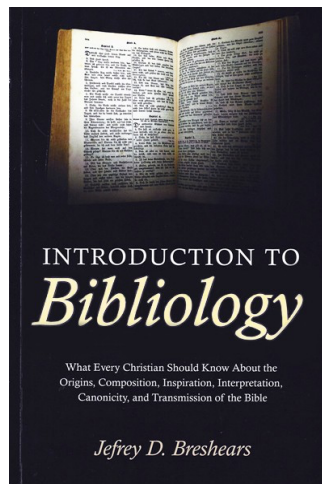


# Introduction To *Bibliology*

*What Every Christian Should Know About the  
Origins, Composition, Inspiration, Interpretation,  
Canonization, and Transmission of the Bible*



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## **Prelude Study: Canonization Study Guide**

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*“Your Word is a lamp to my feet,  
and a light for my path”*

– Psalm 119:105

*“From this time many of Jesus’ followers  
turned back and no longer followed him.*

*‘You do not want to leave also, do you?’*

*Jesus asked his disciples.*

*Simon Peter answered, ‘Lord, to whom would we go?*

*You alone have the words of eternal life.’”*

– John 6:66-68



# Week 1 – Overview of Bibliology

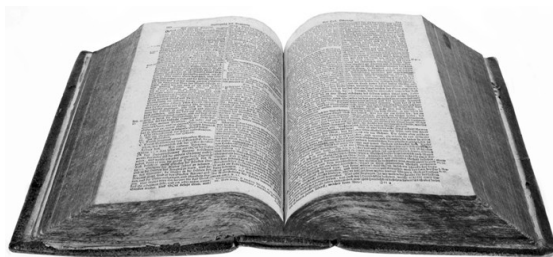
## Bible Study and Bibliology

### A Problem.

- Why are many Bible study groups unfulfilling?
  - ▶ “Few Christians have anything approaching a thoughtful and informed philosophy of the Bible. People come together to study the Bible with wildly varying (and sometimes irreconcilable) views of the nature, the purpose and the message of Scripture.”

### The Solution: The Study of Bibliology.

- Ref. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart’s *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth*.
- What is Bibliology?
  - ▶ The study of the origins, composition, philosophy, theology, divine inspiration, principles of interpretation, canonization, and the preservation and transmission of the Bible through the centuries.
- The goal of Bibliology: The development of an informed, thoughtful, and defensible philosophy of the Bible.
- The apologetics mandate:
  - ▶ I Peter 3:15 – “But let Christ be the Lord of your heart. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”
- The core issue: Why should we believe the Bible is a credible source of divinely-inspired Truth?



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## Americans and the Bible

**What do Americans THINK about the Bible?** Source: Barna Group Annual Survey – “The Bible in America”

- Ownership – 88% of Americans own a Bible
  - ▶ On average: Americans have 3.5 Bibles in their homes & 25% of Americans own 6 or more Bibles.
    - Seniors (age 65+) = 95% own one
    - Young Adults (age 18-28) = 79% own one
    - Atheists or “unreligious” = 60% own one
  - ▶ The problem is NOT that the Bible is unavailable.
- Sacred Literature – 80% of Americans identify Bible as “sacred literature.”
  - ▶ 50% of Americans believe that the Bible, Qur’an, Book of Mormon and the Torah are all just different expressions of the same spiritual truths.
  - ▶ Americans who say “none of these are *sacred* literature” has doubled since 2011 from 7% to 14%
- Neutral & Negative Attitudes Toward the Bible
  - ▶ Survey: “The Bible contains everything a person needs to live a meaningful life.”
    - In 2011, 77% agreed with that statement.
    - In 2013, decreased to 66%.
    - In 2017, decreased to 53%
  - ▶ Number of adults who rarely, if ever, read the Bible and regard it as merely a human book of myths & legends DOUBLED in 3 years.
    - From 10% (2011) to 20% in 2014
    - SHOCKING: More than doubled from 2014 to 2018: 54%
  - ▶ Survey: “The Bible is totally accurate in all the principles it teaches.”
    - Decreased from 70% (2011) to 58% (2016)

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- ▶ Number of Biblical skeptics or agnostics is now equal to the number of people who are “Bible-engaged”.
  - The Gospel Coalition
- ▶ Barna concludes that Bible skepticism is gaining a stronger cultural foothold. Attributes the change to Millennials (23-38 yrs) & Gen Xers (39-55 yrs).
- David Kinnaman, President of the Barna Group and Director of Research:
  - ▶ *“Even in just the few years Barna has been conducting ‘State of the Bible’ interviews, the data is trending toward Bible skepticism. With each passing year, the percent of Americans who believe that the Bible is ‘just another book written by men’ increases. So, too, do the perceptions that the Bible is actually harmful and that people who live by its principles are religious extremists.”*

*“Thankfully, the data is not all bad news. In fact, our researchers continue to find bright spots that demonstrate the Bible’s cultural staying power and persistent hold on people’s hearts.”*

- Staying Power of God’s Word: Isaiah 40:8
- Persistent Hold on Hearts: Psalm 19:7-11, 14

**What do Americans KNOW about the Bible? Sources: Gallup Organization & Pew Forum**

- Bible Reading & Knowledge
  - ▶ Declining since 1980s and Bible knowledge at record low in 2010.
  - ▶ Self-identified “born-again Christians” and “evangelical Christians are only slightly better informed than other Americans.
- Stephan Prothero: *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know – and Doesn’t*
  - ▶ Religious Literacy Quiz Results – Boston University students
- Pew Forum’s “Survey on Religion & Public Life” Results
- Biblical illiteracy is the natural result of a decline in reading and studying the Bible.

