

# Inspiration and Canonicity

Written and compiled by Gary Kukis

These studies are designed for believers in Jesus Christ only. If you have exercised faith in Christ, then you are in the right place. If you have not, then you need to heed the words of our Lord, Who said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son, so that every [one] believing [or, trusting] in Him shall not perish, but shall be have eternal life! For God did not send His Son into the world so that He should judge the world, but so that the world shall be saved through Him. The one believing [or, trusting] in Him is not judged, but the one not believing has already been judged, because he has not believed in the Name of the only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son of God.” (John 3:16–18). “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life! No one comes to the Father except through [or, by means of] Me!” (John 14:6).

Every study of the Word of God ought to be preceded by a naming of your sins to God. This restores you to fellowship with God (1John 1:8–10). **If we acknowledge our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness** (1John 1:9). If there are people around, you would name these sins silently. If there is no one around, then it does not matter if you name them silently or whether you speak aloud.

This was taken from Lessons #059–#060 of the **Basic Exodus Study** ([HTML](#)) ([PDF](#)) ([WPD](#)).

Topics		
<b>Genealogy Lists and Canonicity</b>	<b>Jesus and the Old Testament Canon</b>	<b>The organic development of the canon of Scripture</b>
Charts, Graphics and Short Doctrines		
<b>Canonicity</b> (from Bible.org)	<b>Verbal Plenary Inspiration</b> (the Accurate Understanding of Biblical Authorship)	<b>The Word of God Speaks to Its Own Authority and Accuracy</b>

**Preface:** This is one of my favorite topics, so I have covered it in a variety of ways over the years.

When studying a genealogy, some people no doubt quietly wonder, *are these really words from God?*

The canon of Scripture refers to the books which have been accepted for centuries as authoritative and inspired. Each book in the Bible is considered to have the virtual stamp of God’s authority.

The word canon is transliterated from a classical Greek word that means *a straight rod, a rule, a ruler*. This word has come to mean—when related to the Scriptures—as the books with God’s authority; as the books which are inspired by God. The idea is, these books must measure up to a standard or to a rule.

The first use of this word in this way (insofar as we know) is by Amphilochius (circa 380 A.D.) *where the word indicates the rule by which the contents of the Bible must be determined, and thus secondarily an index of the constituent books.*<sup>1</sup> Saint Jerome spoke of these books as being *the holy library*.

As I have discussed elsewhere, we know by the collection of the canon of the New Testament, that canonization is a very normal, organic process. Apart from Moses recording the exact words of God in the book of Exodus and elsewhere, the assertions of divinity for the books subsequent to the Pentateuch are more subtle than those in the New Testament; and these books were not recognized immediately as a part of the Hebrew canon. Did it take 10 years? 50? 100? Quite frankly, we don't know. But the canon of the New Testament was written before the end of the first century; but assembled and recognized over a period of about 350 years. That process we do know (not perfectly, but with more detail than you might suspect).

For over a millennium, Israel was a sovereign nation with its own kings and its own language. However, Israel fell under national discipline on many occasions until finally, it was ruled over by the Persians and then by the Greeks. There came a point at which many Hebrew people began to adopt Greek as their language of business and social interaction; and this necessitated taking their Scriptures and translating them into Greek. When they decided that it was time to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek—by that point in time (roughly 200 B.C.) they needed to know, *which writings should be translated?* They understood, to some degree, that they had the Scriptures; but there was, no doubt, many writings by many Jewish men (including scholars and rabbis) by this time. Does everything get treated exactly the same and translated into a massive anthology? Obviously, no. They clearly needed to determine, which books are properly the Scriptures? Which books are considered to have the authority of God? Identifying those books was a necessity in order for them to be translated into another and more universal language.

