

3. Concerning the Bible

A. PBCC Statement

The original writings of both Old and New Testaments were inspired by God by means of the Holy Spirit, who chose the words employed. These writings were without error and are of supreme and final authority in the lives of believers in any age. The Bible says everything God intended to say to mankind regarding redemption.

[1 Cor 2:12-13; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21]

¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (1 Cor 2:12-13)

¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16-17)

²⁰knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. ²¹For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet 1:20-21)

I. The Canon

Scripture (Lat. *scriptura*, Gk *graphē*, a writing), the Bible (Gk *biblia*, books < *bublos* papyrus), is understood to be the Word of God. The Bible is canonical (Gk *kanōn*, rule, measure, standard), recognized as authoritative by God’s people. Jews recognize one canon, the Hebrew Bible. Christians recognize two canons, Old Testament and New Testament. The OT canon was inherited from the Jews. The NT canon was decided by the Church. In both cases, the community of faith considered that it was formalizing the canon given it by God.

A. The Old Testament Canon

The Jewish canon contains 24 books in three sections: *Torah* (Law, Instruction), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), *Ketuvim* (Writings) > acronym *Tanakh* (TaNaKh).

Law (<i>Torah</i>)	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
Prophets (<i>Nevi'im</i>)	Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings
	Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel The Book of the Twelve: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
Writings (<i>Ketuvim</i>)	Psalms, Job, Proverbs, <i>Megillot/Scrolls</i> : Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther Daniel, Ezra–Nehemiah, Chronicles

The Twelve = 1 book. The *Megillot/Scrolls* = 5 books.

The canon was fixed mid-2nd century BC.

The English Bible follows the arrangement of the Septuagint:

- 39 books (The Twelve as 12 separate books; Samuel, Kings, Chronicles each divided into two; Ezra–Nehemiah split apart).
- Ruth, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles moved for a better historical sequence.
- Usually treated in four sections:

Pentateuch	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
Historical Books	Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther
Wisdom Books	Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon
Prophets	Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah (& Lamentations), Ezekiel, Daniel Minor Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

B. The New Testament Canon

27 books:

4 Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

Acts of the Apostles

Letters/Epistles (21):

Pauline Epistles (13): Romans, 1+2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1+2 Thessalonians, Philemon, 1+2 Timothy, Titus

[subdivisions: 4 Prison Epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon;
3 Pastoral Epistles: 1, 2 Timothy, Titus]

Hebrews

General/Catholic Epistles (7): James, 1+2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John, Jude

Revelation

1. Development of the NT Canon

- Peter considered Paul's letters to be in the same category as "the other Scriptures" (i.e. OT; 2 Pet 3:15-16).
- **Marcion** (ca. 85-ca. 160): distinguished OT god (jealous, warlike tribal deity of Jews) from NT God (universal God of love and compassion; Father of Jesus Christ); no continuity between Judaism and Christianity. Issued the first canon (ca. 140): *Evangelikon* (based on Luke); *Apostolikon* (10 Pauline letters; minus the Pastorals), both with objectionable parts removed. Church declared him heretical; began to discuss what should be in canon.
- **Diatessaron**, a harmony of the four gospels made by Tatian ca. 170, shows that the church accepted these four gospels as equal, while rejecting all others. But it is the four gospels not the harmony which are canonical.
- **Muratorian Canon**, ca. 170 (Latin copy of Gk original): omits Hebrews, James, 1+2 Peter, 3 John.
- **Eusebius**, *Church History*, ca. 324: Universally recognized: 4 Gospels, Acts, Letters of Paul (including Hebrews), 1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation. Admitted by majority: James, 2 Peter, 2+3 John, Jude.
- **Athanasius**, Bishop of Alexandria, in his Easter Letter, 367, lists 27 books.
- **Council of Carthage** (397) defined 27 books as the canonical Scriptures.

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C. The Apocrypha

Gk *apokryphos*. < *apo-* away + *kryptō* hide.

Tobit, Judith, Additions to the Book of Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, 1, 2 Maccabees, 1 Esdras, Prayer of Manasseh, 2 Esdras.

Included in the Septuagint, except 2 Esdras, but never included in Hebrew canon.

Included in Old Latin translations (based on LXX), including 2 Esdras; hence used by Church Fathers.

In preparing the Vulgate, Jerome used Hebrew texts and classified Apocrypha as secondary.

Augustine considered Apocrypha of equal authority to Scripture.

