

## Part 4: Canonicity

*Canonicity* refers to the character of a book that qualifies it for inclusion in the authoritative list of books comprising the Scriptures.

**Canon** is derived from a Greek word meaning “rule” or “measurement” — a “straight rod” (see Ezekiel 42:16 for an example). *Canon* refers to the set of writings regarded as authentic and definitive for Scripture’s contents. *Canonicity* has the same basic meaning as the thought involved in talking about “*the yardstick* by which we determine what belongs in the Bible.”

### ■ Determining the Canon of Scripture

- Nowhere in Scripture is there any suggestion that any standard outside of Scripture itself should be used to judge the canon.
- Deciding which books to include in the Bible should not be a human decision. No church or church council can create or validate the canon of Scripture — they merely give assent to it.
- The testimony of the Holy Spirit Himself is the only acceptable standard:
  - 1 Corinthians 2:4–11 – the Holy Spirit is the persuasive power behind the words of Scripture.
  - 1 Thessalonians 1:5 – the Holy Spirit was the force behind the words of the apostles.
  - Romans 8:15–16 – the Holy Spirit bears witness with (and to) our spirit with regard to the recognition of spiritual truth.
  - Ephesians 2:20 – the testimony of the Spirit through His Word is superior to the testimony of the church because the church was established upon the foundation of the Word.

The only true test of canonicity is the testimony of God the Holy Spirit to the authority of His own Word.”

Gleason Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, updated and revised edition (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 85

Canonicity is determined by God. A book is not inspired because men make it canonical; it is canonical because God inspired it. . . . Canonicity is *determined* or established authoritatively by God; it is merely *discovered* by man.

Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, revised and expanded edition (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 221

## ■ Canonical Books

### ➤ Old Testament

- There are 39 books in the Protestant Old Testament. In 1546 at the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church added 14 more books to their canon — we know them as the *apocrypha* but they prefer to call them the *deuterocanon* (“second canon”).
- The Hebrew name for the Old Testament is **Tanakh**, an acronym created from the first letters in the Hebrew names for the Old Testament’s three divisions:
  - **T** = **T**orah (*Law*: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) – see Deuteronomy 31:24–26
  - **N** = **N**evi’im (*Prophets*: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, 12 Minor Prophets) – see 1 Samuel 10:25 and Daniel 9:2
  - **K** = **K**etuvim (*Writings*: Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles) – see 1 Chronicles 29:29

### ➤ New Testament

- There are 27 books in the New Testament.
- Tertullian (ca. A.D. 200) was the first to use the name “New Testament” of that portion of Scripture.
- See 2 Peter 3:16–17.
- Compare 1 Timothy 5:18, Deuteronomy 25:4, and Luke 10:7.  
**What does this comparison reveal to us about the Scriptures in New Testament times?**

## ■ Early Manuscripts and Translations

- Old Testament (original language: Hebrew, except for the following portions in Aramaic: Daniel 2:4–7:28; Ezra 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26; and Jeremiah 10:11).
  - **Samaritan Pentateuch (400 B.C.):** A Hebrew dialect was used to translate Genesis through Deuteronomy for use among the Samaritans. They accepted only those five books as Scripture. The Samaritan sect began after the Assyrians captured the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. The Samaritans set up their own temple on Mt. Gerizim near Shechem (see John 4:20).

- **Dead Sea Scrolls (300 B.C.-A.D. 70):** Various manuscripts have been discovered in a number of locations around the Dead Sea. The most famous came to light in 1947. The locations include Qumran, Wadi Muraba‘at, Nahal Hever, and Masada. The vast majority of these Hebrew manuscripts support the same Old Testament text upon which our English Bibles are based.
  
  - **Septuagint (250 B.C.):** A Greek translation of the Old Testament produced by Jews in Alexandria, Egypt. Most of the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament were taken from this translation. For the first 400 years of the Christian Church the Septuagint was the authorized version of Scripture.
  
  - **Latin Vulgate (405 A.D.):** Jerome requested permission from Pope Damasus to produce a Latin translation of the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew rather than from the Greek Septuagint. During the Reformation the Roman Catholic Church revised Jerome’s translation on the basis of Old Latin texts.
- New Testament (original language: Greek)
- There are over 5000 different ancient Greek manuscripts of all or parts of the New Testament.
  - The oldest existing New Testament include some papyrus manuscripts discovered in Egypt mainly in the past century. They date from as early as A.D. 125. Their contents are limited (e.g., the oldest has only a small portion of John 18, another has 2/3 of the Gospel of John). All the books of the New Testament are represented among the papyrus manuscripts. Other ancient manuscripts include books (codexes) bound together with the Septuagint: Codex Vaticanus (325-350 A.D.), Codex Sinaiticus (375-400 A.D.), and Codex Alexandrinus (450 A.D.).
  
  - **Syriac Peshitta (A.D. 125-400):** The Peshitta was the first translation of both Old and New Testaments into a non-biblical language – Syriac (closely related to biblical Aramaic). Both the Syrian Orthodox Church and the group calling themselves Assyrians still use this version today.

## Part 5: Preservation

*God sovereignly **preserves** the words and concepts of the Scriptures permanently in heaven within His own perfect mind. God's people have also been given the responsibility to preserve the written form of God's Word on earth.*

### ■ Divine Preservation

➤ Psalm 119:89 – in heaven, forever.

➤ Matthew 5:18

### ■ Human Preservation

➤ Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32

➤ Proverbs 30:5–6

➤ Jeremiah 26:2

➤ Revelation 22:18–19

### ■ Biblical Illustrations of Preservation

➤ 1 Samuel 13:1 – A few numbers missing for at least 2300 years:  
▪ “Saul was ... years old when he began to reign, and he reigned ... and two years over Israel” (English Standard Version).

