

Dr. Ken Keathley's Notes on the Canon

The Description of Canonicity: The ancient Jews used several phrases or concepts to denote the authoritative writings:

Sacred writings—The inspired or canonical writings were kept by the Ark of the Covenant (*Deut. 31:24-36*). After the Temple was built, the sacred writings were kept in it (*2 Kings 22:8*).

Prophetic writings—(*Zech. 7:12; Luke 24:27*). According to Josephus, only the books written from Moses to Malachi, in the succession of the Hebrew prophets were considered to be canonical (*Against Apion 1.8*).

Apostolic writings—(*Acts 2:42*)

“having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone,” (*Eph 2:20 NKJ*)

“which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.” (*Eph 3:5 NKJ*)

The Determination of Canonicity: In a real sense, Christ is the key to the inspiration and canonization of Scriptures. It was He who confirmed the inspiration of the Hebrew canon of the OT; and it was He who promised that the Holy Spirit would direct the Apostles into all truth for the NT.

Inadequate Views

“Age determines canonicity.” Reply:

Many ancient books are **not** in the canon (ex: *Wars of the Lord—Num. 21:14*).

Many new books were placed in the canon immediately (ex: *Deut. 31:24; Dan. 9:2*).

“Language determines canonicity” (e.g. Hebrew).

Reply: Not all of the OT is in Hebrew (*Dan. 2:4b-7:28; Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26*).

Not all Hebrew books are in the canon (ex: *Book of Jasher—Josh. 10; The Apocrypha*).

“Agreement with the Torah.” Reply: This is a test for exclusion, not inclusion.

Not all the things that Jesus said and did are included (*cf. John 21:25*).

“Religious value determines canonicity.” Reply: Not all inspiring books are inspired. Confuses cause (inspired) with effect (inspiring). “Christian usage determines canonicity.” Reply: Also confuses cause and effect (usage). Then *Pilgrims Progress* and the *Left Behind* series should be in the canon, too! (Not to mention *Veggie Tales*.)

Adequate View: Inspiration determines canonicity. In other words, canonicity is determined by God.

Conclusion: God *determines* canonicity; man merely *discovers* it. Books *receive* canonicity from God and *recognition* from the people of God.

The Discovery of the Canon: The Bible provides for itself a series of litmus tests to determine canonicity.

Was it written by a prophet? An apostle? An associate of an apostle? (*2 Peter 1:20-21*).

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,” (*Heb 1:1 NKJ*)

Were the writers confirmed by an act of God?

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know” (*Acts 2:22 NKJ*)

“how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?” (*Heb 2:3-4 NKJ*)

Does it tell the truth about God?

“when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” (*Deut 18:22 NKJ*)

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.” (*Gal 1:8 NKJ*)

Does it have the power of God?

“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (*Heb 4:12 NKJ*)

Was it accepted by the people of God?

“in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.” (*Dan 9:2 NKJ*)

“For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.” (*1 Thes 2:13 NKJ*)

“and account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation-- as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.” (2 Pet 3:15-16 NKJ)

The Development of the Canon (Akin)

The Progressive Development of the Old Testament
Moses wrote:

“So it was, when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book,” (Deut 31:24 NKJ)

Joshua added:

“Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God.” (Josh 24:26 NKJ)

Samuel added his writing:

“Then Samuel explained to the people the behavior of royalty, and wrote it in a book and laid it up before the LORD. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house.” (1 Sam 10:25 NKJ)

Prophets were collected: (Dan. 9:2; Zech 7:12)

The Progressive Development of the New Testament

The New Testament refers to the Old Testament Law and Prophets:

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” (Matt 5:17 NKJ)

“And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” (Luke 24:27 NKJ)

Paul quotes Luke as Scripture:

“For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” (1 Tim 5:18 NKJ)

Paul’s letters circulated among the churches (Col 4:16; 1 Thes. 5:27).

Peter had Paul’s letters and called them “Scripture.” (2 Pet. 3:16)

The Completion of the Canon

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;” (Heb 1:1-2 NKJ)

In the “former days,” God spoke through the prophets (Heb. 1:1).

In these “last days,” God spoke through His Son (Heb. 1:2).

Christ and the apostles lived in the last days (Heb. 1:2; 1 John 2:18).

Christ is God’s **last word** in these last days (Heb. 1:2f).

Christ “fulfilled” all things (Matt. 5:17-18).

Christ promised “all truth” to his apostles (John 14:26; 16:13).

Christ’s 12 apostles are the **only** official channel of His eyewitness teaching (Luke 1:1-2; John 15:27; Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:3).

The eyewitness apostles lived only in the first century (John 15:27; Acts 1:31-32).

The 27 books of the New Testament are the only apostolically confirmed literature extant about Christ. Many books were written **by** eyewitness apostles (Matthew; John; 1 & 2 Peter; 1, 2 & 3 John; Revelation).

Paul’s letters were confirmed by apostolic teaching (Acts 15; Gal. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:15-16).

Mark was a disciple and secretary of Peter (1 Pet. 5:13)

Luke (Luke-Acts) was an associate of Paul (Acts 16; Col. 4:16).

Hebrews was written by Paul or by an associate of Paul’s (Heb. 13:23).

James and Jude were associates of the apostles [and the half-brothers of Jesus] (Acts 15; James 1:1; Jude 1).

Therefore, the 27 books of the New Testament are God’s last word in the last days; which means that the **canon is closed**.