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# The Problems

## Diminished Acceptance of the Bible’s Authority

- Literal Word of God
  - ▶ 2017 Gallup Poll – Only 24% believe it is the literal word of God
- Authorship
  - ▶ Human authors under divine inspiration and guidance of Holy Spirit.
    - Skeptics – Doubt the Bible’s divine inspiration
    - Believers – 31% believe the Bible is a book of fables, legends, history or moral principles recorded by man.
- Infallibility
  - ▶ Both groups – Do not believe the Bible is wholly without error in its original manuscripts.
- Gallup Poll Summary – *“Americans in all age groups still largely accept the Bible as a holy document, but most of these downplay God’s direct role in it. That could mean people are more willing than in the past to believe it is open to interpretation – if man, not God, wrote the Bible, more can be questioned. And that, in turn, may have consequences for where Americans come down on a number of morally tinged issues.”*
  - ▶ The Gospel Coalition – Post Covid-19
    - Sharp increase in those who are no longer engaged with Scripture *“in a way that shapes their choices and transforms their relationships with others.”*

## Diminished Acceptance of the Bible’s Relevance

- Skeptics Believe:
  - ▶ Bible is an ancient, out of date book that hasn’t matured in step with modern culture and society.
  - ▶ Bible takes hostile positions on hard, inconvenient or politically incorrect issues.
- Believers Believe:
  - ▶ Same. And are *embarrassed* by the Bible’s positions on hard, inconvenient or politically incorrect issues.

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## **Biblical Illiteracy**

- Ignorance regarding what the Bible is and what it says
- Ignorance regarding the Bible’s overarching narrative, themes & orthodoxy

## **The Solution – The Study of Bibliology**

- Jeffrey Breshears – *“We must develop an informed, thoughtful & defensible philosophy of the Bible, and why it is imperative that we understand not only what the Bible teaches but why we should trust it as an infallible guide for what we believe & how we live our lives.”*
  - ▶ Psalm 119:105
  - ▶ John 6:66-68
- Biblical Confidence
  - ▶ The Bible is indeed divinely inspired, supremely relevant & wholly reliable.
  - ▶ Jeffrey Breshears - *“In an age of religious pluralism in which the exclusive truth-claims of the Christian faith are met with skepticism & ridicule, it is essential that Christians develop an informed and thoughtful understanding of the Bible so as to be convinced in their own mind that the Bible is a credible source of divinely inspired Truth.”*
  - ▶ 2 Timothy 3:16 – All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...
  - ▶ 1 Peter 1:24-25 – for ‘all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.’ And this is the good news that was preached to you.
- Christian Apologetics
  - ▶ Believers must be able to confidently defend the truth about the Bible.
  - ▶ 1 Peter 3:15 – But let Christ be the Lord of your heart. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

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- What is Bibliology?
  - ▶ The systematic study OF the Bible.
    - *The study of the origins, composition, philosophy, theology, divine inspiration, principles of interpretation, canonicity & the preservation & transmission of the Bible through the centuries.*
  - ▶ Bibliology addresses questions such as:
    - What is the Bible?
    - What is the basic philosophy of the Bible?
    - What is the central message of the Bible?
    - What is the nature of divine inspiration?
    - Why should we believe the Bible was divinely-inspired?
    - How should we interpret the Bible?
    - How and when were the various biblical manuscripts composed?
    - Why were certain books included and excluded from the biblical canon?
    - What are our oldest and best surviving biblical manuscripts?
    - Has the Bible been accurately preserved and transmitted through the centuries?
  - ▶ The goal of Bibliology: To develop an informed, thoughtful, and defensible philosophy of the Bible.

### **The Focus of Prelude Course – Canonicity**

- Biblical canonicity addresses three questions:
  - (1) Why were certain books included and others excluded from the Bible, and what were the criteria used in making this determination?
  - (2) Who made the decisions regarding which books to include?
  - (3) When was the Biblical canon finalized?
- Cover both the Old Testament & New Testament.
  - ▶ Will also cover the “why” of the excluded books.

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# Week 2 – Philosophy of the Bible

## What is the Bible?

- The Bible is the revelation of God’s will and purpose for mankind in the context of history and in relation to four major doctrinal themes: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration.
- God’s Special Revelation to Mankind.
  - ▶ The primary means by which God has communicated with mankind is through the special revelation of the Bible.
  - ▶ Blaise Pascal: *“God has revealed himself with sufficient clarity to satisfy those who are searching for Him, but with enough ambiguity to allow those who refuse to believe to continue to do so.”*

## What is the Bible About?

- Actually 66 books, written over 1500 years, 3 languages, 40+ different authors telling ONE consistent, cohesive & overarching true story.
  - ▶ Scott McConnell: *“Most Americans don’t know first-hand the overall story of the Bible – because they rarely pick it up. Even among worship attendees less than half read the Bible daily. The only time most Americans hear from the Bible is when someone else is reading it.”*
- The Metanarrative of the Bible
  - ▶ Metanarrative: An overarching account or interpretation of events and circumstances that provides a pattern or structure for people’s beliefs and gives meaning to their experiences.

