

A painting depicting three figures in a landscape. On the left, a woman in a dark blue dress and a red shawl walks away from the viewer. In the center, a man in a white robe with a sash and a dark hat walks towards the right. On the right, another man in a brown and gold robe walks towards the right. They are on a dirt path. A large, leafy tree is on the left side of the path. The background shows a hazy, mountainous landscape under a blue sky with light clouds.

Ancient & Ageless

*Understanding the Complexity while
Experiencing the Beauty of Scripture*

Caleb Brown

Ancient & Ageless
Copyright © 2025 Caleb Brown
All rights reserved.

ISBN:

Artwork: *The Road to Emmaus* by Robert Zund

This book or parts thereof may not be reproduced in any form, stored in any retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of the publisher, except as provided by United States of America copyright law.

While the author has made every effort to provide accurate Internet addresses at the time of publication, neither the publisher nor the author assumes any responsibility for errors or for changes that occur after publication.

Of ancient manuscripts

As mentioned, the Bible is a book with many books; however, each was originally an ancient manuscript – meaning it was written by hand on various materials. We will discuss *who* wrote these manuscripts later, but for now, I want to focus on *how* these manuscripts came to be collected together in the library known as Scripture. The early Christians did not simply discover a Bible with every book included; instead, through various meetings, they compiled manuscripts into a biblical canon, which “is the collection of scriptural books that God has given his corporate people.”¹

Before discussing the history and theology of the canonization process, I want to emphasize its significance. First, the canonization process helps eliminate the “gold tablets from heaven”² approach, where believers unquestioningly trust the Bible without any context of its origin. It is far too familiar for people to claim the Bible as “God’s Word” without a proper understanding of their statement. Second, the canonization process helps to protect the quality of the content within the canon because nothing can be added and/or taken away. The canon is *sealed*, for lack of better terms.

For example, you would never purchase an open soup can from the store. Even if the manufacturer found an extra noodle that “fit” with the other material in the can, they would never reopen the can to add anything because the *seal* creates a trustworthy product. The biblical canon is similar to specific manuscripts that have been compiled and sealed together for the church to have a common and trustworthy library.

History of Canonization

Over the first few centuries, the early church held numerous council meetings to maintain a collective set of doctrines for Christianity worldwide. One common topic was deciding which manuscripts to consider inspired and include in the biblical canon. By the 4th century, the church was mostly on the same page, providing a common biblical canon.

The only caveat is that the *Apocrypha* was eventually removed from the biblical canon within the Protestant Church. Martin Luther was the first to separate the Apocrypha as an intertestamental section in 1534, noting its lack of divine inspiration. However, the Apocrypha was officially removed from the King James Bible in 1885. Saint Jerome, who translated Scripture from Greek to Latin, believed the Apocrypha were not books of the canon but books of the church.

Besides the Apocrypha, there was minimal argument over which Old Testament books should be canonized. In fact, the Old Testament was widely accepted before the incarnation of Jesus. Throughout his ministry, Jesus

often referred to passages in the Old Testament as Scripture. For example, [Jesus said] ‘everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”³ In these short verses, Jesus summarizes almost the entire Old Testament *library* and affirms them as Scripture.

On the other hand, the New Testament was widely accepted by the 2nd century after being heavily debated by church leaders. It was easier to agree on the authority of some passages in the New Testament than others. For example, Paul compared Luke’s writings to the Old Testament (1 Timothy 5:18), while Peter acknowledged Paul’s writings as Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16). Meanwhile, the author of Hebrews is unknown, and many scholars question whether Peter and John wrote 2 Peter, 2 John, and 3 John. And to some extent, James seems to contradict Paul’s Epistles. All that to say, after much praying, examining, and debating, these books were considered inspired by God and included in the biblical canon.

Theology of Canonization

Since you know *when* the books were canonized, I want to focus on *why* the manuscripts were considered inspired by God. As mentioned, the leaders of the early church held multiple meetings to discuss which books to include in the biblical canon. While it was certainly not a simple process to discern which manuscripts were inspired by God, they did have criteria that included three primary categories: Alignment, Acceptance, and Authorship.

First, the early church sought *alignment* by asking, “Does it align with the rest of Scripture?” This question was a primary concern for the Apocrypha, as multiple sections contradict the theme of grace in the New Testament. The main idea was: *Does this piece fit with the rest of the puzzle?* As mentioned, the tension between James and Paul was enough to question, but ultimately, the church could see them align together, as *works* will overflow from *grace*.

Second, *acceptance* was important in the canonization process, so the leaders asked, “Was it accepted by the

early church?” Remember, the church started at Pentecost – a couple of months after Jesus’ death and resurrection – which means the final council meetings held to discuss the biblical canon were *hundreds* of years after the church was born in Acts. Now, while this term would be foreign to them, the council had *data* to use from the various communities regarding which manuscripts were being used in their gatherings.

Third, the leaders would debate authorship by asking, “Were the authors recognized as inspired?” As modern readers, we usually trust the writers of Scripture because *they are in the Bible*; however, they did not get there by accident or oversight. Nevertheless, what does it mean for an author to be inspired? The Old Testament was written or edited primarily by prophets who God chose as his mouthpiece. Isaiah describes his inspiration by saying, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.”⁴ On the other hand, the approach to discovering trustworthy writers in the New Testament was similar to an investigation, with the primary question being, “How close were you to the resurrection?” Each New Testament writer was an

eye-witness (or closely related) to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, which established them as inspired by God.