Got Questions: *When it came to the Old Testament, three important facts were considered: 1) The New Testament quotes from or alludes to every Old Testament book but two. 2) Jesus effectively endorsed the Hebrew canon in Matthew 23:35 when He cited one of the first narratives and one of the last in the Scriptures of His day. 3) The Jews were meticulous in preserving the Old Testament Scriptures, and they had few controversies over what parts belong or do not belong.*<sup>2</sup>

When Jesus spoke of the persecution done by ungodly Hebrews, He said: **“Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.”** (Matt. 23:34–35; ESV) Jesus here speaks of the righteous blood which has been spilled on this earth, starting with Abel (in Gen. 4) and going to Zechariah ben Barachiah (2Chron. 24:20-22). In the Hebrew canon, Genesis and Chronicles are the first and last books. By this, Jesus has implied what the Old Testament is; and by these words, the Lord has left out the apocrypha, the books written after Chronicles (which books are primarily recognized by the Catholic church, which did not pronounce them as inspired until A.D. 1546).

Regarding the New Testament canon—during the first 400 years following the LORD's birth, there were many manuscripts floating about and there needed to be decisions made as to which were authoritative

<sup>1</sup> From the Quick Reference Dictionary, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/canon-of-scripture-the/> accessed May 1, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> From <https://www.gotquestions.org/canon-of-Scripture.html> accessed May 1, 2019.

and which were not. The study of canonicity is quite fascinating because today, we have all of the information available. We know what the canon of Scripture is and we know exactly what canonicity means—and this information is available at the fingertips to nearly every believer who has an interest in this topic. It was not always so.

*Got Questions: Since our faith is defined by Scripture, Jude is essentially saying that Scripture was given once for the benefit of all Christians. Isn't it wonderful to know that there are no hidden or lost manuscripts yet to be found, there are no secret books only familiar to a select few, and there are no people alive who have special revelation requiring us to trek up a Himalayan mountain in order to be enlightened? We can be confident that God has not left us without a witness. The same supernatural power God used to produce His Word has also been used to preserve it.<sup>3</sup>*

This is a good study of canonicity.

## Canonicity (from Bible.org)

### I. Introduction

How do we know that the 66 books in our Bible are the only inspired books? Who decided which books were truly inspired by God? The Roman Catholic Bible includes books that are not found in other Bibles (called the Apocrypha). How do we know that we as Protestants have the right books? These questions are addressed by a study of canonicity.

“Canon” is a word that comes from Greek and Hebrew words that literally means a measuring rod. So canonicity describes the standard that books had to meet to be recognized as scripture.

On the one hand, deciding which books were inspired seems like a human process. Christians gathered together at church councils in the first several centuries A.D. for the purpose of officially recognizing which books are inspired. But it's important to remember that these councils did not determine which books were inspired. They simply recognized what God had already determined.

This study discusses the tests of canonicity that were used, the history of canonization and a brief explanation of why certain disputed books are not scripture.

II. Summary: The collection of 66 books were properly recognized by the early church as the complete authoritative scriptures not to be added to or subtracted from.

### III. Tests of Canonicity

The early church councils applied several basic standards in recognizing whether a book was inspired.

- A. Is it authoritative (“**Thus says the Lord**”)? That is, does the book claim divine authority for itself?
- B. Is it prophetic (written by “**a man of God**” 2Peter 1:20)?
  - A book in the Bible must have the authority of a spiritual leader of Israel (O.T. – prophet, king, judge, scribe) or and apostle of the church (N.T. – It must be based on the testimony of an original apostle.).
- C. Is it consistent with other revelation of truth?

<sup>3</sup> From <https://www.gotquestions.org/canon-of-Scripture.html> accessed May 1, 2019.

## Canonicity (from Bible.org)

- D. Is it dynamic – does it demonstrate God’s life-changing power (Hebrews 4:12)?
- E. Is it accepted and used by believers – 1Thessalonians 2:13)?  
(Norman L. Geisler & William Nix, A General Introduction To The Bible. pp. 137-144).