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- ▶ The Bible’s Metanarrative: Proceeds through 4 doctrinal themes: Creation, Fall, Redemption & Restoration
  - Theme 1: Creation
    - Genesis 1 & 2: God is the Creator of all things.
    - “In the beginning God created”
    - Result: God’s ultimate creation: mankind
  - Theme 2: Fall
    - Genesis 3: Adam & Eve make the wrong choice.
    - Result: Mankind lost our vision of God, sin blurred our image of God & we were evicted from the presence of God.
  - Theme 3: Redemption
    - Genesis 3–Revelation 21: God moves to save us from our sin through His Son, Jesus Christ.
    - Result: God’s people are redeemed & have a relationship once again with God.
  - Theme 4: Restoration
    - Revelation 22: God unveils a new heaven & earth.
    - Result: God & man reside together again in the New Jerusalem.
  
- ▶ The Bible’s Metanarrative: Unfolds in the context of human history
  - Old Testament – Act I
  - GENESIS – God promises to make a nation from one man, Abraham, through whom all peoples of world will be blessed.
    - Nation: People, Law, Land
      - People = Abraham’s descendants. Israel.
      - Law = Given to Moses (EXODUS, LEVITICUS, NUMBERS, DEUTERONOMY)
      - Land = Promised to patriarchs & delivered through JOSHUA

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- JUDGES – Israelites continue to resist God, do what was “right in their own eyes” and demand a king.
- 1 & 2 SAMUEL – God obliges, gives Israel kings & makes an unconditional covenant with one (David). From David’s line the Messiah will come.
- 1 & 2 KINGS, 1 & 2 CHRONICLES – Through good & bad kings, Israel continues in idolatry & rebellion to God.
- PROPHETS – God sends prophets to Israel, urging repentance and warning of coming judgment. When obstinate Israel refuses to repent, God judges the nation and sends the people into exile.
- EZRA & NEHEMIAH – Merciful God allows Israel to return to Promised Land after exile & Jerusalem is rebuilt.
- 400 years of silence from God.
- New Testament – Act II
- The 4 GOSPELS (MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE & JOHN) reveal that the Promised One has arrived - the Messiah who will be the Redeemer of God’s people. Jesus Christ – Son of God, fully God & fully man.
  - Through Jesus’ righteous life, sacrificial death & powerful resurrection, He will redeem a people for Himself.
  - This new community of Jewish & Gentile believers is called the church & its beginnings are chronicled in ACTS.
- ROMANS – 3 JOHN (EPISTLES & clarifying letters) explain what their mission & purpose in life is as citizens of God’s Kingdom and how they are to live until Jesus returns.
- REVELATION – This final book of the Bible explains in prophetic language how this world comes to an end and the restoration of man to God is complete.

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## What is the Philosophy of the Bible?

- Jeffrey Breshears: “As we mature in our understanding of Scripture, we come to realize that the Bible addresses more than just the major theological themes of creation, fall, redemption & restoration. In addition, biblical revelation is conveyed in the context of a particular worldview from which its philosophy and theology are derived.”
  
- **Introduction to Philosophy**
  - ▶ Philosophy – from Greek: *love of wisdom* – the study or creation of theories about basic things such as they nature of existence, knowledge and thought, or about how people should live.
  - ▶ Philosophy – more than just a course of study, it is a way of thinking about the world, the universe and society.
  - ▶ Divided into 2 basic fields of study:
    - 1. Ontology – Addresses the nature of being & the reality of what exists. Four ontological issues:
      - Prime reality: What is the source of all that exists?
      - Origins: Why is there something rather than nothing, and wheredid everything come from?
      - The human condition: What is a human being?
      - Destiny: What happens when a person dies?
    - 2. Epistemology – Addresses the study of knowing & how we can know or understand the reality of what exists. Three epistemological issues:
      - Knowledge: How is it possible to know anything at all?
      - Morality: Is there such a thing as good and evil – and if so, how do we know what is right and wrong?
      - Meaning: What is the purpose of human life?
  - ▶ Perennial Issues of Life
    - Identity – Who am I?
    - Origin – Where did I come from?
    - Meaning – What am I doing here? Or *should* I be doing?
    - Destiny – Where am I going?

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- **Philosophy of the Bible**

- ▶ Jeffrey Breshears: “*The Bible puts forth a rational philosophical & theological explanation of reality that is **coherent, consistent & comprehensive**. It encompasses the totality of reality and addresses the salient perennial issues of life.*”

- ▶ **Biblical Worldview**

- **Worldview** – A general interpretive framework for processing and making sense of the realities we encounter in this life. Any worldview must address those 4 perennial issues of life.
- Only the Bible addresses them all coherently, consistently & comprehensively.
- The Bible contains the words of life and is the lens through which we must live our lives.

