The Bible, the Apocrypha, and the Formation of the Christian Canon

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I have been studying the LXX for the last five years, and in that time I have done some writing on the Apocrypha and the influence of the LXX in the formation of our Bibles. In this paper I would like to develop those ideas a little farther and talk more broadly about the Christian canon.

First, I would like to discuss the canon of the Jewish Bible, the Tanak, which is also the Old Testament of Protestants. Second, I would like to consider the relationship of the Septuagint to Christian Scripture. This leads naturally to a discussion of the Apocrypha. Finally, we need to discuss the New Testament canon and its formation.

Before we address these issues, it might help to define what we mean by “canon.” Etymologically kanon is a Semitic loan word, which originally meant “reed.” From this it came to mean “measuring rod” or “ruler,” and from this came the general idea of “standard” or “norm” (active sense). Finally the term came to be applied to a collection of books, which met a prescribed standard (passive sense). In ecclesiastical usage in the first three centuries of this era kanon refers to the normative ethical and doctrinal content of the Christian faith (Gal. 6:16—“for all who walk by this rule” ESV). But in the latter half of the fourth century the word came to refer to the books that constitute the Old and New Testaments. The fact of divine revelation in written form implies the concept of a canon that identifies those writings and establishes their limits. Conversely, the concept of a canon assumes an inspired revelation from God in written form and the preservation of
that revelation; such a canon cannot be divorced from divine authority. I define canon as “a closed collection of documents that constitute authoritative Scripture.”

Another question we should ask as we begin is why the canon is an issue in the Church today, or “Why the Canon Still Rumbles?” First, the discovery in 1945 at Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt of 49 ancient religious books (including the Gospel of Thomas and the discovery in 1947 of hundreds of manuscripts near the northwest shore of the Dead Sea have raised the question of whether we should consider expanding the traditional canon of Scripture. Second, there is a debate about the status of the Apocrypha, which is fueled by Septuagint scholars, who argue that the LXX was the Bible of the early Church, and since it contains the Apocrypha, that should be part of the Christian Old Testament. Third, critical scholars, following the work of Walter Baur, argue that orthodoxy was merely a tag given to the winners of the debates in the early Church, and the original manifestation of Christianity may have been judged heretical in many places. Bart Ehrman’s book, Lost Christianities, is a contemporary example of this view. Fourth, the suggestion of pseudonimity in the New Testament by some people confuses the issues related to the canon. David Meade tries to reconcile the idea of pseudonimity and an authoritative canon, but conservatives generally reject pseudonimity, believing it is incompatible with an affirmation of the truthfulness of the canon. Also most proponents of modern historical-critical scholarship believe to one degree or another in a “canon within a canon.” This theory is based on significant

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3 David Meade, Pseudonimity and Canon (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) argues that pseudonimity does not compromise authority or canonicity; attribution to an author in the context of the canon must be regarded as a statement of authoritative tradition.
tensions and irreconcilable theological contradictions these scholars find in the traditional canon. The resulting inner canon is distinguished from the rest of the traditional canon because it contributes to moral improvement, or is the original kerygma of the early Church, or it addresses some other key topic. Another reason attention is drawn to the canon is the canon criticism of scholars like Brevard Childs, who reject the atomistic approach of other critics and accept the canon as a unit for the starting point of exegesis and Biblical Theology. Childs did not accept all of Scripture as historically accurate, and he had a neo-orthodox understanding of revelation, but he felt the proper context for theologizing was from the perspective of the Church’s canon. In doing this he separates Scripture from the Divine Word. These are some of the main issues related to the Christian canon today. This paper will not address these issues directly, but rather try to explain the concept of the canon and support for the traditional Christian canon. We will begin with the Old Testament.

The Old Testament Canon

The Christian Old Testament contains the same books as the Hebrew Scriptures. Jewish communities usually refer to their Bible as the Tanak, an acronym for the Torah, Nevi’im and the Kethubim, the three main divisions of the Hebrew Bible. In Christian Bibles these books are arranged slightly differently, following more closely the LXX, and they have four divisions.

The major debate in Christian circles concerning the Old Testament is the time it was “closed.” Especially important for Christians is whether or not there was a “closed”

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5 See the chart in Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 200), 80. There is also charts in Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 45 and 50.
Old Testament canon that could have served as a “model for the formation of the New Testament canon?”

The traditional view of the Hebrew canon, which was dominant until the nineteenth century in Jewish and Christian circles, was that there was a direct link between the writing of books and their canonization, and once a book was written it was virtually recognized as authoritative and added to the collection. Ezra has traditionally been the one considered most significant in the establishment of the canon in its present form (2 Esdras [4 Ezra] 14:44-48). This paradigm could not stand up to Wellhausen’s interpretation of Israel’s history and literature and the revisions proposed in the documentary hypothesis, and therefore a newer construction for the canonization of the Old Testament followed. According to this critical consensus the first evidence of canonical activity concerning the Old Testament was the discovery of the “Book of the Law” during the reign of Josiah (621 BC), which they identified as the book of Deuteronomy or a substantial part of it. The final stages of the formation of the Pentateuch took place during the fifth century, and it was canonized about 400. The canonization of the Prophets followed about 200 BC, and the Writings were recognized as canonical as a result of the Rabbinic council at Jamnia in ca. AD 90. Thus the Old Testament was recognized as canonical in three steps, corresponding to the three parts of the Hebrew Bible.

Although many still endorse this reconstruction, several of the arguments that have been used to support it are weak. First, the role, let alone the existence, of the

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6 The discussion of this point that follows will come primarily from Carson and Moo, An Introduction to the New Testament, 727-31.
council of Jamnia is generally questioned today (see mYad 3,5 in Blackman 6, 763-4 which indicates there were still debates among the Rabbis about Ecclesiastes and Canticles at the end of the second century). If there was an academy of Rabbis there, there is no evidence whatsoever that they assigned canonical status to any book not previously recognized, or rejected any book previously accepted. If anything they discussed Ecclesiastes and possibly Song of Solomon; these books apparently already had some kind of canonical status or there would have been little to question. These same two books were discussed again a century later, thus it appears that what went on at Jamnia, if anything, was theological probing concerning these books.

Second, a frequently cited argument in support of the view that the Pentateuch was recognized about 400 and the Prophets not until 200 is the fact that the Samaritans only accept the Pentateuch as canonical, and the Samaritan schism dated back to the close of the fourth century BC. However, this argument assumes that before the Samaritan schism Samaritan and Jewish views of the canon were identical. Also, many agree with Coggins that the decisive time of development of Samaritanism was from the third century BC to the first century AD, during which time the final redaction of the Samaritan Pentateuch took place. Thus it is unlikely that their differences from Judaism

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10 They apparently confirmed that these books belonged in the canon; at least they did not reject them.
12 The argument is that the Samaritans separated from the Jews at a time when only five books (the Pentateuch) were accepted as canonical, and that is why they only accept those five books.
developed as early as 400, and therefore this could not cause a difference in their views of canon as early as 400.\textsuperscript{14}

Third, a main pillar in this argument is a Maccabean date for Daniel, which thus explains why Daniel is placed in the Writings and not in the Prophets, since it did not exist in 200 when the Prophets were canonized. Several things could be said in response to this argument, not the least of which is that many conservative scholars argue for a sixth-century date for Daniel. Also John Barton has argued convincingly that apart from the Pentateuch the other sections of the Old Testament were not recognized as canonical in set sequences. The books were on individual scrolls, and such a process of canonization in ordered sequences of books was impossible. The classifications of the Old Testament books that have come down to us represent the organization of material on thematic grounds, not on the grounds of a body of books judged to be canonical as a group. Barton argues that the reason Daniel was not placed among the Prophets was because the Prophets were seen as “tridents, those who stand in a line of historical succession and hand on tradition from one generation to the next,” and that is why the so-called historical books were also included in the Prophets.\textsuperscript{15}

Having rehearsed some of the problems with the popular three-step theory of the canonization of the Old Testament, let me now review briefly some of the evidence for a

\textsuperscript{14} It is likely the Samaritans rejected part of what was considered canonical, i.e., at least some of the Prophets, because their split with Judaism was after 300-200 B.C.; see Wegner, \textit{The Journey}, 108.

