

Adapted from materials of Professor Paul Hahn of the University of St Thomas, Houston, Texas

Development of the Old Testament Canon

1000-50 BC:

The Old Testament (hereafter "O.T.") books are written.

C.200BC:

Rabbis translate the O.T. from Hebrew to Greek, a translation called the "Septuagint" (abbreviation: "LXX"). The LXX ultimately includes 46 books.

AD 30-100:

Christians use the LXX as their scriptures.

CAD 100:

Jewish rabbis meet at the Council of Jamnia and decide to include in their canon only 39 books, since only these can be found in Hebrew.

C.AD400:

Jerome translates the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin (called the "Vulgate"). He knows that the Jews have only 39 books, and he wants to limit the O.T. to these; the seven he would leave out (Tobit, Judith, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach [or "Ecclesiasticus"], and Baruch—he calls "apocrypha," that is, "hidden books." But Pope Damasus wants all 46 traditionally-used books included in the O.T., so the Vulgate has 46.

AD 1536:

Luther translates the Bible from Hebrew and Greek to German. He assumes that, since Jews wrote the Old Testament, theirs is the correct canon; he puts the extra 7 books in an appendix that he calls the "Apocrypha."

AD 1546:

The Catholic Council of Trent reaffirms the canonicity of all 46 books.

Development of the New Testament Canon

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C. AD 51-125:

The New Testament books are written, but during this same period other early Christian writings are produced—for example, the Didache (c. AD 70), 1 Clement (c. 96), the Epistle of Barnabas (c. 100), and the 7 letters of Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110).

C. AD 140:

Marcion, a businessman in Rome, teaches that there were two Gods: Yahweh, the cruel God of the O.T., and Abba, the kind father of the N.T.. So Marcion eliminates the Old Testament as scriptures and, since he is anti-Semitic, keeps from the N.T. only 10 Letters of Paul and 2/3 of Luke's Gospel (he deletes references to Jesus' Jewishness). Marcion's "New Testament"—the first to be compiled—forces the mainstream Church to decide on a core canon: The Four Gospels and Letters of Paul.

C. AD 200:

But the periphery of the canon is not yet determined. According to one list, compiled at Rome c. AD 200 (the Muratorian Canon), the N.T. consists of the 4 Gospels; Acts; 13 Letters of Paul (Hebrews is not included); 3 of the 7 General Epistles (1-2 John and Jude); and also the Apocalypse of Peter.

AD367:

The earliest extant list of the books of the N.T., in exactly the number and order in which we presently have them, is written by Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, in his Easter letter of 367.

AD 904:

Pope Damasus, in a letter to a French bishop, lists the New Testament books in their present number and order.

AD 1442:

At the Council of Florence, the entire Church recognizes the 27 books, though does not declare them unalterable.

AD 1536:

In his translation of the Bible from Greek into German, Luther removes 4 N.T. books (Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelations) from their normal order and places them at the end, stating that they are less than canonical.

AD 1546:

At the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church reaffirms once and for all the full list of 27 books as traditionally accepted.