- ▶ **Basic Tenets of a Biblical Worldview**

- **Prime Reality** – God (Genesis 1:1, 3:1-24; Exodus 3:14; Psalm 90:2; John 1:1-3, 5:26; Acts 17:25-28; Romans 11:36; Colossians 1:16; 1 Timothy 6:15-16; Revelation 4:11)
- **Origins** – God created cosmos to operate with a uniformity of cause & effect.
- **Human Condition** – Man created in God’s image. Image was marred & corrupted during the fall and all mankind now has a sin nature. (Genesis 1:26-27; Romans 3:10-18, 23, 5:12, 6:23)
- **Destiny** – Eternal life with God or eternal separation from God (John 1:12, 3:16-18, 14:6, 20:31; Acts 4:12; Psalm 37:20; 2 Thessalonians 1:6)
- **Meaning & Purpose** – Westminster Shorter Catechism: Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. (Isaiah 43:7)

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## Three Views of the Bible

### 1. Traditional/Conservative view:

- ▶ The Bible is the divinely-inspired written Word of God.
- ▶ The Bible is historically reliable, doctrinally and morally authoritative, and scientifically accurate when properly interpreted.
- ▶ The Bible has been accurately preserved and transmitted through the centuries.

### 2. Liberal/Modernist view:

- ▶ The Bible is not the divinely-inspired written Word of God, but some portions of the Bible may *contain* divine truth.
- ▶ The Bible is a mix of authentic history along with legends and myths.
- ▶ The Bible, written in a pre-scientific age, is irreconcilable with modern science.
- ▶ The Bible is not necessarily authoritative regarding doctrinal and moral issues.
- ▶ Science, not Scripture, is the most reliable source of truth.
- ▶ Therefore, Scripture should be interpreted in the light of current theories in the physical and social sciences.

### 3. Neo-Orthodox view:

- ▶ An existentialist view of the Bible.
- ▶ The Bible is not objectively true, but it *becomes* God's Word as we personally (subjectively) encounter and interact with it.
- ▶ The Word of God is a person – the eternal and living Lord Jesus Christ – not a book. (John 1:1-4)
- ▶ The Bible is not necessarily historically reliable or doctrinally authoritative, but it nonetheless serves as a medium of divine revelation.
- ▶ Historical and doctrinal statements in the Bible are not so important as the fact that we can encounter Christ in Scripture.

## Summa - The Bible is the Living Word – A Unique Book

- A source of illumination, inspiration, and transformation.
  - ▶ Jeffrey Breshears: *“The Bible is unique. Unlike any other book ever written, there is life in its words because it testifies to the Living Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Many books contain great truths and are informative, but only the Bible is transformative....”*  
*“But we can only comprehend the ultimate reality of the Bible to the extent that our heart and mind have been quickened by the Holy Spirit.... And for those who read the Bible through illuminated eyes and allow its message to transform their heart and mind, the written Word of God is truly a lamp to their feet and a light for their path.”*

# Introduction to Canonicity

## What is a Canon?

- ▶ Canon – from Greek *kanon*, which is a rule or standard. Eventually, defined as an official collection of authoritative books.
- ▶ “Closed canon” – no more additions

## What is the Biblical Canon?

- ▶ Biblical canon – constitutes those writings that were generally accepted as divinely-inspired. The Bible is a closed canon.
- ▶ Canonicity answers the question, “What exactly constitutes the Bible?” by setting parameters which address 3 basic questions:
- ▶ Why were certain books included in the Bible and others excluded & what were the criteria used in making this determination?
- ▶ Who made the decisions regarding which books to include?
- ▶ When was the Biblical canon finalized?

## Why does the Biblical Canon matter?

- Jeffrey Breshears: *“Without the Bible, the Christian faith would be an amorphous mix of traditions, beliefs & practices lacking a clear vision, mission or parameters.”*
- Purpose of the Canon
  - ▶ To provide a philosophical, theological & historical explanation for what it meant to be a true Christian.
    - Lee Martin McDonald: *“The primary function of a canon is to aid the community of faith in its own self-definition (who we are) and to offer guidelines for living (what we are to do).”*
    - 2 Peter 1:3-4; Hebrews 4:12; Romans 12:2
  - ▶ To serve as the primary source of authority, inspiration & guidance for the church.
    - F. F. Bruce: *“It is not an anthology of inspired or inspiring literature...when the limits of the canon are under consideration, the chief concern is to get as close as possible to the source of Christian faith. In the canon of Scripture we have the foundation documents of Christianity, the charter of the church, the title-deeds of faith. For no other literature can such a claim be made.”*
    - 2 Timothy 3:16-17

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# Week 3 – Old Testament Canonization

## The Traditional Boundaries.

- Catalyst: Destruction of Israel in 586 B. C.
  - ▶ Lee Martin McDonald: *“Only something indestructible, commonly available, adaptable and portable could keep this people from extinction...The only thing that fits this description...was a story that could be transported to Babylon and adapted to the new circumstances of the nation in captivity.”*
  - ▶ The Hebrew canon or Tanakh (the Old Testament) is composed of ancient writings that Jewish scholars and rabbis regarded as divinely-inspired.
  - ▶ The development of the Tanakh was driven by a desire to maintain Jewish identity and preserve the words of the prophets during the period of the Babylonian Captivity in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.
- The Tanakh, an acronym, included 3 categories of writings:
  - (1) The Torah (the Pentateuch, or the **Law**) – 5 Books of Moses
    - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.
  - (2) The Nevi'im (the **Prophets**) – 19 Books
    - Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve (minor prophets).
  - (3) The Ketuvim (the **Writings**) – 12 Books
    - Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles.
- In the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. the boundaries of the Tanakh were still not clearly defined.
  - ▶ Jewish Historian, Josephus, supposedly given a gift “of the sacred books” confiscated from the temple by Roman General Titus following siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD.
  - ▶ The general consensus among 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish scholars was that the “spirit of prophecy” had departed 400 years earlier (i.e., after the prophet Malachi), so books written after that were not accorded the status of Scripture.