Council of Trent (1546) decreed Apocrypha to be canonical, except Prayer of Manasseh, 1+2 Esdras.

Catholic Church recognizes two categories of canonical books:

- protocanonical: books recognized as canonical from the beginning
- deuterocanonical: books later recognized as canonical

The Protestant Church has never accepted the Apocrypha, while often printing it between OT and NT.

The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of Scripture, and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made us of, than other human writings. (WCF 1.3)

D. Other Gospels

Infancy Gospels

Thomas, Judas

The Protestant Canon OT + NT

The Catholic Canon OT + NT + 12 Deuterocanonical Books

The Orthodox Canon OT + NT + 12 Deuterocanonical Books + all or some of 1, 2 Esdras, Psalm 151, Prayer of Manasseh, 3 Maccabees

II. The Text

We don't have the original writings.

A. The OT Text

The Hebrew Bible/OT is written in Hebrew except for three sections written in Aramaic (Dan 2:4b–7:28; Ezra 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26). The consonantal text (proto-MT) was fixed ca. AD 100.

1. The Masoretic Text (MT)

After the fixing of the text, scribes took great care to ensure the exact text was copied. The major center for this work was Tiberias; the text transmitted is called the Masoretic Text (MT). The original consonantal text presumed to lie behind MT is called the proto-MT.

- **Leningrad Codex** (*Leningradensis* L): 1008, currently in the Public Library of St Petersburg. The oldest complete manuscript. The basis for modern Hebrew Bibles.
- **Aleppo Codex**: ca. 935. Kept intact in a Jewish synagogue in Aleppo until 1947. A quarter is now missing. In the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

2. The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS)

The first scroll was discovered in a cave at Qumran, by the Dead Sea, in 1947. Many MSS have been recovered from about a dozen caves. The MSS date to 150 BC – AD 50. They include every book except Esther. They show that the MT is remarkably accurate.

3. Septuagint (LXX)

A translation into Greek made in Alexandria, 250-150 BC. Tradition says it was done by 72 translators. The oldest surviving codices are Vaticanus (4th cent), Sinaiticus (4th cent), Alexandrinus (5th cent), all Greek Bibles of OT + NT.

B. The NT Text

For 1000 years the Western Church used the Vulgate, Jerome's translation of the Bible. Knowledge of the Hebrew and Greek texts disappeared.

Erasmus: compiled a Greek NT from a half-dozen late Byzantine texts, printed ca. 1525. Textus Receptus (TR, Received Text), used for translation, including the English translations of the 16th century, later standardized into the KJV.

Westcott & Hort: The New Testament in the Original Greek (1881), argued that early MSS more closely approximated the original text than did TR.

Three important early near-complete MSS of NT:

- *Vaticanus* (B, 320-350): entire OT, most of NT (missing Pastoral Epistles, Heb 9:15-Rev). In the Vatican Library.
- *Sinaiticus* (Ⲛ 330-360): 50% of OT, entire NT. Discovered by Tischendorf at St Catherine's Monastery, Mt Sinai, 1844, 1853; donated to Czar 1859; bought by UK from Soviet Union in 1933. In British Library.
- *Alexandrinus* (A, 400-440): nearly-complete OT, entire NT. Donated by Patriarch in Constantinople to King Charles I of England 1627, donated to British Museum 1757. In British Library.

Since Westcott-Hort, many other fragments have been discovered.

p52 (ⲓ⁵², ca. 125): papyrus fragment containing a few verses of John 18. Discovered in Egypt, acquired by John Rylands Library, Manchester, 1920. The earliest fragment of the NT.

The Greek NT used today by scholars is an eclectic text, compiled from numerous MSS. There are two versions: Nestle-Aland (28th ed, NA28), United Bible Society (5th ed, UBS5) with identical texts.

Conclusion: though we do not have the "original writings" we can have great confidence in the texts we do have. The Bible is far better attested than any other ancient text.

C. Translations

III. The Authority of the Bible

- **inspiration:** the qualification for canonicity is recognition by the community of faith that a book is God's word, inspired by him. The idea of inspiration comes from 2 Tim 3:16: "All Scripture is breathed out by God (*theopneustos*)."

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- verbal/plenary inspiration: the full (plenary) inspiration of every word of Scripture, not just that God inspired the authors who then wrote down human words.
- **infallibility**: Scripture is fully trustworthy
- **inerrancy**: Scripture is without error in any respect, including history, science, geography, etc. Affirmed by Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (International Council on Biblical Inerrancy).

