writing conform to right doctrine as taught by the apostles?
-Even before the complete NT canon was recognized the early Christians were able to measure orthodoxy based on: (1) The OT; (2) core NT books; and (3) the rule of faith.
- **Catholic (Universal):** Is this writing widely if not universally accepted by all the churches?

Eusebius (ca. A.D. 260-340) categorized books at that time into four categories:

1. **Recognized Books** – These books were universally received as canonical: *the four Gospels, Acts, the letters of Paul (including Hebrews), 1 John, 1 Peter, and Revelation.*
2. **Disputed Books** – These books were questioned by some people but still regarded as canonical: *James, Jude, 2 Peter, and 2 & 3 John*
3. **Rejected Books** – These books were considered to be generally orthodox in their teaching but were not considered Scripture: *Acts of Paul, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Didache, and the Gospel of Hebrews.*
4. **Heretical Books** – These books were rejected as unorthodox: *the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Matthias, the Acts of Andrew, and the Acts of John.*

The first known list we have of the complete canon is found in an Easter letter by Athanasius in AD 367.

Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox ALL agree on the same 27 NT books.

No other books pass the test of being apostolic, orthodox, and catholic. There are no strong candidates for inclusion into the NT canon.

“Ten Basic Facts About the NT Canon that Every Christian Should Memorize” –by Michael J. Kruger
<http://michaeljkruger.com/the-complete-series-ten-basic-facts-about-the-nt-canon-that-every-christian-should-memorize/>

- #1 The New Testament books are the earliest Christian writings we possess.
- #2: [NT] Apocryphal writings are all written in the second century or later.
- #3: The New Testament books are unique because they are Apostolic books.
- #4: Some NT writers quote other NT writers as Scripture.
- #5: The Four Gospels are well established by the end of the second century.
- #6: At the end of the second century, the Muratorian Fragments lists 22 of our 27 NT books.
- #7: Early Christians often used non-canonical writings.
- #8: The NT canon was not decided at Nicea—nor any other Church council.
- #9: Christians did disagree about the canonicity of some NT books.
- #10: Early Christians believed that canonical books were self-authenticating.