



# The Canonicity Question

[Dennis McCallum](#) and [Gary DeLashmutt](#)

---

## I. The Old Testament

Modern theory states that the canon of the Old Testament was determined by the council of Jamnia (90 AD) and was therefore determined by a group of unbelieving Jewish rabbis. Our evidence will show, on the contrary, that the canon was known and immediately recognized as scripture as it developed in each generation.

### A. Dead Sea Scroll Evidence

1. The Manual of Discipline & Zadokite Fragments quote from Isaiah, Deut., Numbers, Leviticus, and Proverbs with the formula "It is written."
2. Zadokite uses the formula "God said" for Isaiah, Malachi, Amos, Zechariah, Hosea, Deut., Numbers and Micah.
3. The Commentary on Habakkuk indicates that it was considered to be inspired.
4. The apocryphal books are quoted also, but never with one of the above formulae.
5. Conclusion: This evidence disproves the liberal theory that the canon was solidified in a series of three steps: the Pentateuch accepted as scripture by 400 BC, the Prophets by 200 BC, and the Writings not accepted until the Council of Jamnia, in 90 AD. The Dead Sea Scrolls quote from all three divisions as scripture and refer to all three as "the Law and the Prophets" or "Moses and the Prophets."

### B. Josephus

1. He wrote twenty years before Jamnia and over 300 years before the Talmud's Tractate *Baba Bathra* which is used to support the theory of the three-part development.
2. He had the actual Temple scrolls in his possession as a gift from Titus. We would conclude from these facts that Josephus should be considered more authoritative than the Talmud regarding the first century view of the canon.
3. Josephus had the same canon we do.

- He says there were 22 books in the canon of the Old Testament (see "Against Apion" 1:8, where he mentions 5 books of Moses, 13 Prophets, and 4 Writings).
  - This corresponds to our 39 books. He recognized Jer. and Lam. as one book, as he also did Judges & Ruth, I Sam. & II Sam., I Kings & II Kings, I Chron. & II Chron., and Ezra and Esther. The 12 Minor Prophets were also recognized as one book, called "The Book of the Twelve."
- He included Daniel in the Prophets instead of in the Writings, which refutes an important part of the proof used to support the three-part theory.
- Josephus also indicates that there was unbroken succession of prophets from Moses to Malachi, and that the histories written since Malachi were not inspired, because there had been no succession of prophets since the time of Malachi.

### C. Actual Criteria for Inclusion in the Canon

1. The test used to determine whether a book was part of the canon of the Old Testament was inspired authorship.
2. An inspired prophet could be identified using the tests for prophets in Deut. 13:1-5; 18:14-22.
3. Relevant Scripture
  - Moses wrote the Pentateuch (Ex. 17:14; 24:4-7; 34:27; Deut. 31:9,22,24; Ezra 7:6; Ps. 103:7; Josh. 8:31, 23:6; I Kings 2:3).
  - Some prophets clearly state that they were ordered to write (Jer. 30:2; Ezek. 43:11; Is. 8:1).
  - Each of the 12 Minor Prophets call themselves prophets.
  - The historical books were written by prophets (I Chron. 29:29; II Chron. 9:29; 12:15; 13:22; 20:34; 32:32; 33:19).
  - Daniel accepted the book of Jeremiah as scripture (Dan. 9:2).
  - Joshua received Moses' writing as scripture (Josh. 1:26).
  - Isaiah and Micah accepted each other's writings as scripture contemporaneously (Is. 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-4).

### D. Additional Evidence

1. Solomon, Samuel, Daniel, Isaiah and Ezekiel all had dreams and visions which squares with God's description of a prophet (Deut. 13:1; Num. 12:6-8).
2. The New Testament quotes the Old Testament over 600 times (all of the Old Testament books are quoted except Ezra, Neh., Esther, Eccles., and Song of Solomon). Acts 2:30 and Mt. 24:15 identify David and Daniel as prophets.
3. Therefore, only Ezra, Neh., and Esther are unproven if Eccles. and Song of Solomon were written by Solomon.

4. Melito, Origen and Jerome agreed with the Jewish canon. Only Augustine and his councils accepted apocryphal books.
- 

## II. The New Testament

Authorship is again the determining factor. Apostolic authorship in the New Testament corresponds to prophetic authorship in the Old Testament. This is based on the "pre-authentication" passages where Christ authorized the apostles to write scripture in advance (Mt. 10:40; Lk. 10:16; Jn. 14:26; 15:26,27; 16:13).