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**The Collection Process.**

- The systematic collection and preservation of the holy books of the Torah might have started as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.
- Efforts to preserve the Nevi'im probably started by the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.
- Efforts to preserve the Ketuvim might have started in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.
- Some scholars believe the first reference to a collection of prophetic writings was Daniel 9:2 – “In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.”
  - ▶ Other Old Testament references where God commanded His people to “write it down”: Exodus 17:14; Numbers 33:2; Jeremiah 30:2; Ezekiel 24:2
  - ▶ Other Old Testament references which describe the reading of the “Book of the Law” to the nation: 2 Chronicles 17:9 (King Jehoshaphat) and 2 Kings 22:8, 2 Chronicles 34:14 (King Josiah)
  - ▶ Extra Biblical references: Apocryphal books of 1 & 2 Maccabees & writings of Jewish historian, Josephus
- Evidently, all the Jewish religious sects (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, etc.) regarded the same books as authoritative.
  - ▶ A few books were controversial: Ecclesiastes, Esther, Song of Songs, and Proverbs.
- Collection corresponds closely to the many ancient manuscripts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

**The Septuagint (LXX).**

- The Septuagint was the first translation of the Tanakh into Greek.
  - ▶ Practical reason for translation: Torah was essential to worship & many Jews of the Diaspora no longer spoke Hebrew.
  - ▶ Legendary reason for translation: Letter of Aristeas
    - According to tradition, the Septuagint was produced by 70 (or 72?) Jewish scholars in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. in Alexandria, Egypt.

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- In addition to the Tanakh, the “Septuagintal plus” included various other texts that would later be referred to as the Apocrypha or the Deuterocanonical books.
- In the time of Jesus, Septuagint was regarded as Holy Scriptures of Greek-speaking Jews both inside & outside Palestine.
- The Septuagint essentially functioned as the “Bible” of the early church, and many New Testament quotes of the Tanakh came from the Septuagint.
  - ▶ Many of the early Church Fathers considered the Septuagint to be divinely-inspired.
  - ▶ Sequential order of books in the Septuagint became the pattern for later Christian Bibles.
  - ▶ Septuagint was so revered and used by first-century Church that Jews came to reject it in mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century.

### **Jamnia.**

- Following the Zealot Revolt and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai founded an academy for the study and preservation of Judaism in Jamnia (town south of Joppa).
- Under Zakkai’s direction, the rabbis at Jamnia essentially defined orthodox (Pharisaical) Judaism from that time to the present.
- According to the Mishna (c. 200 – 220), there were ongoing debates in Jamnia concerning the canonical status of various books such as Esther, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and Song of Songs.
- Jewish scholars at Jamnia rejected the Septuagint, claiming that it mistranslated key texts.

### **The Hebrew Canon.**

- The debate over the parameters of the Hebrew canon continued for another 300 years after Jamnia as various rabbis continued to question inclusion of various books.
- Will never definitively know the specifics of Old Testament canon formation, but within Tanakh is evidence it likely happened over a period of several centuries.
  - ▶ 2 Chronicles 17:9 – King Jehoshaphat (873-849 BC)
  - ▶ 2 Kings 22:8 & 2 Chronicles 34:14 – King Josiah (641-609 BC)
  - ▶ Nehemiah 8:1 – Ezra (605-537 BC)

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- F. F. Bruce: *“A common, and not unreasonable, account of the formation of the Old Testament canon is that it took shape in three stages, corresponding to the three divisions of the Hebrews Bible.”*
  - 1. The Law – early in period of return from Babylonian exile
  - 2. The Prophets – late in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC
  - 3. The Writings – possibly “open” until end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD
- However, little doubt that the majority of Old Testament canon was accepted without question by the time of Christ.

**Jesus, the Apostles, and the Old Testament.**

- None of the authors or dates associated with the Old Testament texts can be verified by external historical sources.
- There is no way to know if, or to what extent, these texts were altered in the transmission process in the centuries prior to the time of Christ.
- So why should Christians take the Old Testament Scriptures seriously?
  - ▶ Because Jesus did!
    - John Warwick Montgomery: *“Christ’s attitude toward the Old Testament was one of total trust.”*
    - Even liberal scholars concede Jesus regarded the Old Testament writings as sacred:
      - H. J. Cadbury: *“Jesus held to the common Jewish view of an infallible Bible.”*
      - F. C. Grant: *“Everywhere it is taken for granted that what is writing in Scripture [i.e. The Old Testament] is the work of divine inspiration, and is therefore trustworthy, infallible and inerrant...No New Testament writer would dream of questioning a statement contained in the Old Testament, though the exact manner or mode of its inspiration is nowhere explicitly stated.”*
    - Jesus directly quoted from or alluded to 23 of the 39 books of the Old Testament.
    - Jesus endorsed the Hebrew scriptures as authoritative without reservation. (Matthew 5:17-19, Luke 4:16-19, Luke 24:27, 44-45, John 5:39)