\textsuperscript{15} Taken from Carson and Moo, \textit{An Introduction to the New Testament}, 729. Daniel was not in the historical succession of the Prophets; he was a statesman. Also, Daniel 1-6 were considered to be narrative (see R. T. Beckwith, “The canon of Scripture,” in \textit{The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology} [ed. T. Desmond Alexander, \textit{et al}; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000], 32; see also Roger Beckwith, \textit{The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church} [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985], 355-8). Of course there are contexts where Daniel (and David) are viewed as prophets, because a prophet could be viewed from different angles: “access to divine mysteries, calling people back to the given revelation, etc.” (729). Carson and Moo give several other reasons why the older critical threefold development of the Hebrew canon is not an adequate explanation of the evidence (727-31).
“closed” Old Testament canon before New Testament times. I should emphasize that all would agree that the Pentateuch was universally recognized as canonical Scripture early, and it is generally accepted that there was no longer any dispute concerning the canonical books in the Prophets by New Testament times. However, as mentioned above, many question whether the Writings would have been “closed” by that time.

Since the downfall of the critical consensus of a three-fold development of the Hebrew canon from 400 BC to Jamnia in AD 90, Old Testament canonical theory has gone two different directions. Some have pushed back the date of the closing of the canon to the second century AD or later. Others argue that it must have been “closed” or established sometime before the Christian era. In the following section I will give some of the evidence for the latter. The debate concerns primarily when the third section of the Hebrew canon, the Writings, was recognized and “closed.”

**Evidence the Old Testament Canon Was Established before the First Century AD**

The material that could be amassed in this section is extensive, and some of it will relate to our discussion of the Apocrypha below. I begin with the earliest evidence and try to move generally in chronological order through it.

**Tobit (200-170 BC)**

In Tobit 14:5 Tobit is told to flee Nineveh because of the judgment announced on that place, and he is given hope because God will rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple “just as the prophets of Israel have said concerning it.” “Prophets” here is a general reference not indicating particular individual prophets, but “the prophets speaking collectively.”

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Although the Torah or Prophets are not spoken of collectively as Scripture in Tobit, the
Torah is functioning as a guide to ethics in the present situation, and the Prophets are
giving future hope.

**Jesus Ben Sirach (c. 180 BC)**

In 38:24-34 of this work the scribe is described as one who has leisure “to study
the law of the Most High” (38:34), to concern himself with “prophecies” (39:1) and to
seek and study “parables” and “proverbs” (39:2). This seems to be an inference to the
tripartite form of the canon at this early date. Dempster also develops the evidence for a
tripartite canon from the list of heroes that are drawn from the Hebrew sacred writings in
chapters 44-49. The references seem to draw on people from all three parts of the canon,
including Zerubbabel, Joshua, and especially Nehemiah, from the Writings. Furthermore
the order of references seems to follow or at least make sense with the traditional order of
the Hebrew canon.\(^\text{17}\)

**Prologue to Ben Sirach (c. 135)**

Three times in the prologue to Ben Sira the grandson of Jesus Ben Sirach, who
translated this work into Greek, mentions the threefold division of the Old Testament
(“the Law, the Prophets, and the others [that followed them]”), thus limiting the canon to
those books and suggesting that a threefold division was already in place. Also important
in this prologue is the fact that Ben Sira’s grandson distinguishes his grandfather’s
literary work from the three categories of sacred writings. Dempster concludes that “the
evidence would suggest that there are three divisions of writings here which are always
viewed together and are to be distinguished from other books such as the grandfather’s

\(^{17}\) It is also important that Jesus Ben Sirach demonstrates an early knowledge of the canonical order of the
prophetic books from Joshua to Nehemiah in 46:1-49:13, and he refers to the “Twelve Prophets” after
Ezekiel in 49:8-10.
work. His grandfather’s work is to be prized for the very reason that he devoted himself to these sacred writings” (see above on 38:34-39:2).  

1 Maccabees (c. 110 BC)

One of the books of the Apocrypha, 1 Maccabees, which was written about 100 BC, states that the prophetic voice, or inspiration, had ceased (4:46; 9:27; 14:41; see also Josephus, Against Apion 1.40-41); this statement tacitly recognizes a qualitative difference between the books before the time of the Maccabees and after. De Silva notes that “The fact that the prophetic voice had ceased during the reign of Artaxerxes (5th century BC) probably accounts for the tendency to view as canonical only what derives (or purports to derive) from that period.”

2 Maccabees (c. 100 BC)

There is evidence of a sacred collection of books both at the beginning and end of 2 Maccabees. In the two letters that preface the document (1:1-9 and 1:10-2:18) there is reference to the “law” (2:2-3), “the books about the kings and prophets [former and latter prophets]” (2:13) and “the writings of [or about] David [Psalms, Ruth?], and letters of kings about votive offerings [perhaps Ezra/Nehemiah?]” (2:14). There is also a reference to a collection of sacred texts at the end of 2 Macabees in 15:9 (see also the reference to a holy book in 8:23). This verse refers to the law and the prophets. Dempster

18 Dempster, “From Many Texts to One,” 30.
19 David A. DeSilva, Introduction to the Apocrypha (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 32. There are also constant references to the Law in this work and a citation of a psalm (Ps. 79:3 [LXX 78:3]) in 7:17, indicating that “Scripture” extended to other books beyond the Law.
20 Dempster, “From Many Texts to One,” 30, suggests it was written “shortly after 1 Maccabees.”
21 In 2:14 it says Judas collected “all the books that had been lost on account of the war,” perhaps referring to the destruction of books in the time of Antiochus IV (1 Macc 1:56-7).
asks if this reference to a bipartite canon should not be understood in light of the reference to a tripartite canon earlier in the book?22

Qumran (200-70 CE)