### IV. The History of Canonization

- A. Old Testament Canon – Recognizing the correct Old Testament books
  1. Christ refers to Old Testament books as “scripture” (Matthew 21:42, etc.).
  2. The Council of Jamnia (A.D. 90) officially recognized our 39 Old Testament books.
  3. Josephus, the Jewish historian (A.D. 95), indicated that the 39 books were recognized as authoritative.
- B. New Testament Canon – Recognizing the correct New Testament books
  1. The apostles claimed authority for their writings (Colossians 3:16; 1Thessalonians 5:27; 2Thessalonians 3:14).
  2. The apostle’s writings were equated with Old Testament scriptures (2Peter 3:1, 2, 15, 16).
  3. The Council of Athanasius (A.D. 367) and the Council of Carthage (A.D. 397) recognized the 27 books in our New Testament today as inspired.

### V. The Disputed but non-canonical books

- A. The Apocrypha is not scripture.

The Apocryphal books are 15 books written in the 400 years between Malachi and Matthew. They record some of the history of that time period and various other religious stories and teaching. The Catholic Bible (Douay Version) regards these books as scripture. The Apocrypha includes some specific Catholic doctrines, such as purgatory and prayer for the dead (2Maccabees 12:39-46), and salvation by works (almsgiving – Tobit 12:9). Interestingly, the Catholic Church officially recognized these books as scripture in A.D. 1546, only 29 years after Martin Luther criticized these doctrines as unbiblical.

Below are listed several additional reasons for rejecting the Apocrypha as inspired:

1. The Jews never accepted the Apocrypha as scripture.
  2. The Apocrypha never claims to be inspired (“Thus says the Lord” etc.) – In fact, 1Maccabees 9:27 denies it.
  3. The Apocrypha is never quoted as authoritative in scriptures. (Although Hebrews 11:35-38 alludes to historical events recorded in 2Maccabees 6:18-7:42). Referencing historical events does not make the written source of those events inspired.
  4. Matthew 23:35 – Jesus implied that the close of Old Testament historical scripture was the death of Zechariah (400 B.C.). This excludes any books written after Malachi and before the New Testament.
- B. Other disputed books are also not scripture
    1. There were other books that some people claimed to be scripture. Some of them were written in the intertestamental period and called Old Testament pseudopigrapha (or “false writings”). Others were written after the apostolic age (2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. and following). These are called New Testament pseudopigrapha. The writers often ascribed these books to the 1<sup>st</sup> century apostles (Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Peter, etc.). Evidently, they figured they would be read more widely with an apostle’s name attached. They include some fanciful stories of Jesus’

## Canonicity (from Bible.org)

childhood and some heretical doctrines. No orthodox Christian seriously considered them to be inspired.

2. There were some other more sincerely written books that had devotional value and reveal some of the insights of Christian leaders after the 1<sup>st</sup> century (Shepherd of Hermas, Didache, etc.). Although they are valuable historically, and even spiritually helpful, they also do not measure up to the standards of canonicity and were not recognized as scripture.

From <https://bible.org/seriespage/canonicity> accessed April 17, 2019 (edited).

The canon would be the books which could be defined as *inspired* by God. At the point when we determined which books were in the Old Testament and New Testament canons, we really had not developed a full and complete definition of *inspiration*. In fact, I don't believe the meaning of *inspiration* was fully understood until the 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which is a long time after canon of Scripture was established.

There was enough information within the canon of Scripture to determine what it meant to be a part of the Word of God; but it took theology a long time to get to the point of clearly defining that. What exactly does it mean for specific books to make up the Word of God? What exact does it mean for these books to be *inspired*?

Since the canon was closed, there have been a number of people who have claimed to author divine Scriptures—Mohammed, Joseph Smith, among others. Is there a single thing written by either of these men (or by anyone else) where you might be tempted to say, *that does make a great deal of sense; why isn't that in our Bible?*

There have been quite a number of men who have claimed to have interacted with God or with Jesus since the closing of the canon. You may or may not be aware of any of them; but, just like those who claim to have written Scripture after the fact, these men add nothing to theology of note. There was one child evangelist, whose name escapes me, who claimed to hang out with Jesus in heaven and have splash fights with Him in the heavenly Jordan River. Such recollections of divine interaction come across as silly at best; blasphemous at worst.