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- Jesus based his Messianic legitimacy on his ability to fulfill the prophecies of these ancient writings. (Luke 4:16-30, 24:27, 44)
- ▶ Because the apostles did!
  - The apostolic writings of the New Testament regarded the Old Testament as divinely-inspired and interpreted these writings Christocentrically.
    - Gospel of Matthew cites numerous ancient Hebrew prophecies fulfilled in the life of Jesus regarding His birth, work, death & resurrection.
    - Romans 1:1-3 – Paul regarding God’s gospel: “the gospel [God] promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding His Son...”
  - 2 Peter 1:20-21 – Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ Because the Early Church & Church Fathers did!
  - For the early church, prior to the circulation of the apostolic writings, the only “Bible” was the Septuagint.
  - Like the Jews, the early Christians questioned the legitimacy of certain disputed books of the Tanakh such as Esther and Ecclesiastes.
    - Similarly, the status of the Apocrypha (included in the Septuagint) was controversial. NOTE: The Apocrypha will be discussed in detail in Week 5.
  - It took the early church more than three centuries to reach a general consensus on a set Old Testament canon.
  - Church leaders differentiated between three classifications of writings:
    - 1. Books worthy of canonical status
    - 2. Books that were efficacious but supplemental
    - 3. Books that were purely legendary and mythical.

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# Week 4 – New Testament Canonization

## **The Living Word.**

- Jeffrey Breshears: *“The Christian faith was founded not on a book of sacred writings but on a person – the living Word of God, Jesus Christ – and the Gospel message as propagated by His apostles.”*
  - ▶ Ancient Hebrew Scriptures revered because they bore witness prophetically to Jesus.
  - ▶ Writings of the Apostles and their associates gained scriptural status due to their accurate to Jesus’ life and teachings.
  - ▶ So, the original Christian “canon” (the standard of faith) was Jesus Himself.

## **Parallels to Emergence of a New Testament Canon.**

- Jesus’ life and resurrection gave the early Church its identity and mission.
  - ▶ Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2
- Eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life, mission & majesty.
  - ▶ Initially, the Jesus story spread orally in the evangelistic efforts of the apostles.
- Prompting by Spirit of God to “write it down.”
  - ▶ Greetings in letters of Paul
- Within a few decades the Christian message was incorporated into various texts – gospels, history, epistles, and apocalyptic literature.

## **Motives for the Compilation of a New Testament Canon.**

- Immediately after Christ’s death and resurrection there was no incentive to compile a Christian canon for two reasons:
  - (1) Most Christians believed the Second Coming was imminent.
  - (2) The oral traditions of Jesus and the apostles’ teachings were adequate so long as the apostles and other eyewitnesses were still alive.

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- Jeffrey Breshears: *“Because Christ had not returned yet and eyewitnesses were dying out, later generations of Christian scholars and church leaders believed there was a need to identify the authentic apostolic writings, distinguish them from all other works by Christian authors & collect them into a well-defined corpus of books that Christians could trust as accurate & authoritative.”*
- 4 Motivations:
  - (1) To preserve an accurate account of the life and teachings of Jesus.
    - Eyewitnesses started dying 40+ years after Jesus’ ascension.
    - New generation of Christians needed an accurate account of Jesus’ life & teachings.
    - Needed exposition of God’s NEW covenant with mankind as mediated through the atoning death & resurrection of Jesus Christ.
  - (2) To complete the story of God’s redemption throughout history
    - Early Christians were convinced Jesus had fulfilled the ancient prophecies regarding God’s redemption of His people.
    - Luke 24:27-45; Matthew 1 genealogy connecting Jesus to Messiah, Son of David, Redeemer of God.
  - (3) To preserve orthodoxy in the face of heresy
    - Newly birthed churches faced “wolves in sheep’s clothing,” factions, divisions & rivalries amidst false teaching.
      - Paul: 2 Corinthians 11:26 (false apostles)
      - John: 1 John 2:18 (antichrists)
    - Early heresies:
      - Docetism
      - Nicolaitanism
      - Gnosticism
      - Marcionism
    - False gospels: *Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Mary Magdelene*
    - Lee Martin McDonald: *“This widespread concern for the truth – that is, the correct understanding of the story of Jesus – was significant in the church’s decision about what literature to read in its worship. What did not conform to this tradition was eventually considered heresy & rejected.”*

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(4) To preserve orthodoxy in the face of persecution.

- Essential need to distinguish between books which might be surrendered to authorities as a last resort, and those that had to be preserved at all costs.
- Emperor Diocletian’s persecution of the church – 303 AD

• Progression of writings:

- ▶ 150 AD – “[these books] had gained authority that once belonged exclusively to the Old Testament.”
- ▶ Mid 2<sup>nd</sup> Century – 3 of 4 gospel accounts of Jesus’ life were circulating as a collection. Same with Paul’s letters.
- ▶ Apocryphal “gospels” were also being written & circulated, but orthodox church leaders were dismissing those.
- ▶ Apostolic authority became the basis of later canonization of these writings.

