

How Jews and Christians Chose Their Sacred Texts

CANONS OF SCRIPTURE

CANON

- ✗ Reed, measuring stick = ruler
- ✗ A *fixed list* of authoritative writings

THREE STAGES IN CANON DEVELOPMENT

- ✗ Useful
- ✗ Authoritative
- ✗ Canonical

QUESTIONS

- ✖ Why develop a canon?
- ✖ Who decides which books are in and which are out?
- ✖ Whose canon is it?
- ✖ What changes when writings become canonical?

WHY DEVELOP A CANON?

- ✖ Sacred texts provide authoritative basis for faith and practice
- ✖ Authoritative account and interpretation of important history and people
- ✖ Assumes long-term viability of group

WHO DECIDES WHICH BOOKS ARE IN?

- ✗ Authoritative council (Jamnia, Nicea)
- ✗ Authority figure
- ✗ Process of discussion, debate, and practice by people of faith

WHOSE CANON IS IT?

- ✖ Origin stories of founding of the religion
- ✖ Boundaries of canon include some and exclude others
- ✖ When list becomes fixed, those with different lists become separated

WHAT CHANGES WHEN WRITINGS BECOME CANONICAL?

- ✗ Canonization doesn't freeze the text, but it does prevent major alterations of content
- ✗ “Final form” refers to arrangement of units within the text, not the text itself

PRESENT-DAY CANONS OF JUDAISM & CHRISTIANITY

Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	Jewish
<i>Law (Pentateuch)</i>	<i>Law (Pentateuch)</i>	<i>Law (Pentateuch)</i>	<i>Law (Torah)</i>
Genesis	Genesis	Genesis	Genesis
Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	Exodus
Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus
Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers
Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy

PRESENT-DAY CANONS OF JUDAISM & CHRISTIANITY

Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	Jewish
<i>History</i>	<i>History</i>	<i>History</i>	<i>Prophets (Nevi'im)</i>
Joshua	Joshua	Joshua	Joshua
Judges	Judges	Judges	Judges
Ruth	Ruth	Ruth	Samuel
1-2 Samuel	1-2 Samuel	1-2 Samuel	Kings
1-2 Kings	1-2 Kings	1-2 Kings	Isaiah
1-2 Chronicles	1-2 Chronicles	1-2 Chronicles	Jeremiah
Ezra	Ezra	Ezra	Ezekiel
Nehemiah	Nehemiah	Nehemiah	Book of the Twelve
Tobit	1 Esdras	Esther	
Judith	Tobit		
Esther (+ additions)	Judith		
1-2 Maccabees	Esther (+ additions)		
	1-3 Maccabees		

PRESENT-DAY CANONS OF JUDAISM & CHRISTIANITY

Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	Jewish
<i>Poetry</i>	<i>Poetry</i>	<i>Poetry</i>	<i>Writings (Ketuvim)</i>
Job	Job	Job	Psalms
Psalms	Psalms (+ Ps 151)	Psalms	Proverbs
Proverbs	Proverbs	Proverbs	Job
Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes	Song of Songs
Song of Songs	Song of Songs	Song of Songs	Ruth
Wisdom of Solomon	Wisdom of Solomon		Lamentations
Ecclesiasticus	Ecclesiasticus		Ecclesiastes
	Prayer of Manasseh		Esther
			Daniel
			Ezra-Nehemiah
			Chronicles

PRESENT-DAY CANONS OF JUDAISM & CHRISTIANITY

Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	
<i>Major Prophets</i>	<i>Major Prophets</i>	<i>Major Prophets</i>	
Isaiah	Isaiah	Isaiah	
Jeremiah	Jeremiah	Jeremiah	
Lamentations	Lamentations	Lamentations	
Baruch	Baruch	Ezekiel	
Ezekiel	Ezekiel	Daniel	
Daniel (+ additions)	Daniel (+ additions)		

PRESENT-DAY CANONS OF JUDAISM & CHRISTIANITY

Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	Jewish
<i>Minor Prophets</i>	<i>Minor Prophets</i>	<i>Minor Prophets</i>	
Hosea	Hosea	Hosea	
Joel	Joel	Joel	
Amos	Amos	Amos	
Obadiah	Obadiah	Obadiah	
Jonah	Jonah	Jonah	
Micah	Micah	Micah	
Nahum	Nahum	Nahum	
Habakkuk	Habakkuk	Habakkuk	
Zephaniah	Zephaniah	Zephaniah	
Haggai	Haggai	Haggai	
Zechariah	Zechariah	Zechariah	
Malachi	Malachi	Malachi	

