

How Did We Get the Bible?

By Christian Equippers International

Christians maintain that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. However, they often accept this fact without a basic understanding of how we received the Bible.

Although God was the divine architect and author of the sacred scriptures, He chose to use a variety of selected individuals, over a 1600-year period, to communicate God's revelation to mankind through both the Old and New Testaments. We call this unique revelation the Holy Bible.

This teaching offers a concise yet comprehensive examination of how we got the Bible. It carefully explains the origins, translation, preservation, and gradual evolution of the Word of God.

What is the Canon?

The word "canon" means "measuring rod", and refers to the inspired collection of books in both the Old and New Testaments regarded as scripture. It conveys the idea that certain books "measure up" to the divine standards required of sacred scripture. The gradual process of determining which books met the requirements unfolded over many centuries. However, it should be stressed that the church did not create the canon or confer inspiration upon the various books of the Bible. As one scholar noted, "The church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity. God gave us gravity . . . and similarly He gave us the New Testament canon, by inspiring the individual books that make it up." The church simply recognized and received those books that were already inspired from their creation and bore the distinctive marks of divine authority, authorship, and authenticity.

The Guidelines for Determining Sacred Canon

Specific rules have been developed for determining which writings meet the requirements for sacred canon:

- 1) Does the book possess a definite prophetic and inspirational quality?
In short, does it manifest a "Thus saith the Lord"?
- 2) Was the book written by a reputable prophet, authored by an apostle, or someone intimately associated with an apostle?
- 3) Was it accepted, collected, distributed, and read by God's people either in the Old Testament period or New Testament period?
- 4) Does its contents and message harmonize with the standards of sound biblical teaching?
- 5) Does it possess dynamic, life-transforming power?

6) Was it endorsed and accepted by future generations of believers, such as the early church fathers?

The 66 books comprising our present Bible have met these standards.

The Old Testament Canon

The Old Testament canon was completed with the Book of Malachi and closed around the year 425 B.C. The Jewish Talmud, which contains ancient Jewish beliefs, confirms this fact: "After the later prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel."¹ Josephus, the Jewish historian (37-100 A.D.), also acknowledged this in his writings.

The Old Testament canon accepted by the Jews and later by Christ and the early church is exactly the same as the 39 books in our present Protestant Bibles, even though the number of books and sequential order differs (i.e., the Jews combine I and II Kings and place Chronicles last instead of Malachi). The Jews unconditionally accepted the Hebrew Old Testament books as sacred scripture because they met the strict requirements demanded of canon.

This is an excerpt from the booklet "How Did We Get the Bible" by Christian Equipppers International. To purchase the booklet visit www.equipper.com