The most important textual evidence from Qumran for a tripartite canon is the recently published halachic letter 4QMMT, in which a bipartite division for the Hebrew Scriptures is presented along with a tripartite division. The two references are to “the Book of Moses and the Words of the Prophets and David” and then later there is reference to the fulfillment of predictions in “the Book of Moses and the Words of the Prophets.” This is further evidence that a bipartite description is a shorthand term for a tripartite division.23 For other references to a bipartite division of Scripture see Community Rule (1QS1.2-3 [“Moses…Prophets”]) and Damascus Document (CD) 7.15-17, which refers to the Law and Prophets in an allegorical treatment of Amos 5:25-26. David deSilva observes that the Jewish sect at Qumran seemed to distinguish between classical authoritative texts (OT minus Esther)24 and other texts (some shared beyond the community like 1 Enoch and Jubilees, and some peculiar to them, like Community Rule, the Thanksgiving Psalms and the War Scroll). The sacred texts are distinguished by being written on more durable material, by the way they are quoted, and by the fact that they become the basis for commentaries. It is noteworthy that texts like Jubilees and Community Rule were highly authoritative in the community, but they are not distinguished along with the other classical authoritative texts.25

22 Dempster, “From Many Texts to One,” 32.
23 Again, see Dempster, “From Many Texts to One,” 31-3.
24 See the comment on Esther in Dempster, “From Many Texts to One,” 32, n. 29. He suggests the absence of Esther may be “due to chance.”
25 Also divine inspiration could extend beyond biblical books to the commentaries of the teacher of righteousness. See also de Silva, Introduction to the Apocrypha, 32, where he states that no other texts at Qumran indicate the status of Apocryphal books like Community Rule indicates the binding status of...
4 Maccabees (19-54 CE)

This book is important for our discussion, because in 18:10 the writer exhorts his audience using the example of the father of the famous martyrs in 2 Maccabees 6-7, who had taught his children from “the law and the prophets.” The following context tells of the father reading and telling, and singing the songs of heroes, including David, Solomon, and Daniel, who was faithful through persecution. This list suggests that, as we have suggested above, the law and prophets in this passage includes in it books we would normally include in the Writings. More likely it is shorthand for the sacred Scriptures, as we have seen above.

Philo (AD 20-50)

Philo, the Jewish philosopher from Alexandria (c. 25 BC-c. AD 50), majors on the Pentateuch in his exegesis, and he quotes it about 2,000 times, as compared to about 50 times from the remaining two sections of the Hebrew Bible. He does not list the contents of the biblical canon, although he shows an awareness of the threefold division of the Hebrew Bible in *De Vita Contemplativa* 1.25 (he says the Theraputae bring into their cells only “laws and oracles delivered through the mouth of prophets, and psalms and anything else which fosters and perfects knowledge and piety.”) He is the greatest Alexandrian Jewish writer, but he does not quote the Apocrypha although he quotes many of the Old Testament books as divinely inspired, nor did Philo write commentaries on the Apocryphal books, though he wrote on the books of the Hebrew canon.

Josephus (c. AD 90)

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*Jubilees.* See Schnabel, “History, theology and the biblical canon, 17-18, on the evidence from Qumran and possible evidence for “biblical” material that goes beyond the traditional canon.

26 See Dunbar, “The Biblical Canon,” 305, for possible reasons for this.
Josephus the Jewish historian (c. AD 37-c. AD 100) is the first author to discuss explicitly the formation and limitation of the Old Testament canon in *Against Apion* 1.37-42. Thus, by the end of the first century AD it is beyond doubt that the Hebrew canon is closed. For Josephus canonicity is based on prophetic inspiration (*ten epipnoian*); also he divides the books into three divisions and he is aware of “the failure of the exact succession of the prophets,” which explains the difference between the books included in the canon (from Moses to Artaxerxes, at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah) and those written since Artaxerxes. He also fixes the canon at twenty-two books, which almost certainly corresponds to the Talmudic canon of twenty-four books. (See Baba Bathra, where the unstated total is 24 books and 2 Esdras 14:44-49 [c. AD 100], which mentions 24 books.) The number twenty-two results from counting Judges and Ruth as one book and Jeremiah and Lamentations as one book.\(^{27}\) It is noteworthy that in *Apion* 1.43 (the same context as the reference above) he uses a bipartite designation for the Scriptures; his reference to “the laws and allied documents is a “clear bipartite reference to the Scriptures, previously designated as tripartite.”\(^{28}\)

**The New Testament**

The evidence from the New Testament is earlier than Josephus. Carson and Moo helpfully note, “there is no unequivocal evidence that the New Testament writers viewed the Old Testament Scriptures as a closed canon.” They go on to say, “Of course that does not mean they did not so view it; arguments from silence can be tricky. And there are

\(^{27}\) See Wegner, *The Journey*, 44, for various lists of the books of the OT, including Josephus’. See also the list in Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 80.

\(^{28}\) Dempster, “From Many Texts to One,” 35.
several lines of evidence in the New Testament that at least suggest that they recognized a closed canon.”

An important indication of the attitude of the New Testament authors toward the Old Testament is their descriptions of it. Luke 24:44 is the only time in the New Testament the tripartite division of the Jewish Scriptures is mentioned: “the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.” It is noteworthy, in light of our previous discussion, that in the same context in Luke 24:27 there is a bipartite designation of the Scriptures ("Beginning from Moses and all the prophets he explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself"). This passage also connects “Moses and … all the prophets” with “all the Scriptures.” (Clearly Jesus taught there were prophecies about him in the Psalms.) More often in the NT a dual reference is used for the OT, like “the Law and the Prophets” or “Moses and the Prophets.” The OT is also described generally as “the Law” or “the Prophets” or “the Old Covenant” (2 Cor. 3:14), or “Scripture” (or “Scriptures”). In view of our survey of references to and designations of the Scriptures in Jewish writings before the Christian era, it seems unlikely that such references were intended to be limited to only one or two parts of the Hebrew Sacred Writings.

Also important in understanding the evidence in the New Testament concerning the Old Testament canon is the fact that the New Testament quotes the Old Testament about 250 times (and some are very extensive) and has more than 900 allusions to it. All five books of Moses are quoted, of course, and all the Prophets are cited except Joshua, Judges, perhaps Ezekiel (but see 2 Cor. 6:16-17), Obadiah, Nahum, and

Zephaniah. The last three would have been included in the Minor Prophets scroll and thus the book they are in would be cited. It is also possible that Joshua 1:5 is quoted in Hebrews 13:5, and Judges is presupposed in Hebrews 11:32. The evidence suggests that by the time of the New Testament the Prophets were a recognized and defined corpus along with the Law. From the writings Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Daniel, and Chronicles are cited in the New Testament. That leaves a few books that may not be quoted directly.\footnote{But see the evidence in Dunbar, “The Biblical Canon,” 306, on Ruth and the discussion of the Megilloth.}

It is also noteworthy that when literature is quoted in the New Testament that is outside the corpus of what is now recognized as the Old Testament canon, it is not referred to as Scripture, nor is God or the Holy Spirit assigned as the author. See the references to Cleanthes in Acts 17:28; Menander in 1 Cor. 15:33; Epimenides in Tit. 1:12; and \textit{I Enoch} in Jude 14-15.

Further there is no hint that the writers of the New Testament desire to discard any of the canonical Old Testament, as being incompatible with their developing Christian faith. Paul even says that the Scriptures were written for the instruction and encouragement of Christians. (Rom. 15:3-6; see also 1 Cor. 10:11; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; and Heb. 11:39-40). In fact, even passages in the New Testament that are cast as refutation or correction of traditional Jewish theology, still appeal to what both sides have in common, namely, agreed Scriptures (e.g., Mark 7:6-7, 10-13; 11:17; 12:10-11, 24; Luke 4:16-21; John 6:45; 10:34-35; 15:25; Acts 17:2-3, 11; 18:24, 28; 24:14-15; 26:22; Rom. 3:1-2; Gal. 3).

