

## *Biblical Studies #105 How we got the Bible #3*

Let's briefly look at the Old Testament—39 books written between 1446 BC to around 433 BC. It constitutes the solid foundation upon which the New Testament stands, and points to Christ in its entirety. All of Hebrew scholarship is in agreement as to what constitutes the TANAK, The Torah or (Law); Genesis, through Deuteronomy, Neviim or (Prophets); Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the 12 minor prophets, The Kethubim (writings); Psalms Proverbs, Job, Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Ester, Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah, and Chronicles. This Old Testament Canon has been accepted as the divine Word of God by His people for over twenty-four hundred years. And since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we lack only the book of Esther in having copies of Old Testament texts that range in age from 2100 to 2300 years old.

The Apocrypha: You can learn all you desire about the Apocryphal books by visiting Wikipedia (online), and for some of us, a hard-bound encyclopedia may be necessary. Concordia Publishing House has also produced an excellent study version. There are four different Catholic lists of Apocryphal books: Roman; Eastern; Syrian; and Ethiopian. They are all similar for the most part, varying in size from 15 to 25 books. However, it is worth noting that all of Catholicism considers them to be Deuterocanonical, which means secondary to the other 39 Old Testament books that all of Christianity agrees on.

Trinitarian Christianity and all of biblical scholarship find full agreement on the 27 books that constitute the New Testament, written between 45 and 95 AD. The earliest list is the Muratorian Canon from 150 AD listing 24 books. Origen of Alexandria listed all 27 in 240 AD, and by 397 AD, Eusebius, Athanasius, and the Council of Carthage had all listed the 27 books we call the New Testament.

Now you might ask: Why did it take them so long, some 150 to 300 years to identify these 27 books? Well, that would be a very good question, and here are some very good answers:

- Over half of the New Testament contains letters that were spread all over the Roman Empire. The Gospels were also spread throughout the early church. These obviously took time to be brought together and for their authorship to be verified.

- The “technology” of the day was not conducive to large collections of books; scrolls could only hold one or two books. Scrolls were replaced by what is called a Codex, or “books with pages”, and these did not start being produced until the second and third centuries.

- The first century Christians probably did not see the need for a collection of books because they thought Christ's return would be very soon, but “soon” for us and “soon” for our eternal God are very different.

- Heretical writings existed, like the Gnostic gospels, and other “pseudepigraphal” books—spurious writings falsely attributed to biblical characters or times. These texts were written between 200 BC and 200 AD and were easily identified by the early church as fraudulent because of their clear contradiction to the rest of the canon. But excluding these fraudulent works also took time.

Now many say that centuries of copying to replace old worn-out text would introduce many errors. Well, let's look at all the errors introduced into the book of Isaiah between the Dead Sea Scroll copy (from about 100 BC) and the earliest copy we had available (before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered) known as Codex Leningradensis (1000 AD). I have read many descriptions of the differences introduced between these two texts over that 1100-year period, and here are how they are described: changes in the style that a particular letter is written; changes in the way words are spelled; changes in the way sentences are constructed; and changes in prefixes or suffixes. It seems that over time as the language changed, God's word grew to communicate the same truth. So, while grammar and spelling have changed, God's word has not. Here is an example of the vast difference that 1100 years of copying introduced in Isaiah 53:3. A letter in the Isaiah scroll from 100 BC that is not in the Masoretic text from 1000 AD is a suffix meaning “him”—so this is the great difference that was produced. The reading of the Isaiah scroll is “and despised him,” while the Masoretic text is

“he was despised.” (in 1000 AD) This is one of the greater differences and most are much less, affecting only grammar and spelling.

In Christ,  
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