### A. Internal Evidence

1. 1. The 13 letters of Paul all indicate that he is the author, although this is challenged by some modern scholars.
2. 2. The gospel of John indicates that John is the author (Jn. 21:23,24).
3. 3. The 3 epistles of John are identical to the gospel in style. I John also claims to be written by an eye-witness (I Jn. 1:1).
4. 4. Revelation claims to have been written by John (Rev. 1:4,9).
5. 5. Both I Pet. & II Pet. claim Petrine authorship (I Pet. 1:1; II Pet. 1:1; 3:1).
6. 6. This leaves only Luke, Acts, Hebrews, Matthew, Mark, James, and Jude without direct internal claims to apostolic authorship.
  - Early church history connects Luke-Acts with Paul, saying that it was written by Luke under Paul's supervision and approval (Papias quoted in Eusebius).
  - Papias and others also said that Mark wrote the memoirs of Peter.
  - Hebrews is of uncertain authorship, although it is theologically and conceptually connected with Paul. At the same time, the grammar and vocabulary are quite different from Paul's other books. Two options are possible:
    - Paul wrote it in Hebrew or Aramaic (and it was later translated). This would account for the obvious difference in vocabulary and style. Clement of Alexandria states that this was the case according to his earlier sources.
    - One of Paul's companions wrote it under his supervision (see ch.13:23).
  - James and Jude -- two options are possible:
    - The book may have been written by Christ's half-brothers (Mk. 6:3) who were evidently designated as apostles after the resurrection (I Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19). Early Church sources indicate that this theory is the correct one.

- It may have been written by James and Jude the Alpheus brothers, two of Jesus' original disciples (Lk. 6:16; Acts 1:13). This possibility comes about from a comparison of the crucifixion accounts, which seem to establish that James the Less (James Alpheus) and Jesus were first cousins on their mothers' side. Therefore, James the Less might have called himself "the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19) within the common usage of the day.
  - In either event, both books are of apostolic origin.
- 

## III. The Apocrypha

The Apocryphal books are nowhere held to be of either prophetic or apostolic authorship. They were universally rejected as scripture in their own day by both Jew and Christian.

### A. Jewish Evidence

1. Josephus rejected the canonicity of the apocryphal books, apparently reflecting current Jewish thought.
2. Jamnia held the same view.
3. The apocryphal books themselves admit that the prophetic succession ended with Zechariah and Malachi (I Macc. 4:46; 9:27; 14:41).
4. This view is also reflected in the Manual of Discipline in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

### B. Christian Evidence

1. Melito and Origen rejected the Apocrypha, as does the Muratorian Canon.
2. It was nowhere accepted in a canon, although it was occasionally quoted in early church writings.
3. It was sometimes included at the end of a New Testament codex copy.
  - Since the codex was cut and assembled before copying began, pages were left over. These were often filled with one or more apocryphal books.
1. Jerome vigorously resisted including the Apocrypha in his Latin Vulgate Version, but was over-ruled.
  - As a result, the standard Roman Catholic Bible throughout the medieval period contained it.
  - Thus, it gradually came to be revered by the average clergyman. Still, many medieval Catholic scholars realized that it was not inspired.
1. Not until the Council of Trent in the late 1500's was the Apocrypha

declared to be scripture, and then only by the Catholic Church.

## Significant Quotes From I Maccabees & II Maccabees

The following passages from the apocrypha are important, either because they have played an important role in church history, or because they demonstrate the view, held by the Apocrypha itself, that no prophets were ministering at that time.

### **I Maccabees 4:46**

"And they laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, till there should come a prophet, and give answer concerning them."

### **I Maccabees 9:27**

"And there was a great tribulation in Israel, such as was not since the day, that there was no prophet seen in Israel.

### **I Maccabees 14:41**

"And that the Jews, and their priests, had consented that he should be their prince, and high priest for ever, till there should arise a faithful prophet."

### **II Maccabees 12:39-46**

"And the day following Judas came with his company, to take away the bodies of them that were slain, and to bury them with their kinsmen, in the sepulchres of their fathers. And they found under the coats of the slain some of the donaries of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbiddeth to the Jews: so that all plainly saw, that for this cause they were slain. Then they all blessed the just judgment of the Lord, who had discovered the things that were hidden. And so betaking themselves to prayers, they besought him, that the sin which had been committed might be forgotten. But the most valiant Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves from sin, forasmuch as they saw before their eyes what had happened, because of the sins of those that were slain. And making a gathering, he sent twelve thousand drachms of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection, (For if he had not hoped that they that were slain should rise again, it would have seemed superfluous and vain to pray for the dead,) And because he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness, had great grace laid up for them. It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins."

---

[Return to the Outlines page](#)

[Return to the Xenos home page](#)

[Ask Dennis a question or share a comment.](#)

[Ask Gary a question or share a comment.](#)

Please [contact our Webmaster](#) with comments or questions

For guidelines on using this material see our [Copyright notice](#).



[\*\*The Xenos Web CD is now Available!\*\*](#)