**Criteria for Inclusion.**

(1) Apostolicity – aka “Apostolic Authority”

- ▶ Was the book was written by an apostle or the associate of an apostle?
- ▶ Was there a chain from eyewitness to oral testimony to writings?
- ▶ By extension, this excluded any book not written in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

(2) Orthodoxy – “Rule of Faith”

- ▶ Did the book conformed to the “rule of faith” – that is, the core doctrines of the Christian faith as articulated by Jesus and propagated by the apostles?
- ▶ Is the book theologically sound & generally correlative with the rest of apostolic literature?

(3) Catholicity - Acceptance

- ▶ Was a particular book generally received over time in the Christian community as authentic & authoritative?
- ▶ Did the book prove itself to be inspirational, edifying & instructional?

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## The Skeptics' Theory.

- Authorship: Skeptics argue that the authors of the Four Gospels are unknown.
  - ▶ Bart Ehrman (UNC, New Testament scholar) in *Lost Christianities: "The Gospels that came to be included in the New Testament were all written anonymously"* and generations later were assigned to their "reputed authors." He claims none of these books "contains a first-person narrative...or claims to be written by an eyewitness or a companion of an eyewitness."
  - ▶ This theory contradicts statements of the New Testament writers themselves:
    - Matthew 9:9; 2 Peter 1:16; Luke 1:1-4; John 21:20-25
- Canonization Process: Primarily a power struggle between competing Christian sects.
  - ▶ Bart Ehrman, in *Misquoting Jesus*, argues that the first 2 centuries of the Christian era were rich in "theological diversity" and produced an intense struggle for dominance. "The group that established itself as 'orthodox'...then determined what future Christian generations would believe and read as scripture."
  - ▶ This theory contradicts the fact that the 27 New Testament books were included in the canon because their authority had already been recognized and established among orthodox Christians.
    - F. F. Bruce: "It was not until the 27 books had been generally accepted by Christians throughout the known world that they were first made the subject of a decree by an ecclesiastical council – the Synod of Hippo in 393....Canonicity implies supreme authority in matters of faith...they included these writings in the canon because they already recognized their authority; the writings did not acquire authority by being included in the canon."
    - Ivor Davidson, in *Birth of the Church*: "Rather than imposing legitimacy on a particular set of texts, they [Christian leaders] were, as they saw it, acknowledging and conserving the inspired authority that was already inherent in these works according to their origin, content, and proven usefulness over time."
    - Bruce Metzger: "The canon is a list of authoritative books more than it is an authoritative list of books."

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## Acceptance of the New Testament Texts.

- Many early Christian writers implied in their references to New Testament books that they regarded these books as divinely-inspired Scripture.
  - ▶ Writers of Scripture
    - 2 Peter 3:16 – He [Paul] writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.
    - Written by Peter, circa 65 AD & implies some of Paul's letters were already being circulated through the churches.
  - ▶ Church Fathers
    - Clement of Rome, (c. 95) – Urged Corinthians to take up the epistle Paul had sent and implied other Pauline epistles carried the same weight of authority as Old Testament.
    - Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, (c. 112) – Quoted from 6 of Paul's epistles, inferring they had scriptural authority.
    - Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, (c. 150) – Quoted from the 4 gospels, Acts, most of Paul's epistles & several general epistles.
    - Theophilus of Antioch (c. 177) – Argued the gospel writers were spokesmen for God in the same sense as the ancient Hebrew prophets. Regarded the Christian writings of the New Testament to be equal in authority to those of the Old Testament.

## Early New Testament Canonical Lists.

- The process of New Testament canonization was a long, deliberative process that took place over a period of about 300 years.
- The Pauline epistles circulated as a collection by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century.
- By the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century, most Christian leaders and scholars accepted most of the books of the New Testament.
  - ▶ According to Justin Martyr, the gospels were read regularly in the church of Rome in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century.

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- The Muratorian Fragment (c. 170) listed books approved for public reading in church of Rome. Included all NT books other than Hebrews, James, and I and II Peter.
- Origin (c. 230) regarded all 27 books of the New Testament as authoritative.
- Circa 325, Eusebius distinguished between three categories of books:
  - (1) *Homologoumena* – books that were universally accepted
    - Most NT books were considered *homologoumena*.
  - (2) *Antilegomena* – disputed books
    - The *antilegomena* included James, II Peter, II & III John, and Jude.
  - (3) *Nothos* – spurious books, generally rejected as canonical
    - *Apocalypse of Peter, Epistle of Barnabas, Acts of Paul*
- ▶ Also identified heretical & gnostic writings – “*none of these has been deemed worthy of citation in the writings of any of the succession of churchmen...they are not to be reckoned even among ‘spurious’ books, but must be shunned altogether wrong and impious.*”
  - *Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Philip, Gospel of Mary Magdalene*
- Debate over some of the disputed books continued into the 4th century.
  - ▶ The Synod of Laodicea (363) declared the entire Old and New Testaments canonical with the exception of Revelation.
- In 367, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, listed as canonical all 27 books in the New Testament.
  - ▶ Called them the “*Springs of Salvation – so that the one who is thirsty may be satisfied with the oracles which are in them. In these alone is the teaching of true religion proclaimed as good news. Let no one add to these or take anything from them.*”
- After 367 there was a general consensus in the Western church as to the bounds of the New Testament canon, and the Eastern church followed a century later.
- The final book to receive full acceptance was Revelation.