Since we are studying a passage that deals with genealogies, we may ask ourselves, does this really belong in the canon of Scripture? Is this really inspired? To consider these questions, we really need to understand what the words *canon* and *inspired* both mean, from a theological perspective.

For a book to be in the canon of Scripture, it must be *inspired*. However, the concept of inspiration was more fully developed *after* the canon had been determined. So first, we had the complete Word of God (the canon of Scripture) and then we used the books in the canon to define what it meant for those same books to be inspired.

An outstanding definition of *inspiration*: *God the Holy Spirit so supernaturally directed the human writers of Scripture that, without waiving their intelligence, their individuality, their personal feelings, their literary style, or any other human factor in written or spoken expression, to communicate His complete and coherent message to mankind, recorded with perfect accuracy in the original languages of Scripture, in the autographs, the very words bearing the Authority of Divine Authorship.*

Let's examine the definition of inspiration and examine it phrase by phrase:

## Verbal Plenary Inspiration (the Accurate Understanding of Biblical Authorship)

Definition	Explanation of the Definition
God the Holy Spirit so supernaturally directed the human writers of Scripture...	<p>There is a human author and a divine Author of each book of the Bible. The Holy Spirit guided or directed the human author, but did not dictate Scripture to the human author (there are exceptions to this; when we read <i>thus says the Lord</i>, that would be an example of Scripture which was dictated). The actual act of writing Scripture was probably very normal and natural. Paul hears of some problems in the church at Corinth, and so he writes them a letter to deal with those issues.</p> <p>When it comes to the actual recording of holy Scripture, there are no weird attendant happenings. That is, no one writes with a flaming pen, an angel on their shoulder, or anything like that.</p>
...that, without waiving their intelligence, their individuality, their personal feelings, their literary style, or any other human factor in written or spoken expression,...	Writers of Scripture did not turn into human secretaries nor did their minds go blank, and God filled their minds with His Words. All that the human authors possessed with regards to their literary skills (or lack thereof) was maintained. Their intelligence, their individual personalities, their personal feelings, their literary style, their vocabulary, and their use of common literary devices were all retained and were integral factors in their writing of Scripture. Even in the book of Genesis, the writing styles of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph are distinct.
...to communicate His complete and coherent message to mankind...	<p>All that we need to know in this life about God, Jesus Christ and our place in the world is found in the Bible. There is no additional source that we must go to in order to fill in missing information (that is, we do not pursue dreams, visions, or ecstatic experiences to find truth missing from the Bible).</p> <p>This information found in the Scriptures makes sense. God reveals Himself in His Word; He does not obscure divine truth. All that we need in order to understand God and His plan for our lives is found in the Word of God.</p>
...recorded with perfect accuracy in the original languages of Scripture,...	What God wanted to say is found written in exactly the way He wanted it to be written, in the original languages. These original writings are divinely inspired—in the Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic. The King James Version Bible is not divinely inspired (but it was an outstanding translation for its time).
...in the autographs,...	The <i>autographs</i> are either the original writings or exact copies of the original writings. As first written down, these are the words of God. So there is no misunderstanding, we do not have the autographs of any book of the Bible, but we can very nearly reproduce them with reasonable accuracy. It has been demonstrated that the Scriptures have been maintained with greater accuracy than the writings of William Shakespear (who wrote after the invention of the printing press).

## Verbal Plenary Inspiration (the Accurate Understanding of Biblical Authorship)

### Definition

...the very words bearing the Authority of Divine Authorship.

