

When people think of the word Cannon, something like this comes to mind...



The English word "*canon*" comes from the Greek word "*κανών*", a word that means “**standard**” or “**measuring stick**”.

I suppose on a battlefield an artillery cannon IS the measuring stick! It’s hard to beat and will find an army’s weakness! But instead of thinking of canon as something dangerous, think of it as helpful. Something like this...



A ruler, marked with universally accepted forms of measurements, inches, millimeters or what have you.

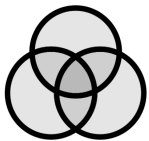
The first Biblical “canon” was the *Muratorian Canon*, compiled in A.D. 170. It included all the New Testament books except Hebrews, James, and 3 John. In A.D. 363, the *Council of Laodicea* agreed that the Old Testament (along with the Apocrypha) and the 27 books of the New Testament were to be read in the churches. Subsequent Church councils upheld the same decision in A.D. 393 and A.D. 397

What "standard" or "measuring stick" was used to determine which books fit the Canon? Early church leaders met in councils. In those councils, they brought what Holy letters they had received and shared them equally. After careful examination, they agreed on guiding principles that would help establish this Biblical system we call the canon.



Ever heard of a cubit? It's a rough measurement, about the size of a grown man's forearm. Good enough for simple construction, but not accurate enough to build a tower or something complex!

The Bible is an enormously complex book. Why wouldn't it be? It was written over thousands of years to more than 40 different authors, all of whom said they heard from God Himself! To compile the books of the Bible there would need to be a serious standard. Principles of measurement everyone could understand and hold to.



The first principal was the principal of **unity**. Not a 'everyone's right, let's just get along' kind of unity. Rather, church fathers **understood God to be a God of unity**. His word would never contradict itself.

To determine if a book was truly inspired by the Holy Spirit, Church forefathers asked:

- 1) Was the author of a book in question an apostle or did they have a close connection with an apostle?
- 2) Is the book being accepted by the body of Christ at large?
- 3) Did the book contain consistency of doctrine and orthodox teaching?
- 4) Did the book bear evidence of high moral and spiritual values that would reflect a work of the Holy Spirit?

While the human process of collecting the books of the Bible was less than perfect, God, in His sovereignty, and despite our ignorance and stubbornness, brought A DIVIDED early church to A UNIFIED recognition of the books He had inspired!

Around 315 AD, **Athenasius**, the Bishop of Alexandria, identified the 27 Books which we recognize today as the canon of New Testament scripture. He did so in a letter to the churches, the St. Athanasius, Festal Letter XXXIX. In the spirit of the Gospel letter of Luke 1:1, Athanasius letter read:

“... it seemed good to me also, having been urged thereto by true brethren, and having learned from the beginning, to set before you the books included in the Canon, and handed down, and accredited as Divine; to the end that anyone who has fallen into error may condemn those who have led him astray; and that he who has continued steadfast in purity may again rejoice, having these things brought to his remembrance.

There are, then, of the Old Testament, twenty-two books in number; for, as I have heard, it is handed down that this is the number of the letters among the Hebrews; their respective order and names being as follows. The first is Genesis, then Exodus, next Leviticus, after that Numbers, and then Deuteronomy. Following these there is Joshua, the son of Nun, then Judges, then Ruth. And again, after these four books of Kings, the first and second being reckoned as one book, and so likewise the third and fourth as one book. And again, the first and second of the Chronicles are reckoned as one book. Again Ezra, the first and second are similarly one book. After these there is the book of Psalms, then the Proverbs, next Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Job follows, then the Prophets, the twelve being reckoned as one book. Then Isaiah, one book, then Jeremiah with Baruch, Lamentations, and the epistle, one book; afterwards, Ezekiel and Daniel, each one book. Thus far constitutes the Old Testament.

Again it is not tedious to speak of the [books] of the New Testament. These are, the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Afterwards, the

Acts of the Apostles and Epistles, seven, viz. of James, one; of Peter, two; of John, three; after these, one of Jude. In addition, there are fourteen Epistles of Paul, written in this order. The first, to the Romans; then two to the Corinthians; after these, to the Galatians; next, to the Ephesians; then to the Philippians; then to the Colossians; after these, two to the Thessalonians, and that to the Hebrews; and again, two to Timothy; one to Titus; and lastly, that to Philemon. And besides, the Revelation of John.

For more than 330 years, the Christian church attempted to settle doctrine and religious practice without agreement on what made up the complete Word of God, or Canon as it came to be known. Without the whole word of God as counsel, incomplete doctrine and understanding threatened to fracture the church. With the conversion of the Roman Emperor and political world leader Constantine, even the politics of the secular world threatened to influence the core beliefs of the Church.

Who was this Athanasius, and what gave him the right to determine which books were to be accepted as Holy Scripture? In June 328, at the age of 30, three years after Nicæa, Athanasius became archbishop of Alexandria. Before that, he wasn't a man of renown or power. His convictions for Holy Scripture, and the passion with which he fought to defend the Holy Trinity made him the standout man, the recognized authority he later became. Athanasius conclusions as to what books would qualify as Canon came from his study and devotion to the whole of God's Word. I'd call him **the "Father of Context"**. Weary from the division caused by an incomplete picture or understanding of the Word, Athanasius studied and collected the holy books from throughout Christendom, then painstakingly put those together, allowing Scripture of interpret Scripture.

The Bible we hold in our hands today was not created by the powerful edict of a king, but by the tireless work of believers looking for unity. It is also important to note, that nearly all of Christendom gladly accepted and together affirmed these findings!



HOW DOES SCRIPTURE ANSWER SCRIPTURE AND WHY IS THAT IMPORTANT?

WHY MIGHT A SCEPTIC SAY THAT SCRIPTURE SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE IS AN AWFUL WAY TO SETTLE AN ISSUE? SOUNDS LIKE CIRCULAR LOGIC. IS IT?

IF YES, WHY?

IF NO, WHY?