THE CANON OF THE HEBREW BIBLE/OLD TESTAMENT

THE OLD TESTAMENT BY ANY OTHER NAME

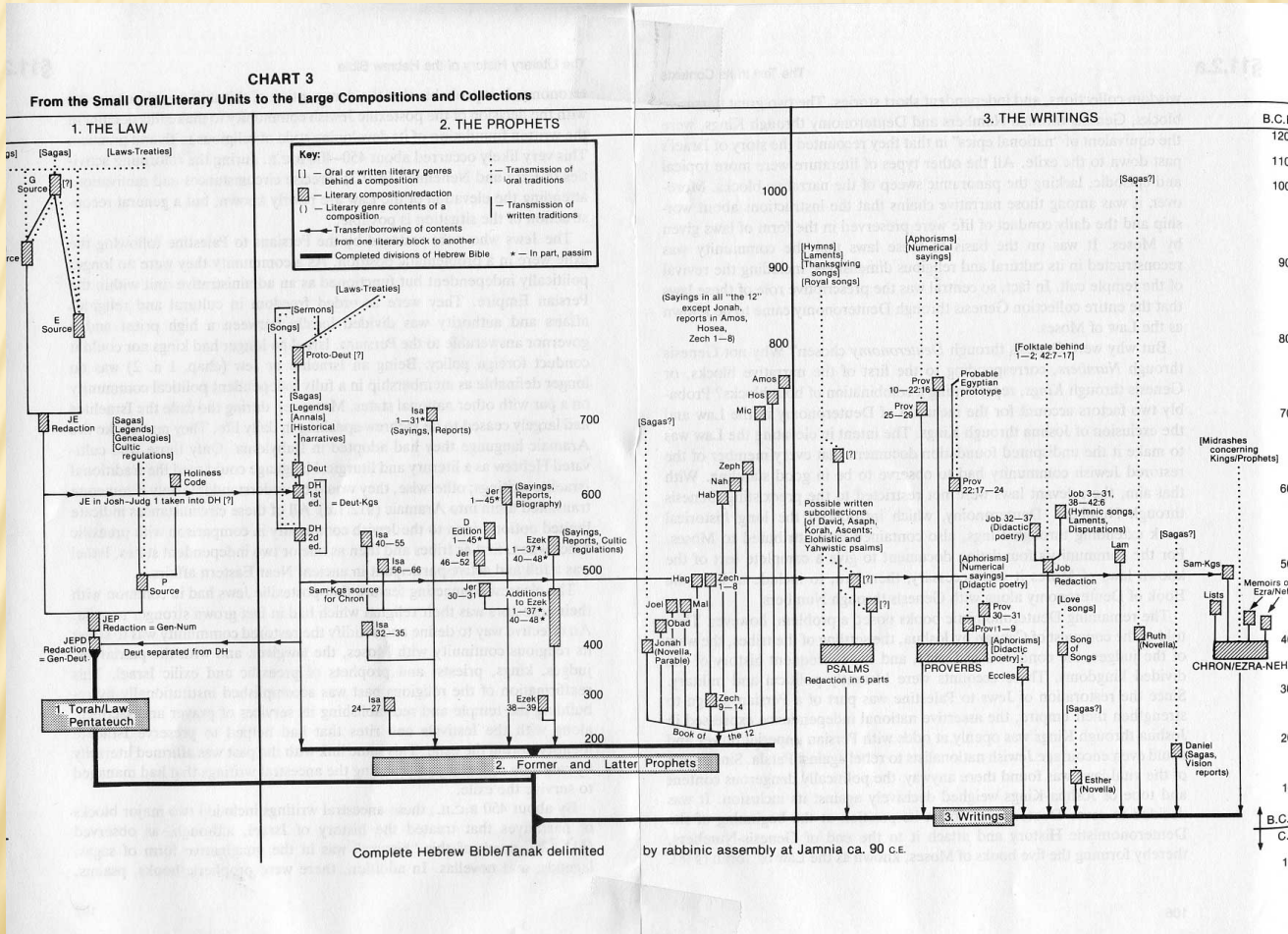
- ✖ Old Testament (Christian, assumes NT)
- ✖ Tanakh (Jewish, assumes Jewish order)
- ✖ Hebrew Bible (implies Jewish/Protestant canon)
- ✖ First Testament (neutral, scholarly circles)

Textual, theological, & canonical implications

COMPOSITION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

- ✖ Written over period of about 1000 years
- ✖ Earliest parts: Song of Deborah & Song of Moses
- ✖ Latest part: Daniel
- ✖ Languages: mostly Hebrew, some Aramaic (Dan 2:4b-7:28; Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26; Jer 10:11)

COMPOSITION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT



PENTATEUCH/TORAH

- ✗ Originally assembled from three major strands (JE preexilic, P postexilic), plus smaller contributions
- ✗ Another preexilic strand (D) added in postexilic period, completing Pentateuch about 400 BCE
- ✗ Divided into 5 books
- ✗ Accepted as canonical by Jews shortly after 400
- ✗ LXX translated in 3rd C BCE, with just Pentateuch
- ✗ Samaritans split from Jews in 5th C, just accept Pentateuch

FORMER & LATTER PROPHETS

- ✗ Deuteronomistic History
- ✗ Books named after individual prophets
- ✗ Larger prophetic books grew over time with additional material added (Isa, Jer, Ezek, Zech)
- ✗ Minor prophets gathered into single book
- ✗ All combined before 200 BCE & accepted as canonical shortly thereafter
- ✗ Prolog to Sirach (117 BCE) speaks of Law, Prophets, other books
- ✗ These books and others translated into Greek