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## **The Official Lists.**

- Bishop Damasus I of Rome and the Council of Rome (382).
- Jerome and the Latin Vulgate Bible (c. 382-405).
- Augustine of Hippo (c. 354-430).
- Three church councils officially sanctioned the consensus view of the New Testament canon:
  - ▶ Synod of Hippo (393).
  - ▶ Third Council of Carthage (397).
  - ▶ Fourth Council of Carthage (419).
- Interim popes & published codexes followed with few variations through the Medieval era.
- After some contentious times in the Reformation era, all major branches of Christianity eventually drafted official declarations on the scope of the Biblical canon:
  - ▶ Roman Catholic Canon of Trent – 1546
  - ▶ Gallic Confession of Faith of 1559 – French Protestants (drafted by John Calvin)
  - ▶ The Church of England’s Thirty-Nine Articles of 1563
  - ▶ The Synod of Jerusalem of 1672 – Greek Orthodox Church

## **The Protestant Canon.**

- Debate over the canon was rekindled during the Reformation era.
- Martin Luther doubted the legitimacy of Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation, and included them as an “outer canon” in his German translation of the Bible.
- William Tyndale followed a similar pattern in his 1525 translation which was perpetuated in subsequent English-language Bibles. (i.e., Coverdell Bible, Matthew’s Bible).
- John Calvin doubted the authorship of Hebrews and II Peter, though he had no problem with their theology.
- Few Reformation scholars after Luther and Calvin questioned the legitimacy of the canon, though questions persisted regarding II Peter and II Timothy.

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# Week 5 – The Apocrypha & Other Exclusions

## The Apocrypha.

- Literally means “the things that are hidden”
- As applied to Jewish intertestamental literature and the biblical canon, it refers to more than a dozen books or supplements to books that postdate the Old Testament.
- Acceptance:
  - ▶ Highly regarded by Jewish scholars for their historical & moral value but considered to be supplemental rather than scriptural.
  - ▶ Early Christian scholars and church leaders accepted at least some of the writings as authentic Scripture, primarily due to inclusion of these writings in the Septuagint.
  - ▶ During Reformation era, Protestant leaders such as Luther and Calvin rejected the Apocrypha while Roman Catholic authorities approved them as “deuterocanonical – later editions to the canon.”
  - ▶ Today, Roman Catholic and various other Orthodox denominations continue to include the Apocryphal books as part of the Biblical canon. Most Protestant denominations do not.
- Composition: Books and supplements are divided into 8 categories or genres:
  - ▶ Historical – *I Esdras* and *I Maccabees*.
  - ▶ Polemical History – *II Maccabees*.
  - ▶ Historical Fiction – *Tobit*, *Judith*, additions to Daniel (“Susanna,” “Bel and the Dragon,” “Prayer of Azariah,” and “Song of the Three Jews”), and *III Maccabees*.
  - ▶ Legendary – *Jubilees*.
  - ▶ Wisdom Literature – *Wisdom of Solomon*, *Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)*, and *IV Maccabees*.
  - ▶ Devotional – “Prayer of Manasseh,” additions to Esther, Psalm 151, and *Psalms of Solomon*.
  - ▶ Prophecy – *Baruch*.
  - ▶ Apocalyptic – *II Esdras* and *I Enoch*.

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- Biblical References to Apocryphal Books:
  - ▶ Hebrews 11:25-38 – In the past, many righteous men & women “were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection.” These were people of whom the world was not worthy.
    - *II Maccabees 6:18-7:4* relates the stories of righteous Jews who suffered excruciating torture rather than forsake their faith.
  - ▶ Jude 14 – “Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: ‘See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of His holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way...’”
    - *1 Enoch 1:9* – “And behold! He cometh with ten thousands of His Holy ones to execute judgment upon all, and to destroy all the ungodly: And to convict all flesh of all the works of their ungodliness which they have committed, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”
  - ▶ Romans 1:18-32 parallels *Wisdom of Solomon 13:5-10; 14:22-30*
  - ▶ 2 Corinthians 5:1, 4 parallels *Wisdom of Solomon 9:13-15*
  - ▶ James 1:13, 19 parallels *Wisdom of Sirach 5:11; 15:11-12*
- Controversy:
  - ▶ Recall, because early Christian scholars and church leaders revered the ancient Hebrew Scriptures as divinely inspired, they differentiated between three classifications of writings:
    - 1. Books worthy of canonical status
    - 2. Books that were efficacious but supplemental
    - 3. Books that were purely legendary and mythical.
  - ▶ Proved to be a messy and complicated process as related to the Apocrypha.
    - Pharisaic Jewish scholars at Jamnia rejected them.
    - First century AD Jewish scholars & historians rejected them.
    - The writings did not include the common authoritative declaration of the ancient prophets “thus saith the Lord.”
    - However, the writings had been included in the Old Latin translation & reluctantly in a codicil to the Latin Vulgate translation and had also been quoted by early church fathers.
    - Christian scholars and church leaders remained undecided over many centuries.

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