Finally, it is likely that the Scriptures of Jesus ended with Chronicles, the last book in the Hebrew canon. In Matthew 23:35 Jesus refers to all the blood shed by the Jews from Abel to Zechariah, son of Berekiah (see also Luke 11:49-50). He is apparently
referring to Abel in Genesis 4, the first person murdered in the Scriptures and Zechariah, who was murdered in the courtyard of the Temple in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22. This Zechariah is not the final martyr in the Hebrew Scriptures chronologically; that would probably have been Uriah son of Shemaiah (Jer. 26:20-23). But he is the last person murdered in the recognized Hebrew canon when reckoned according to canonical order, and Jesus is saying that the whole OT canonical revelation (from Genesis to Chronicles) is a history of the Jews’ rejection of revelation, and so it calls for judgment.

The Fathers. The reason the patristic sources on the canon show confusion is because of the early division between Christians and Jews, cutting Christians off from their roots. Therefore the codices, five centuries after the original translation, cannot be a guide as to what should be included in the Septuagint. Jerome, who goes back to the originals, declares clearly in his Helmed Prologue to the Vulgate that the apocryphal books were useful but not part of the canon.\(^{33}\)

Summary

Throughout the Second Temple Period all the sources suggest there was a tacit recognition of the differences between the Apocrypha and the books of the Hebrew canon. Hanhart argues on the basis of the evidence from the prologue of Jesus Ben Sirach, Josephus, Qumran, and the NT that there was a relatively well-defined Hebrew canon in Alexandria in the second century BCE. He believes “in the realm of pre-Christian Judaism of the Hellenistic period that all the writings of the ‘Palestinian canon’ transmitted in the Masoretic tradition already possessed the canonical status of ‘Holy

He suggests the few exceptions in the evidence actually prove the rule.\textsuperscript{35} R. Beckwith believes the Jewish canon was defined, if not totally closed by the time of Judas Maccabean in the first half of the second century BC. He acknowledges there might have been some discussion of Daniel and Esther for a time.

Thus, the evidence suggests that agreement on the Hebrew canon was not something that evolved in stages over four or five centuries, as some argue; it suggests that there was something inherent in the documents themselves that commended them to Jewish believers and students of the Hebrew Scriptures, and that for the most part they were acknowledged as Scripture early in the so-called intertestamental period.

The above discussion is also important for the consideration of the New Testament canon, because it suggests that there already was a body of literature in Judaism that would have served as a model for the formation of the New Testament canon. Furthermore, the evidence is strong that the traditional Hebrew canon was closed already by the time of Christ.\textsuperscript{36}

\section*{So What about the Apocrypha? What are the Old Testament Apocryphal Books?}

The Apocrypha is a collection of Jewish literature from the intertestamental period. The books in this collection date from perhaps as early as the third century BC (c. 200 BC) to about the end of the first century AD (2 Esdras). The exact books included in the collection vary in different collections. The Roman Catholic Church canon includes 8

\textsuperscript{34} Robert Hanhart, “Introduction” in \textit{The Septuagint as Christian Scripture} (by Martin Hengel; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002), 4; italics are original. See also 4 Esdras 14, and Josephus for further evidence of a well-defined canon.

\textsuperscript{35} Robert Hanhart, “Introduction,” 3; as Müller also does in Mogens Müller, \textit{The First Bible of the Church: A Plea for the Septuagint} (JSOTS 206; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 34

\textsuperscript{36} Beckwith, “The canon of Scripture,” 30, suggests that the canon was “closed” in the second quarter of the second century BC, the time of Judas, who collected the scattered Scriptures after the Antiochene persecution [1 Macc. 1:56-57; 2 Macc. 2:13-15].
books, whereas the Greek Orthodox contains 12. My *Oxford Annotated Apocrypha* has several other works in it (24 in all).\(^\text{37}\) Several of the works are additions to Daniel and Esther, some are history, some are wisdom literature, and all are related in some way to the situation of the Jews in the intertestamental period (most in the Diaspora?) and their relationships with Hellenistic society.

Augustine and Jerome are foundational to the Church’s relationship to these books. To oversimplify, “if it were not for Augustine, these books might have been lost to the church; it it were not for Jerome, we might never have distinguished them as a collection separate from the Old Testament.”\(^\text{38}\) When Jerome was commissioned to render the Bible into Latin in the fourth century, because of his knowledge of Hebrew, he decided to render the Old Testament from that language. Augustine opposed this idea and felt that it should be rendered from the Greek Old Testament, which he considered to be the Church’s Old Testament. For Augustine the Hebrew text was the Hebrew (or Jewish) Bible, and the Septuagint was an equal independent testimony of revelation.\(^\text{39}\) For him the Church has its own Old Testament, with respect to both text and form, i.e., the Septuagint (he apparently held the Apocrypha to be Holy Scripture and part of the canon), which was inspired by God and given to the Church for its special needs and mission,\(^\text{40}\) and since the Church had been led in this regard by God, it would be unthinkable to start over and go back to the Hebrew, as Jerome wanted to do.\(^\text{41}\)


\(^{38}\) DeSilva, *Introduction to the Apocrypha*, 27.

\(^{39}\) Müller, *The First Bible of the Church*, 93-4.

\(^{40}\) Müller, *The First Bible of the Church*, 94.

\(^{41}\) Müller, *The First Bible of the Church*, 94. H. H. Howorth, “The Influence of St Jerome on the Canon of the Western Church” *JTS* 10 (1909) 482, writes, “Augustine took the view that the Church from the beginning had had a separate tradition of its own, and that the Bible of Christ and His disciples was not the Bible as the Jews accepted it in the first century, but the Bible as it had been accepted by them when the Septuagint version was made, containing several books not in the current Jewish Bible. With Augustine the
At any rate, Jerome included the Apocrypha in editions of his Latin translation, but he called attention to their distinct status in prefaces. In the following centuries it seems that Jerome’s translation triumphed, but in actuality it became the Bible of the Western Church only. The Eastern Church held fast to the Septuagint, and to this day it is the standard Old Testament text of the Eastern Orthodox Church (Russian and Greek and the Slavonic Church). In the thirteenth century Jerome’s Latin translation came to be called the Vulgate, or “Common Bible” (which was originally the name of the Old Latin translation). Subsequent copies of Jerome’s translation did not always contain his prefaces, and during the medieval period the Western Church came to regard the apocryphal books as part of Holy Scripture without differentiation. Although in the Western or Latin Church Jerome’s translation had been traditionally accepted as authoritative Scripture from the time of its origin, it was officially decided that Jerome’s Vulgate be reckoned the only authentic text of the Bible at the Council of Trent (April 8, 1546). It is ironic that by that time the so-called Apocrypha had been incorporated into the Latin canon, and to this day eight of these books are included in Catholic Bibles at the end of the OT as the deuterocanonical books.

**Notes:**

42 The first time the Church made a statement on the canon of the OT was at the Council of Trent where “the Roman Catholic Church officially adopted the Vulgate as its canon of Scripture” R. Timothy McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 2, n. 4.