### Explanation of the Definition

Even though the Bible was written by man, subject to each man's style of writing and even to his thinking and emotions at the time of writing, it is, at the same time, the Word of God. Just as Jesus is the Living Word of God, fully God and yet fully man (John 1:1–14), so the Bible is fully God-breathed and, at the same time, a product of man. The writers of Scripture are not mere secretaries, but active participants in the process of the writing of Scripture. Yet, despite the authors being very human, their output was the Word of God.

This doctrine was first placed in the **Genesis Introduction** ([HTML](#)) ([PDF](#)) ([WPD](#)). It has been slightly modified.

## The Word of God Speaks to Its Own Authority and Accuracy

We know this first: that no prophecy [divine utterance; i.e., the Words of the Bible] of Scripture came into being from someone's personal application [interpretation or explanation of things]. For prophecy [divine utterance] was not carried along at any time by the will of [any] man, but set-apart men of God spoke being carried by [God] the Holy Spirit (2Peter 1:20–21).

All Scripture is God-breathed, and is beneficial [in the following areas]: for [the teaching of] doctrine, for testing, for correction [of error], for instruction [training and education] in integrity [righteousness and justice], so that the man of God may be prepared, thoroughly furnished [equipped] to every good [of divine quality] work (2Tim. 3:16–17).

Scripture is unable to be undone [annulled, declared unlawful, destroyed or subverted] (John 10:35b).

Every word of God is pure [refined, free from impurities]; It is a shield [protection] to those who take refuge in it. Do not add to His words, or He will correct you, and you will be shown to be a liar (Prov. 30:5–6).

And Jesus answered him, saying, "It stands written, Man will not live [be sustained] only by food, but [he will be sustained] by every word of God." (Luke 4:4; Deut. 8:3).

To the contrary, we renounce any personal [and secret] agenda of shame [or disgrace], not habitually living our lives by means of specious [or false] wisdom; nor do we corrupt [dilute or adulterate] the Word of God, but rather, we exhibit [or manifest] the Truth, uniting ourselves face to face with every man's conscience before God (2Cor. 4:2).

We continually thank God that, when you received the Word of hearing, [the Word] of God, you welcomed it as the Word of God, not as a word of men, because it is truly the Word of God, which also effectually works in you who believe (1Thess. 2:13).

For the Word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of the soul and spirit, as well as the joints and marrow, and is able to [accurately] judge [and evaluate] the thoughts and intents of the heart [that is, our thinking] (Heb. 4:12).

You may not fully appreciate that you actually have the ability to know and appreciate the concept of canonicity and inspiration better than Paul or Peter did—even though both men alluded to it in their writings. Furthermore, you hold that very canon in your hand (or it is on your computer screen), something that no Apostle could do. You may be surprised that you are in a better position to explore and understand a great many more things than Paul or Peter could.

**The organic development of the canon of Scripture:** As I said earlier, the New Testament canon was developed very organically and prior to the full and complete understanding of what it meant to be in the New Testament canon (*canonicity* came first; then a full understanding of *inspiration*). Theologians of that era would have understood, this is God's Word, this is the canon of Scripture; and that these words are authoritative—but they would *not* have had the complete and full understanding of *Verbal Plenary Inspiration*.

So, men from the first centuries after the birth of our Lord needed to figure out what was in the canon of Scripture before they even fully understood what it meant to be in the canon of Scripture. There were a set of requirements, the chief two being: (1) the book or letter was written in the first century (there were ways to confirm this); and (2) it was written by an Apostle or someone closely associated with an Apostle. The first condition placed the book in the right time period; and the second indicated that the book was authoritative. At the time that this was being determined, there were many books, letters, and writings being circulated (between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries). Theologians wrote things then, just as they do now, and what they wrote was often circulated. Some accepted the authority of the original writings; and a few others tried to establish their own views in their writings.

I said that this was an organic process. Christian theologians and early fathers individually had to determine for themselves what was canonical so they would know what to teach from or what writings to refer back to. If they were teaching such-and-such a doctrine, was there a place that they could read from which would back that up or help them to understand or explain that doctrine more thoroughly? Were they able to determine which letters should be studied in order to further understand their relationship with God and God's plan?