A. Is Scripture the Sole Authority?

- Catholic: Scripture as officially interpreted by the Church (*magisterium*).
- Protestant: the Reformers returned *ad fontem* (to the source), returning to Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*). Technically the confessions are human approximations to divine Scripture, and therefore are secondary.

B. Tradition



Tradition is received from the previous generation, carefully guarded, then passed on to the next generation.

- Orthodox: Tradition was fixed by the Church Fathers, especially the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa) and John Chrysostom. The Orthodox churches preserve this Tradition unchanged.
- Catholic: Tradition continues to expand, as decreed by the magisterial authority of the Church.
- Protestant: the Reformation rejected Tradition, returning to the source (Scripture); in practice, Protestant churches generate many traditions.

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral

John Wesley: scripture, tradition, reason, experience.

C. Attitudes to Scripture

Bruce Waltke classifies five attitudes to Scripture:¹

1. Liberal theologians stand *above* the Bible: as heirs of the Enlightenment they put reason above revelation, and read with scepticism. Confidence in human reason.
2. Neoorthodox theologians stand *before* the Bible: as they proclaim the Biblical witness to Jesus Christ, this becomes the word of God to those who hear. Confidence in my response.
3. Traditionalists place Traditions and Confessions *alongside* the Bible: for both Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, the Church is the authoritative custodian and interpreter of God's Word, and the guardian of Tradition. Protestant churches also have confessions and many traditions which often are treated with at least as much deference as Scripture, even if this is usually denied.

1. Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 77.

Confidence in the confession.

4. Fundamentalists stand *on* the Bible, usually convinced of its “plain truth.” Confidence in my understanding.
5. Evangelicals stand *under* the Bible, submitting themselves to the Bible’s unique authority. Confidence in the text.

IV. Understanding the Bible

Perspicuity of Scripture:

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them. (WCF 1.7)

Scripture is like a river...broad and deep, shallow enough here for the lamb to go wading, but deep enough there for the elephant to swim. (Gregory the Great, *Moralia on Job* 4)

A. A Hermeneutic for Today

N.T. Wright suggests a “five-act hermeneutic”:

Suppose there exists a Shakespearean play, most of whose fifth act has been lost. The first four acts provide, let us suppose, such a remarkable wealth of characterization, such a crescendo of excitement within the plot, that it is generally agreed that the play ought to be staged... [G]ive the key parts to highly trained, sensitive and experienced Shakespearian actors, who would immerse themselves in the first four acts, and in the language and culture of Shakespeare and his time, *and who would then be told to work out a fifth act for themselves...*

[The] ‘authority’ of the first four acts...would consist in the fact of an as yet unfinished drama, containing its own impetus and forward movement, which demanded to be concluded in an appropriate manner. It would require of the actors a free and responsible entering in to the story as it stood, in order first to understand how the threads could appropriately be drawn together and then to put that understanding into effect by speaking and acting with both innovation and consistency.²

Wright’s first four acts are Creation, Fall, Israel, Jesus. The NT forms the first scene of Act 5, with hints (Rom 8, 1 Cor 15, Rev) of how the play is supposed to end. “The church would then live under the ‘authority’ of the extant story.” Kevin Vanhoozer proposes a slight modification to the five acts of the *theodrama*: creation (ending in the fall), election of Israel, Christ, Pentecost and the church, consummation. These match the five acts of my hermeneutic as expressed in the PBCC window.

On my dramatic reckoning, the church does not have to work out the ending so much as to live in its light. The essential thing is to play the right act. The church is no longer in Act 2, under the law, nor in Act 3, in

2. N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 140. Wright first published this idea in “How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?” *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991) 7-32, based on The Laing Lecture 1989 and The Griffith Thomas Lecture 1989. Wright develops these ideas in *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005).

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which case it would have to do the work of Christ. Nor is it already in Act 5, as some in the first-century church at Thessalonica with an over-realized eschatology mistakenly thought. No, the church is in Act 4, an in-between the first and second comings of Christ time, marked by the firstfruits of the end time but not yet at the end.³

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. (Collect for the Second Sunday of Advent, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1662)⁴

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3. Kevin Vanhoozer, in Gary T. Meadors, ed., *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*, Counterpoints (HarperCollins, 2009).
 4. See Bernard Bell, "Formed By Word," sermon 1783, 2014.07.27.