43 Müller, *The First Bible of the Church*, 88, n 43. They are called deuterocanonical by the Roman Catholic Church because the Roman Catholic Church officially declared these books canonical on a “second” occasion in the sixteenth century after a period of debate connected with the Reformation and the Council
At the time of the Reformation it was the general opinion that “every translation was in principle secondary.” The Reformers, influenced by the critical scholarship of the Renaissance and the call of the humanists to go back to the original sources, as well as their emphasis on *Sola Scriptura*, adopted the Hebrew Bible, both in text and in volume, as the standard Old Testament for Protestants. Therefore, the Roman Church became the advocate of the Septuagint and published the first printed editions of it in 1522. The Roman Church also was concerned to defend the volume or canon of the Old Testament found in the Vulgate, including the Apocrypha. Since the Reformation a growing conviction of the antiquity of the Hebrew text combined with the orthodox doctrine of verbal inspiration of the original writings have allowed the Hebrew text to dominate completely in the West, where the Septuagint has had a “Cinderella-like existence” among Protestants.

It should be mentioned that the first edition of the KJV included the Apocrypha, and Luther’s and Wycliffe’s translation included it also. Part of the reason Protestants rejected the Apocrypha was the mention of works of mercy having salvific effects in Tobit 4:7-11 (cf. Matt. 25:31-46) and the possible legitimation of the saying of Masses and prayers on behalf of the dead (2 Macc. 12:43-45). The books in it are also later than

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44 Müller, *The First Bible of the Church*, 95.
46 Müller, *The First Bible of the Church*, 96, n. 60, notes that the first edition of the Septuagint was finished in 1517 but not published until 1522.
48 It was placed at the end of the OT in the early editions of the KJV and in Luther’s German Bible.
49 See Beckwith, “The canon of Scripture,” for other examples. The Apocrypha is weak on doctrine of salvation (Tobit 12:9; Wisdom of Sol 8:19-20; Sirach 3:3, 30).
the books in the Hebrew canon. The Reformers believed the Apocrypha was useful and edifying, like any good devotional literature, but they did not believe it should be the basis of Christian doctrine.

**What about the Septuagint (LXX)?**

There is a revival of interest in the LXX today, and accompanying that revival are several voices arguing that the LXX is the Christian OT and Christians should use it as the standard Old Testament in the Church. Robert Funk summarizes,

The Church movement purloined a set of scriptures not its own, in a secondary language, and then created a “canon” of proof texts within that “canon” to support its own claims. In view of the history of this process and in view of Christian-Jewish relations over the centuries, I think it is time we return the Hebrew Bible to the Jews whose Bible it is and confine ourselves to scriptures that were historically employed by the first Christians. If we need a collection of ancient documents that functions as “background” to the rise of Christianity, we should readopt the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) and translate it into English as our “First Testament.”

The German scholar Martin Hengel asks if the Church should cling to an “unhistorical” Hebrew canon. He suggests, on the basis of the Church’s use of the Septuagint, that the Church should not have a “clearly demarcated, strictly closed Old Testament canon.”

Does the church still need a clearly demarcated, strictly closed Old Testament canon, since the New Testament is, after all, the ‘conclusion’, the goal and the fulfillment of the Old? Indeed, does one not face an essential contradiction if one, in an unhistorical biblicism, clings to a limited ‘Hebrew’, or better pharisaical, ‘canon’ from Jabneh?

Mogens Müller argues that the Septuagint text rather than *Biblia Hebraica* (MT) should be the Church’s Old Testament.

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In my opinion our (newly-)gained insight into the creation of the Biblia Hebraica
text and the peculiar character of the Septuagint, together with the story of how
this old Greek translation was received into the New Testament and the early
Church, must lead to our questioning the matter of fact way in which we have, by
tradition, understood Biblia Hebraica as the original text of the Old Testament as
part of the Bible of the Church. For the New Testament authors, the original text,
that is the text they drew on, was primarily the Septuagint. To make up the first
part of the Bible which has the New Testament as the other part, the Old
Testament in the shape it has in the Septuagint would therefore seem the obvious
choice. 52

Thus, some scholars are calling for the Church to adopt the Septuagint text and
expanded canon as its Old Testament. The question that they ask is, if the Septuagint was
the Bible of the Early Church and is the version of Scripture most often quoted in the
New Testament, then why should the Church adopt the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) as
its Old Testament? Jewish scholars, called Masoretes, between the sixth and tenth
centuries of this era, drew up the Masoretic Text and it is the basis for the standard
Hebrew text (BKS and BHS), which is used for scholarly work today. 53 Proponents of the
Septuagint rightly argue that although the MT is often assumed to be, and treated as if it
were, the original text of the Old Testament (Ur-text), it is in reality one stage or branch
in the stream of development of the Hebrew text that was circulating in the time of
Christ. Furthermore textual evidence also indicates that the Hebrew text that was the
basis of our Septuagint texts was also in circulation at this time, which means that the
Septuagint text is more than a translation; it is a witness to another stage or branch of the
Hebrew Bible circulating at the time of Christ. 54

52 Müller, The First Bible of the Church, 144; see also pp. 118-9, 126-7. See also, McLay, The Use of the
53 The standard Hebrew text used today is actually based on one medieval manuscript representing the MT,
the Leningrad Codex, and in modern Hebrew Bibles all textual variants are relegated to the apparatus at the
bottom of the pages.
54 J. Daniel Hays, “Jeremiah, the Septuagint, the DSS, and Inerrancy: Just What Exactly Do We Mean by
‘The Original Autographs’” (Paper presented at the National ETS Meeting, November, 2000, in Nashville,
TN). ; Jobes and Silva, Invitation to the Septuagint; Müller, The First Bible of the Church, 118-9. Emanuel
However, it is not without reason that most OT scholars value the Hebrew MT:

(1) the evidence suggests the central position of a proto-MT type text in temple circles during the time of Christ;\textsuperscript{55} (2) the MT “preserves the oldest complete Hebrew text that also circulated in 1\textsuperscript{st}-century Palestine, albeit along with others;”\textsuperscript{56} (3) there is also evidence that some of the first revisers of the Septuagint translation revised the Greek toward an MT like text;\textsuperscript{57} (4) furthermore, the Septuagint textual tradition is not united, and it is often very difficult to determine what is “the Septuagint,” or the original reading of the Septuagint text, (5) finally, the textual tradition of the Old Testament mss supports our use of the MT for our Old Testament text. The textual tradition at Muraba’at (AD 70-135) and at Masada (AD –135) is the Proto-Masoretic text, and 35% of the manuscripts found at Qumran have a Proto-Masoretic type text, compared with 20% Qumran, 15% Pre-Samaritan, 5% LXX, and 25% Non-aligned.

There are several other more general and theological arguments that also support the Hebrew Bible as the standard Old Testament of the Church. First, the Septuagint is a translation, and this was assumed and acknowledged at every stage of its history. This is clear from Aristeas, Origen, Jerome, and the Reformers, as I have tried to demonstrate tonight. As a translation it will always have a derivative authority, which it receives from the nature of the original. Traditionally Christians have believed that the authority of God’s redemptive deeds and words (words which are His revelation concerning those deeds) come together in the persons of the prophets and the Apostles, who wrote in the

\textsuperscript{55} Tov, “The Nature of the Large-Scale Differences between the LXX and MT S T V, Compared with Similar Evidence in Other Sources” in \textit{The Earliest Text of the Hebrew Bible}, ed. by Adrian Schenker (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 121-144, esp. 143-4.

