

The Canon of the Old Testament

OTI Part I

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Concept of Canonicity

- Greek word *kanôn* (*kanon*):
 - A reed
 - A measuring rod
 - The norm or rule of faith
 - A catalogue or list of books accepted as holy scripture

Concept of Canonicity

- Citations
- Lists
- Rabbinical Terms
- Canonical Form
- Biblical Evidence
- Ancient Near Eastern Thinking

Concept of Canonicity

- Ancient Near Eastern Thinking
 - Hittite Suzereignty Treaties (treaty between king and vassals)
 - Ancient Near Eastern Law Codes
 - Code of Hammurabi
 - Deut 4:12, 13; 12:32; Prov 30:6

Determining Principle in Formation of Canon

- Bible attests to or make claims for itself
- God's people acknowledge its claims

1Cor 14:37 (NASB) If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment.

Tripartite Division of OT Canon

- Four-fold division of OT in Christian Bibles: (1) Law, (2) History, (3) Poetry, and (4) Prophecy [see list on Word doc]
- Three-fold division of OT in Hebrew Bible: (1) Law, (2) Prophets, and (3) Writings

TaNak: Torah, Nebi'im, and Kethubim

Tripartite Division of OT Canon

- How did the order of the Hebrew Bible arise?
 - Liberal answer (O. Eissfeldt)
 - Pentateuch: around 398 BC
 - Prophets: around 200 BC
 - Writings: around AD 100
 - Conservative answer: tripartite division based on literary and rational organizing principles

Tripartite Division of OT Canon

- 2 Macs 2:13-14 13 The same things are reported in the records and in the memoirs of Nehemiah, and also that he founded a library and collected the books about the kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and letters of kings about votive offerings. 14 In the same way Judas also collected all the books that had been lost on account of the war that had come upon us, and they are in our possession. 15 So if you have need of them, send people to get them for you.
- 1Mac 4:45 (NRA) And they thought it best to tear it down, so that it would not be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, 46 and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them.
- 1Mac 9:27 (NRA) So there was great distress in Israel, such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them.
- 1Mac 14:41 (NRA) "The Jews and their priests have resolved that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise,

The Examination of the Witnesses

- Witnesses of the OT
- Evidence of Ben Sira / Ecclesiasticus 132 BC
- Evidence of MMT (Miqsat Ma'ase Ha-Torah) 152 BC
- Evidence of the Gospels (Lk 24:44; Mt 23:35)
- Evidence of Philo of Alexandria (b. 20 BC) 40 AD
- Evidence of Josephus, Jerome, and Talmud

Problem Areas: I. Synod of Jamnia and the Disputes of the Rabbis

- Synod of Jamnia (AD 90): Did it officially close the canon?
- Disputes of the Rabbis
 - Ecclesiastes: hedonistic/secular in outlook
 - Esther: married pagan king
 - Song of Songs: erotic
 - Proverbs: contained contradictions (26:4-5)
 - Ezekiel: plan of temple different from Law of Moses

Problem Areas: I. Synod of Jamnia and the Disputes of the Rabbis

Note: Rabbis already agreed that the canon was closed: "With the death of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi the latter prophets, the Holy Spirit ceased out of Israel. Despite this, they were made to hear through a *bath kol*" (Tos. *Sotah* 13:2, baraita in Bab. *Yoma* 9b, Bab. *Sotah* 48b and Bab. *Sanhedrin* 11a).

- The Rejection of Ben Sira: "The Books of Ben Sira and all the books which were written from then on do not make the hands unclean" (Tos. *Yadaim* 2:13).

Problem Areas: II. Canon of the Essenes (Jewish Sect)

- Pseudonymous apocalypses cherished
- But likely an Essene appendix to the standard Jewish Canon rather than integral part of it.
- 4 Ezra (2 Esdras) 14:44-48 So during the forty days, ninety-four books were written. 45 And when the forty days were ended, the Most High spoke to me, saying, "Make public the twenty-four books that you wrote first, and let the worthy and the unworthy read them; 46 but keep the seventy that were written last, in order to give them to the wise among your people. 47 For in them is the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom, and the river of knowledge."

Problem Areas: III. The Alexandrian Canon

- Alexandrian Judaism not independent of Palestinian Judaism
- Not all Apocrypha composed in Greek or in Egypt
- 1 Macc (one of the apocrypha) itself indicates that prophecy had ceased (4:45 ; 9:27; 14:41)
- Ben Sira (originally composed around 190 BC) shows that Canon was closed
 - Sir 38:34-39:1 "How different the one who devotes himself to the study of the law of the Most High! He seeks out the wisdom of all the ancients, and is concerned with prophecies."
 - Prologue of the Greek Translation of Ben Sira (132 BC): "Many great teachings have been given to us through the Law and the Prophets and the others that followed them So my grandfather Jesus, who had devoted himself especially to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other books of our ancestors. . . . Not only this book, but even the Law itself, the Prophecies, and the rest of the books differ not a little when read in the original."

Problem Areas: III. The Alexandrian Canon

- Philo of Alexandria: does not quote Apocrypha; no commentaries on them.
- No NT quotations of the Apocrypha.
- Manuscripts of the LXX (Septuagint) are of Christian, not Jewish origin; they are copies made 500 years after the original translation.
- In manuscripts of the LXX, the Apocrypha vary in number and name.
- During AD 2nd Century, Aquila's Greek OT excluded the Apocrypha (Jews adopted his translation).
- From AD 1st to 2nd Century, Theodotion (a Jewish proselyte) made a revision of the LXX into Greek; it did not contain the Apocrypha.

Conclusion

- Roger Beckwith: "What evidently happened in the early centuries of Christianity was this. Christ passed on to his followers, as Holy Scripture, the Bible which he had received, containing the same books as the Hebrew Bible today. The first Christians shared with their Jewish contemporaries a full knowledge of the identity of the canonical books. However the Bible was not yet between two covers: it was a memorized list of scrolls. The breach with Jewish oral tradition (in some matters a very necessary breach), the alienation between Jew and Christian, and the general ignorance of Semitic languages in the church outside Palestine and Syria, led to increasing doubt on the Canon among Christians, which was accentuated by the drawing up of new lists of the biblical books, arranged on other principles, and the introduction of new lectionaries. Such doubt about the Canon could only be resolved at the Reformation—by returning to the teaching of the NT, and the Jewish background against which it is to be understood" (*Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 238).