



Session 2

Canon and Confidence

– Which Books and Why

Series Overview

- The series aims to show that the Bible is a divinely guided story of revelation, writing, and faithful preservation.
- Key themes include miraculous preservation, reliability of manuscript evidence, and understanding the canon—why certain books are included or excluded.

Session 2 Focus: Canon and Confidence

- Explores which books are in the Bible and why.
- Addresses confusion about different versions of the Bible, emphasizing gratitude for how the canon was guided

Transmission and Preservation

- The message of the Scriptures has been faithfully passed down: “What we received we passed on to you” (1 Corinthians 15:3).
- Transmission involved copying, sharing, and translating the texts.

Understanding the Canon

- The Hebrew foundation was recognized by Jesus (Luke 24:44).
- Apostolic, orthodox, and universal acceptance shaped the New Testament canon.
- Early acceptance focused on the four Gospels and Paul’s letters
- Early believers already knew which writings had apostolic authority by the **1st and early 2nd centuries**.
- Criteria used by the early church (not invented later):
 - **Apostolic connection** (written by an apostle or close companion).
 - **Orthodoxy** (consistent with the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles).
 - **Universal use** across churches.
 - **Spiritual impact** (recognized as “God-breathed”).

Canon **recognized**, not “created,” at councils.

Manuscript Evidence

- Dead Sea Scrolls confirm Old Testament reliability.

- Over 5,800 Greek New Testament manuscripts (1st–4th century) exist, including Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Alexandrian, etc.
- Early translations (Syriac, Coptic, Latin) affirm accuracy.
- No other ancient book is so widely preserved or verified.

The Apocrypha Question

- ‘Apocrypha’ refers to Jewish writings (400–100 BC) valued but not in the Hebrew canon.
- Catholic and Orthodox churches retained these due to Septuagint usage.
- Protestants followed the Hebrew canon.
- The difference is about tradition, not corruption.

Ethiopian Orthodox Canon

- Broader canon with unique Old Testament and New Testament texts.
- Includes books like Jubilees, 1 Enoch, Meqabyan, and others.
- Canon finalized over centuries, reflecting ancient liturgical tradition.

Comparison of Canons

- Ethiopian Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, and Western (Catholic & Protestant) canons differ in Old Testament books and inclusion of apocryphal texts.
- Formation periods and views of canon vary, but all agree on the same New Testament.

Key Takeaways

- Differences in canon are historical, not evidence of corruption.
- All Christians agree on the central truths and authority of Scripture.
- The diversity of canons reflects the richness of early Christian traditions.

Reflection

- Encourages considering why God allowed diversity in history and language yet preserved the same message.
- Key verse: John 17:17 – “Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth.”

Ethiopian Orthodox vs. Eastern Orthodox vs. Western Canons

Category	Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo	Eastern Orthodox	Western Canon (Roman Catholic & Protestant)
Old Testament Books	~46–54 universally recognized, plus numerous additional books unique to Ethiopian tradition	49 OT books (includes Deuterocanon)	39 (Protestant); 46 (Catholic, includes Deuterocanon)
Deuterocanonical / Apocryphal	Includes books like Jubilees, 1 Enoch, 1–3 Meqabyan (distinct from Maccabees), Joseph ben Gorion (Pseudo-Josephus)	Includes Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, 1–4 Maccabees, Additions to Esther and Daniel	Catholics include Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, 1–2 Maccabees; Protestants exclude all Deuterocanicals.
Unique Old Testament Texts	Jubilees, 1 Enoch, 1–3 Meqabyan, Paralipomena of Jeremiah, Joseph ben Gorion, Ezra Sutuel, Apocalypse of Ezra	3 & 4 Maccabees, Psalm 151, Prayer of Manasseh	–
Psalms	151 Psalms + <i>additional local psalms</i> (e.g., Psalm 151 recognized)	151 Psalms (including Psalm 151)	150 Psalms
New Testament Books	35 books total (includes additional texts such as 1 Clement, Shepherd of Hermas, Sinodos, Clementine Epistles, Didascalia)	27 books (same as standard NT)	27 books (standard NT)
Unique New Testament Texts	Sinodos (church order), Book of the Covenant, Didascalia, 1 Clement, Shepherd of Hermas	–	–

Category	Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo	Eastern Orthodox	Western Canon (Roman Catholic & Protestant)
Canonical Language / Transmission	Ancient Ge'ez manuscripts; canon shaped by Jewish-Christian heritage and early Alexandrian influence	Greek Septuagint as OT base; strong Patristic influence	Hebrew Masoretic Text (OT); Latin Vulgate (Catholic) or original-language sources (Protestant Reformation)
Formation Period	Finalized over centuries; traditional acceptance by 5th–6th c. with expansions later	Councils of Laodicea (363), Hippo (393), Carthage (397); local usage refined later	Councils of Carthage (397), Trent (1546, Catholic); Reformers standardized 39+27 (Protestant)
View of Canon	Dynamic, broader canon reflecting ancient liturgical and theological tradition	Stable but includes Septuagintal texts beyond the Jewish Tanakh	Fixed and “closed” canon emphasizing apostolic authority and Jewish Scriptures

Observations & Theological Implications

- **Ethiopian Canon:** Broadest of all Christian canons, preserving books tied to early Jewish-Christian traditions. Its inclusions (e.g., Enoch, Jubilees) provide unique insights into 2nd Temple Judaism and early Christian theology.
- **Eastern Orthodox Canon:** Sits between Ethiopian and Western canons, retaining Septuagint texts and some early writings not in Western lists (e.g., 3 & 4 Maccabees, Psalm 151).
- **Western Canon:** More narrowly defined, emphasizing texts with widespread apostolic recognition and early church consensus. **The Protestant canon, primarily, reflects a deliberate return to the Hebrew Bible for the Old Testament.**

Reflection

- ❖ The differences in canon reveal the diversity of early Christian scriptural traditions.
- ❖ The Ethiopian Church's broader canon reflects a more **ancient, liturgically rooted** approach.
- ❖ The Western canon emphasizes **doctrinal clarity and historical consensus**.
- ❖ **Yet all three traditions affirm the same central truths of the Christian faith — the authority of Scripture and the centrality of Jesus Christ.**