\textsuperscript{56} Tov, “The Nature of the Large-Scale Differences between the LXX and MT S T V.”


\textsuperscript{57} The so-called “\textit{kai}-\textit{ge} recension.”
original languages, and therefore the locus of revelation and inspiration (authority) is in the original languages.\textsuperscript{58} Second, the main reason that the Septuagint was used so widely in the Early Church and the New Testament was because it was written in a language that the Christians could read, and the great majority did not read Hebrew. Therefore, its use at first was more for pragmatic reasons than out of a conviction of its superiority. Third, I would argue that the Hebrew text (MT) should be preferred as the Old Testament of the Church because Jesus Christ came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms (Mt 5:17; Lk 24), the Hebrew Scriptures, and not a Christian OT that is distinct from the Bible of Israel. Many who argue that the Septuagint should be the OT of the Church also assume that the Hebrew Bible is Israel’s Scripture and the two are different from each other. However, this is not a Christian understanding of the relationship between the Hebrew Scriptures, which we call our Old Testament, and the Christian NT.\textsuperscript{59} Finally and most importantly, it appears from the text he used and the divisions of the Scripture that he referred to that the Hebrew Bible was the “received Scripture of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Luke 24:25-27, 44-49).\textsuperscript{60}

This is not to say that the Septuagint text is not valuable; in fact, it is an important witness in our endeavor to come as close as we can to the original Old Testament text.\textsuperscript{61} Where it agrees with the Samaritan Pentateuch, for example, it probably reflects a

\textsuperscript{58} Adapted from Jobes, “When God Spoke Greek,” 8. The locus of God’s special revelation lies in the meaning of the revelatory events, provided by the Scriptures, not in the naked events.

\textsuperscript{59} The most controversial point in Christian theology has always been Jesus’ claim to fulfill the Hebrew Scriptures. To differentiate between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian OT and disconnect Christianity from the Hebrew Old Testament destroys the foundation and identity of Christianity.

\textsuperscript{60} Jobes, “When God Spoke Greek,” 7; Craig A. Evans, “The Scripture of Jesus and His Earliest Followers” pp. 185-95 in The Canon Debate (ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), esp. p. 192 and n. 23. The divisions of the Scripture, which Jesus refers to concur with the divisions of the Hebrew Bible and the linguistic evidence also supports this conclusion.

\textsuperscript{61} Hayes, “Jeremiah, the Septuagint, the DSS, and Inerrancy.”
Hebrew text-type older than the MT.  

However, I am not convinced that the evidence argues for its superiority to the MT as the standard Old Testament text for the Church. The textual situation in the centuries around the time of Christ is complex, and the LXX along with the MT are witnesses to that abstract entity we call “the text of the Bible.”

The other way in which some proponents of the LXX suggest it should especially influence the Christian Bible is in the extent of the OT canon. Thackeray (1921) may have been the first to argue that the Septuagint represented the Jewish canon outside of Palestine, that is an Alexandrian canon that included the Apocryphal books. In 1956 Peter Katz argued that the Septuagint preserves the pre-Jamnia Jewish canon for both Palestine and Alexandria. But Albert Sundberg, and others like Roger Beckwith have thoroughly disproved that argument, so that today it is more common to use the evidence from the Septuagint to call into question whether any formalized Jewish canon existed in the first century. Three different lines of evidence from the Septuagint are used to question a formalized canon in the first century AD.

Tim McLay argues that to admit the early Church used the text of the LXX is an argument against any fixed canon of the Jewish Scriptures in the first century of this era, apparently connecting the text of the LXX with the more extended LXX canon.

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62 Bruce K. Waltke, “Samaritan Pentateuch” in ABD ed. by D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 5:934. Waltke says that the SM has about 6,000 variants from the MT, and it agrees with the LXX in about 1,900 of them. Jobes, “When God Spoke Greek,” 8-9, suggests that these agreements may go back to the second or first century B.C, because the Samaritan temple was destroyed in 120 B.C. by John Hyrcanus, completing the religious break between the Samaritans and the Jews; therefore the differences of the MT from the agreements of the LXX and SM may have been introduced into the MT in reaction to the breach.  
66 McLay, Use of the Septuagint, 144.
However, McLay confuses the text form of a book and its canonical status. The NT authors used various text forms available to them, sometimes quoting texts that disagreed with the Hebrew and sometimes producing their own translation, indicating that they did not consider any one single text form to be sacrosanct. However, the use of these various forms of the text says nothing about the canonical status of the book quoted or especially about the canonical status of other books having the same text form.  

Peter Stuhlmacher takes a different track. He argues for an expanded canon by pointing out that the NT quotes from the so-called Apocryphal books not found in the Hebrew canon but attributed to the Septuagint. He contends that the Apocryphal books these quotations come from are canonical because the quotations are introduced in the NT “as Scripture.” In response to Stuhlmacher, it is obvious from the many quotations in the NT from Greek writers (Acts 17:28—Paul quotes the Greek poet Aratus) that the NT authors do not confer canonical status on a work simply by quoting it. Beyond that, the three instances, which he cites as “the most important evidence” for his claim are “rather weak” when examined closely. Of Stuhlmacher’s two important “quotations,”

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68 Peter Stuhlmacher, “The Significance of the Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha for the Understanding of Jesus and Christology” in *The Apocrypha in Ecumenical Perspective* (UBS Monograph Series, No. 6; trans. P. Ellingworth; ed. S Meurer; New York: United Bible Society, 1991). On page 2 he writes, “In the course of early Christian mission history, the Septuagint then became the real Old Testament of early Christianity. The so-called Septuagintal Apocrypha thus belongs inseparably to the Holy Scriptures of early Christianity.” He also states, “From the Synoptics and letters of Paul to Jude and 2 Peter, some of the so-called Septuagintal Apocrypha, and also pseudepigraphical tradition, are freely quoted as Scripture, and knowledge of them is presupposed.” I am not dealing with Stuhlmacher’s references to Pseudepigraphical books because it is beyond the scope of this paper, and there are no extent manuscripts of the Greek Bible that include pseudepigraphical books.


70 Stuhlmacher, “The Significance of the Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,” 2, “The most important evidence is as follows: in Mk. 10.19, Sir 4.1 is quoted along Ex 20.12-16 and Dt 5.16-20; in 2 Tim 2.19, Sir 17.26 is quoted alongside Num 16.5. Paul offers in 1 Cor 2.9 a quotation from “Scripture,” either from Ascension of Isaiah 11.34, or (according to Origen) from a lost Elijah Apocalypse derived from Isa 64:3.” The quotation in Mk 10 is a verb and a negative particle “do not defraud,” which could come
the exact correspondence is only two words in length (his third, which is actually from the Pseudepigrapha, could actually come from a Greek version of Isaiah 64:3, as Clement of Rome implies). Stuhlmacher’s best evidence does not overthrow the conclusion of Beckwith that “the New Testament, by contrast with the early Fathers, and by contrast with its own practice in relation to the books of the Hebrew Bible, never actually quotes from, or ascribes authority to, any of the Apocrypha.”