➤ 2 Kings 22:1–13 – All or part of the first five books of the Old Testament were misplaced for about 50 years.

➤ Jeremiah 36:1–37 – King Jehoiakim destroyed the original prophecies of Jeremiah.

➤ 1 Corinthians 11:24 – “Broken” cannot be correct when compared with John 19:36; Matthew 26:26; and Luke 22:19.

### ■ Preservation by means of the Clarity of Scripture

➤ God's Word is clear because it is His word.

➤ God commands us to read and obey His Word because we can understand it.

***Illumination** is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the mind and heart of believers allowing them to understand the Scriptures.*

Why is it that some do not seem to be able to understand what the Bible says?

- Natural Blindness (1 Corinthians 2:14)
- Satanic Blindness (2 Corinthians 4:3–4)
- Carnal Blindness (1 Corinthians 3:1–2)
- Judicial Blindness (Romans 11)

Century follows century — There it stands.  
Empires rise and fall and are forgotten — There it stands.  
Atheists rail against it — There it stands.  
Kings are crowned and uncrowned — There it stands.  
Despised and torn to pieces — There it stands.  
Storms of hate swirl about it — There it stands.  
The flames are kindled about it — There it stands.  
Higher critics deny its claims to inspiration — There it stands.  
Radicalism raves and rants against it — There it stands.  
Infidels predict its abandonment — There it stands.  
Modernism tries to explain it away — There it stands.  
The arrows of hate are discharged against it — There it stands.

— A. Z. C.

### THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE

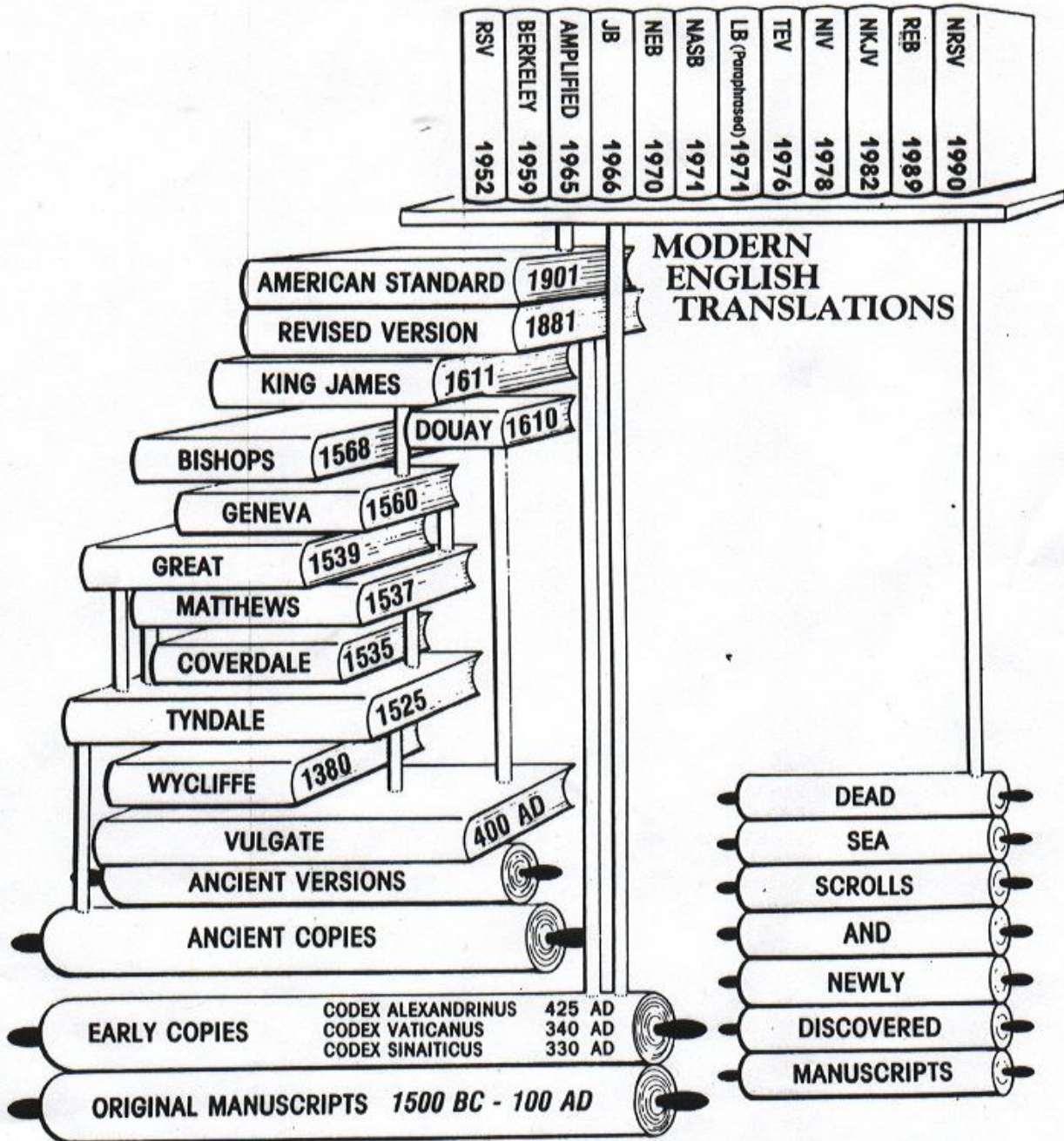


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