Also, the New Testament needed to be translated into a variety of languages, so translators needed to figure out, *what was the New Testament* so that they would know which books and letters to translate. We commonly understand that there is the Old and New Testament; but I don't know if they even had such a vocabulary at that time or who thought up those designations. It was clear that there was a Jewish canon of Scripture; and soon after the end of the first century, people knew that they needed to identify and collect those books and letters which pertained to Jesus Christ and the spread of Christianity. There would be adjacent countries, and there was the command to believers to go out in all the world. Therefore, very early on, the writings of the New Testament (before there was actually a New Testament) would be translated into other languages and distributed farther and wider into the world.

God coming into the world and dying for His Own—this was a unique experience of the greatest importance, so the documentation of this act had to be preserved and disseminated. The only way this could be preserved is by historical documents; only John actually saw the crucifixion (along with some of the Lord's female followers); and it would have been too horrific to preserve graphically. So what we have remaining are the words of eyewitnesses and friends (or associates) of eyewitnesses.



By the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, even though most of the New Testament books had been accepted as authoritative, there was still no universally accepted canon of New Testament Scripture.

As local churches became more institutionalized, church councils were organized and they met and discussed the various books and letters available to them. It is not clear if these involved representatives from individual churches or from groups of area churches; nevertheless, they needed to discuss, *what is authoritative? Which writings came from the right era and the right people?* These councils (there are at least 3 that we know of) came to a consensus as to which books were canonical. Many people today think that some big religious guy (like a pope or some king) decided what the canon was, and so, there it was. But, it was nothing like that. No one person and no single organization made that decision. This was an organic process which took place over the period of 3 centuries. By the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, perhaps 80–90% of the New Testament had been recognized; by the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the entire New Testament canon was recognized.

As some have explained this process, it was not so much that various groups and individuals determined what belonged in the canon and what did not; the authoritative writings were already in existence and they believed it to be of the utmost importance to *discover* which writings those were.

In some kind of similar process, the canon for the Old Testament had been determined; but that process is not known to us today. We know that there were libraries which had books in them; there were the synagogues where the Scriptures were read; and we know that there were translations made into other languages of the Old Testament. So, no doubt, just as organically, a canon arose out of the existing Jewish writings.

In the time of Jesus, we do not have our Lord disputing with the pharisees about which books are in the Old Testament canon (which was our Lord's Bible); but about the understanding and interpretation of those Scriptures. Long before Jesus, the canon of Scripture for the Old Testament had been recognized and accepted. Jesus accepted as authoritative the exact same books that the scribes and pharisees accepted.

My point in all of this was, at what point did Chronicles (a book we referred to when studying the genealogies) become recognized as a part of the canon? Apparently quite early on—but there would have been a period of time when it was preserved (copied and recopied) when it is not clear that the scribes believed it to be canonical (we simply do not know about this history—was it known from the first time it was copied to be a part of the canon of Scripture or did it take longer than that?).

The first time Chronicles was written down, it was canonical; but it was not necessarily recognized by man as canonical at that time—in fact, it probably was not recognized as a part of the Word of God at first.

It would be an interesting study—if there is any available material at all on it—as to when the Jews first understood that there was a canon; that there was a Word of God, and some books belonged to that set and some books did not. There seemed to be some general recognition of that when the Septuagint was translated (roughly 200 B.C.); but what led them to that recognition? Whereas we have a great deal of material about the canonization of the New Testament, I don't know that we have any information about the canonization of the Old (that is, commentary of ancient rabbis on this particular topic).

[Topics](#)

[Charts, Graphics and Short Doctrines](#)

## Addendum

### The Abbreviated Doctrine of

[Chapter Outline](#)

[Charts, Graphics and Short Doctrines](#)

### Bibliography

[Topics](#)

[Charts, Graphics and Short Doctrines](#)

[Kukis Homepage](#)

[Doctrines](#)