Martin Hengel builds his argument for an open OT canon on the evidence from the important Greek codices of the fourth and fifth centuries, which contain the Old and New Testaments in one bound volume. He and McLay contend that since Christian codices contain the apocryphal/deutero-canonical writings, it implies these writings were widely accepted as canonical, or as Scripture. However, it is probably wrong to use the table of contents of a codex as if it were a canon list. Jobes summarizes,

…the selection of material in a particular codex may have been motivated by the purpose of the volume in consideration of the expense of producing it. In other words, a codex that contained only the Gospels is clearly not a statement that

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The revised editions of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotian of Malachi 3:8. de Silva notes that it may not be a conscious borrowing since this injunction “became a standard part of ethical summaries of the Torah, a very convenient formulation by which to capture in a nutshell Deuteronomy’s interest in economic justice and integrity” (21, n. 3). The three-word correspondence between 2 Tim 2 and Sir 17 actually involves different verbs; the prepositional phrase and its object that follow the verb (2 words) is the only exact correspondence. Here de Silva suggests that “the author appears to have created his own “Scripture” out of phrases known to him from LXX Joel 3:5 and Sir. 17:26” (21, n. 3). The result of the authors adaptation of the text is so different from the originals that these examples can hardly be called quotations, as we normally find them in the New Testament.

Anthony C. Thielston, The First Epistle to the Corinthian. A Commentary on the Greek Text NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 250-1. Jobes, 15, writes, “…there are so many theories about the source of this last text that it is far from conclusive evidence for Stuhlmacher’s point.” There are no known manuscripts of the Greek Bible containing the Pseudepigrapha, which suggests those writings were not given canonical status by the Church. At least they have no connection with the Septuagint.

Roger Beckwith, The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church, 387. de Silva agrees; he writes, “…the Apocrypha are never explicitly cited as Scripture [in the NT]” and “…the New Testament authors never quote an apocryphal book in the manner that they quote texts from what came to be known as the Hebrew canon” (21). I could expand here from Jobes’ discussion (15-16, based on Hengel, 112-113) of the surprising extent of the Hebrew canon in light of the fact that most of the quotations in the NT are from so few books.

Hengel, The Septuagint as Christian Scripture.

See also McLay, Use of the Septuagint, 144.
other New Testament books were not considered canonical, but only an economy of production for a purpose that was concerned with readings from the life of Jesus. Furthermore, one codex (ms. Gr. 242) has the New Testament and the Psalms, but also includes hymns and much liturgical material in what presumably was a service book. And there are five Greek minuscule codices (35, 69, 506, 680, 1424) that include the complete New Testament plus various treatises similar to articles bound in Bibles today.\textsuperscript{75}

Earle Ellis observed that no two codices contain the same apocryphal books, and the codices appear to have been intended originally to be service books than a defined and normative canon of Scripture.\textsuperscript{76} In his recent introduction to the Apocrypha, David deSilva concludes that

The “Septuagint” codices … cannot be used as evidence for an Alexandrian Jewish canon that included the Apocrypha. These manuscripts are fourth- and fifth-century Christian works, fail to agree on the extent of the extra books, and seem to have been compiled more with convenience of reference in mind than as the standards of canonical versus noncanonical books….As “church books,” they may have sought to contain what was useful rather than what was strictly canonical.\textsuperscript{77}

Even in the fourth century when the Greek Old Testament was widely read as the Bible of the Church, the Fathers noted the difference between the apocryphal books and the Hebrew canonical books. For example, Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem (ca. A.D. 350) advised in his \textit{Catechetical Lectures}: “you are to read the Old Testament books of the Septuagint that have been translated by the Seventy-two….Stay away from the Apocrypha” (4.33, 35). Jerome and Luther believed that though the Apocryphal books “were not esteemed like holy Scriptures, [they] are still both useful and good to read.”\textsuperscript{78} I

\textsuperscript{75} Jobes, “When God Spoke Greek,” 16-17. See also Daryl D. Schmidt, “The Greek New Testament as a Codex” in \textit{The Canon Debate}, 478, 474, which Jobes, “When God Spoke Greek,” refers to on pp. 16-17. Manuscript 1248 contains additional material also, but it does not contain the complete NT.

\textsuperscript{76} E. Earle Ellis, \textit{The Old Testament in Early Christianity} (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991) 34-5. Beckwith, 195, says “the Septuagint manuscripts appear to reflect the reading habits of the early church, whereas the [canon] lists are often more critical.”

\textsuperscript{77} deSilva, \textit{Introducing the Apocrypha}, 29-30.

\textsuperscript{78} deSilva, \textit{Introducing the Apocrypha}, 38.
think they both read the evidence correctly; to appreciate the rightful place of the Septuagint in our Christian heritage does not require that we accept a broader canon than that traditionally held by Protestants.\footnote{Of course, this does not solve the issue of when the Old Testament canon was recognized. For the evidence concerning the Apocrypha at Qumran, see deSilva, \textit{Introducing the Apocrypha}, 31-32. The evidence suggests that the so-called deuterocanonical books were not part of the canon among Diaspora Jews, nor was there an Alexandrian canon that was different than the Palestinian canon. (1) The apocryphal books vary in number and order in the oldest codices; (2) The \textit{Letter of Aristeas} shows that Judaism in Alexandria was not independent of Palestinian Judaism; (3) Not all of the apocrypha books were originally composed in Greek, or even in Egypt; (4) One of the books of the Apocrypha, 1 Maccabees, states that the prophetic voice, or inspiration, had ceased (4:46; 9:27; 14:41; see also Josephus, \textit{Against Apion} 1.40-41), which tacitly recognizes a qualitative difference between the books. “The fact that the prophetic voice had ceased during the reign of Artaxerxes probably accounts for the tendency to view as canonical only what derives (or purports to derive) from that period,” de Silva, \textit{Introducing the Apocrypha}, 32. (5) The prologue to Ben Sira does not seem to include the deuterocanonical books (ca. 135); (6) Philo, who should be a key resource for information on Alexandria, does not quote the Apocrypha, nor did Philo write commentaries of the Apocryphal books, though he wrote on the books of the Hebrew canon.; (7) The reason the patristic sources on the canon show confusion is because of the early division between Christians and Jews, cutting Christians off from their roots. The codices, five centuries after the original translation therefore cannot be a guide as to what should be included in the Septuagint. Jerome, who goes back to the originals, declares clearly in his Helmed Prologue to the Vulgate that the apocryphal books were useful but not part of the canon. (The seven points above come from Peter J. Gentry, Review of \textit{Invitation to the Septuagint} in \textit{JAOS} 122.4 (2002) 907-8.) For further evidence that the canon was established by the time of Christ see the evidence in Hanhart’s article (argues it was basically formed in second century BC), summarized near the end of my article on “LXX and Biblical Theology.” See also Neuman on 4 Esdras, and the evidence in Josephus. Throughout the Second Temple Period all the sources suggest there was a tacit recognition of the differences between the Apocrypha and the books of the Hebrew canon. For the evidence concerning the Apocrypha from Qumran, see de Silva, \textit{Introducing the Apocrypha}, 28. He observes that the Jewish sect at Qumran seemed to distinguish between classical authoritative texts (OT minus Esther) and other texts (some shared beyond the community and some peculiar to them). The sacred texts are distinguished by being written on more durable material, by the way they are quoted, and by the fact that they become the basis for commentaries. Texts like Jubilees and Community Rule are highly authoritative, but they are not distinguished along with the other classical authoritative texts. Also divine inspiration could extend beyond biblical books to the commentaries of the teacher of righteousness. See also deSilva, 32, where he states that no other texts at Qumran indicate the status of Apocryphal books like \textit{Community Rule} indicates the binding status of \textit{Jubilees}.}

The LXX has had an important and influential history. It is a crucial witness in the consideration of the complex textual issues of the OT; it is the first written translation of the Hebrew Scriptures; and it is our earliest and best commentary on those Scriptures. It was the standard form of the Old Testament for the early Church, and its significance has been so great that some suggest apart from it both Christendom and western culture
would be inconceivable. But most importantly for Christians, as the NT authors and early Christians believed, the LXX is important, because this ancient text contains the living and enduring words of God, through which his voice is still heard today.