WRITINGS

- ✘ Most other books postexilic, though many Psalms & Proverbs preexilic
- ✘ Jews in Judah, Babylonia, & Egypt read many other books, including Sirach, Wisdom, Tobit, Judith, books of Maccabees, 1 Esdras
- ✘ Limits of Writings section not established until after split with Christianity, maybe 2nd or 3rd C CE
- ✘ Last books to gain universal acceptance were Song & Esther, which don't contain "God"
- ✘ Jesus spoke of "Law and Prophets"
- ✘ All these books translated into, or written in, Greek

BOOKS LEFT OUT OF THE JEWISH CANON

- ✘ Books like Tobit and Judith left out of Jewish canon, but continued to be read as edifying tales
- ✘ Festival of Hannukah celebrated in remembrance of rededication of Temple, described in 1 Maccabees

CHRISTIAN CANON OF OLD TESTAMENT

- ✘ After 1st C CE, few Christians could read Hebrew, so most accepted without reservation all the books accepted as authoritative by Jews and available in Greek, including many ultimately rejected from Jewish canon
- ✘ 1 Esdras, Wisdom, Sirach, Judith, Tobit, Baruch & Epistle of Jeremiah, 1-4 Maccabees
- ✘ Longer versions of Daniel & Esther
- ✘ Sometimes other books, such as Psalms of Solomon, Enoch, 2 Esdras, Jubilees

MARTIN LUTHER'S CANON AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC REACTION

- ✘ Martin Luther declared, for theological reasons, that the church should reject from the OT those books not found in the Jewish canon as fully authoritative, moving them to a separate section called Apocrypha
- ✘ RCC responded at Council of Trent (1546) that the Deuterocanonical books were equally authoritative as the books accepted by Jews

THE CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

COMPOSITION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

- ✗ Earliest books in the New Testament are letters of Paul (written between 51 and 63)
- ✗ Gospels written between 70 and 95
- ✗ Latest book probably 2 Peter, written around 125

MARCION: THE FIRST CANON

- ✗ Marcion, a Christian from Asia Minor who lived in Rome for a time, rejected the Old Testament as the product of an inferior god (mid-2nd C)
- ✗ Marcion produced the first Christian canon, consisting of an edited copy of Luke and ten letters of Paul (omitting the Pastoral Epistles, and substituting 3 Corinthians for Philemon)

MONTANUS: CONTINUING REVELATION

- ✘ Montanus, another Christian from Asia Minor, valued the Old Testament, especially the writings of the prophets (mid 2nd C)
- ✘ Montanus also accepted many early Christian writings, such as the four gospels and the letters of Paul
- ✘ Montanus believed the Holy Spirit spoke through him and his two female associates, Priscilla & Maximilla, so that their words carried the authority of scripture

REACTIONS TO MARCION AND MONTANUS

- ✘ Christians in the Great Church (proto-orthodox) rejected Marcion's canon as too restricted
- ✘ Christians in the Great Church rejected Montanus's "canon" as too broad
- ✘ Various Christians started to create lists of authoritative books and share them with other Christians (late 2nd C)

MURATORIAN FRAGMENT

- ✕ Earliest canon list, about 170
- ✕ (Matt, Mark), Luke, John, Acts, 13 Pauline epistles, 1 John, 2 John(?), Jude, Rev, Apocalypse of Peter (disputed), Wisdom of Solomon—rejects Shepherd of Hermas as too recent

STATE OF THE NT CANON ABOUT 220 (OUTSIDE SYRIA)

- ✗ Accepted: 4 gospels, Acts, 13 Pauline epistles, 1 Pet, 1 John, 2 John(?), Jude
- ✗ Disputed: Heb, Rev, Apocalypse of Peter
- ✗ Unknown: James, 2 Pet, 3 John(?)

CRITERIA FOR CANONICITY

- ✕ Apostolicity
- ✕ Antiquity
- ✕ Orthodoxy
- ✕ Spiritual Value
- ✕ Acceptance by the Churches

DEVELOPMENT OF THE NT CANON AFTER 220

✕ Undisputed:

- + Matt, Mark, Luke, John
- + Acts
- + 13 Pauline epistles

STATE OF THE CANON ABOUT 325

- ✕ E Church firmly accepted 21 books:
 - + 4 gospels, Acts, 13 Pauline epistles, Heb, 1 John, 1 Pet—other 6 widely used & accepted
- ✕ W Church firmly accepted 24 books:
 - + 4 gospels, Acts, 13 Pauline epistles, 1-2 Pet, 1-3 John, Rev—other 3 disputed

TOWARD THE MODERN NT CANON

- ✘ Athanasius of Alexandria (367) first to list exact 27 books of modern NT canon
- ✘ Many in E & W followed suit, but canon still not finally decided (cf. previous slide)
- ✘ Books such as 1-2 Clement, Barnabas, Apocalypse of Peter, and Hermas still lingered on the fringes of authority in some places through the 4th and 5th centuries

THE MODERN NT CANON

- ✘ By Council of Chalcedon (451), 26 books firmly established in E, and Rev accepted by many—W Church accepted 27 books by this time
- ✘ Both E & W churches accepted 27 books by 600