**The New Testament Canon and Its Formation**

There are two different ways to consider the formation of the New Testament canon. First, as is normally done, one might study the various turning points in the recognition of a “closed” list of books. This approach emphasizes a growing awareness of the canon and the outward forces that influenced, and some would even say caused, the establishment of the New Testament canon. However, one could also consider the authority of the New Testament books in the Church and how that is related to the canon. I will follow the latter approach.

By the first century of the Common Era it was customary to think of all the authors of the Old Testament books as prophets, but prophecy (in the full sense of the word) had ceased in the intertestamental period (1 Macc.; Josephus; Rabbinical lit).

Beckwith writes,

> With the gospel, however, the long silence of prophecy was broken (Matt. 11:9; Acts 2:16-18; 11:27-28; 13:1; etc.), and written prophecy was also revived (Rev. 1:3; 10:11; 22:6-7, 9-10, 18-19). With the NT prophets were linked the apostles (Luke 11:49; 1 Cor. 12:28-29; Eph. 4:11), as joint recipients of the mystery of the gospel and the joint foundation stones of the Christian church (Eph. 2:20; 3:5), and the greatest Christian prophet of all was Jesus, the expected prophet like Moses (Mark 6:4; Luke 13:33; 24:19; Acts 3:22-23; 7:37).  

Jesus claimed that with John the Baptist the old era of promise had ended and the times of fulfillment had arrived (Matt. 11:11-14; Heb. 1:1-2). At first the sayings of Jesus

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and the writings of the apostles were often quoted alongside the Old Testament Scripture, as having similar authority (1 Tim. 5:18). Jews would probably have had hesitations about the idea of Scripture in any other language than Hebrew, but the popularity of the Septuagint apparently made the idea of Greek Scriptures less unthinkable. Paul’s command that his writings are to be read in the congregation suggests that in his view they had Scriptural status (Col. 4:16; 1 Thes. 5:27). Revelation is also to be read to the congregation (1:3; 22:18-19), implying that the author also considered his work to be Scripture. In 2 Peter 3:16 Paul’s writings are called Scripture, and in 1 Tim. 5:18 the same claim is made for Luke’s writings. Beckwith comments that “The use of ‘Scripture(s)’ to denote NT writings became increasingly common through the 2nd century and by the end of it was normal.” \(^{83}\) The Muratorian canon list, as well as other documents, indicates that by the end of the second century there was widespread agreement to accept as Scripture the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the thirteen epistles of Paul, 1 Peter and 1 John. There was still disagreement on the remaining seven books, the Antilegomena (books spoken against), and general agreement to include them did not occur until the end of the 4th century. Two other books received consideration for inclusion, *Apocalypse of Peter* and *Shepherd of Hermas*, but it was agreed to exclude them by the early 4th century. \(^{84}\) *Hermas* was too late to be considered apostolic, and *Apocalypse of Peter* was ruled out of court, perhaps because of its overly literalistic descriptions of the afterlife. \(^{85}\) The criteria that were used to determine what was included were (1) apostolicity (thus rejecting pseudonymous works, 2 Thes. 2:2; 3:17), (2) 

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antiquity (continuous use), and (3) orthodoxy (i.e., the rule of faith, thus acknowledging the difference between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, Gal. 1:8-9; Col. 2:8ff.; 1 Tim. 6:3ff.; 1 and 2 John).

The seven antilegomena were Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. Several of these works has strong support in some areas already in the second century (esp. Hebrews and Revelation, but also Jude and 2 John). Third John was not well known, and there were questions about James and 2 Peter, which were seldom considered to be canonical at first. It is understandable that it would take time for an international body like the Church to reach complete agreement on its canon. This seems more likely when one remembers that the books that were questioned all presented particular problems.86 Furthermore, it seems to me that it would have been very hard for the Church, as an international body, to discuss such issues and reach any consensus before the time of Constantine.87 Before that time they could not meet in an international council, and it seems once they were able to that (Nicaea 325-40) it did not take long to come to a consensus on a canon. Also, it is good to remember that probably all the books in our canon were accepted as Scripture from an early period in some quarter of the Church, even those whose acceptance is not recorded anywhere. If that were not the case, then at the end of the 4th century some of them suddenly rose up from being canonical nowhere, to be canonical everywhere, an implausible supposition.88

The use of the New Testament in the Fathers and the adoption of the codex over the scroll to bind together New Testament books gives evidence of an early and

87 Constantine also wanted the churches to settle the issue of the canon, so there would be agreement on it.
88 The preceding discussion draws heavily on Beckwith’s helpful development in “The canon of Scripture,” 30-1.
widespread attestation of our twenty-seven New Testament documents.\textsuperscript{89} That the world wide Church almost universally came to accept the same twenty-seven documents without any medieval papacy to enforce such a decision is remarkable. The result was not contrived in the least, and suggests that the final decision did not originate solely on the human level.\textsuperscript{90}

The evidence suggests that the Church did not bestow authority on the New Testament documents; rather the Church acknowledged an authority that was already there. The New Testament canon is not simply the result of an evolutionary development of thought that was fueled by outside pressures from heretics, opponents, false teachers, and the distancing of the Church from the original words of Jesus, all of which over centuries forced the church to come to a consensus of opinion on this issue.\textsuperscript{91} The New Testament books had, and still have, an authority inherent in them, because they are the authoritative record and interpretation of God’s final revelation “in these last days” in Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-2). Before the Church had a canon it had a Lord and a theology, which it had received from its Lord.

Thus, I would argue that at its most basic level it is the risen Lord himself who is ultimately the canon of his Church. The New Testament is the authoritative and God-approved record of the Gospel of God in Christ that is communicated to us through the apostles, who were eyewitnesses of the events they report and comment on. Not even the


\textsuperscript{90} Carson and Moo, \textit{An Introduction to the New Testament}, 736, quoting others.

\textsuperscript{91} See Ehrman’s explanation of the process in \textit{The History of the Bible: The Making of the New Testament Canon}. He emphasizes the pressures on the church from opponents and heretics, the Church’s desire to have its own canon, like Judaism, and the long period of time necessary to come to a consensus. He also does not like the ideas of orthodoxy and heresy, but understands that the winners became the orthodox and that they were then able to define what is orthodox.
Old Testament was the ultimate authority in the infant church. In Acts 2 the new believers give themselves to the “Apostle’s doctrine,” the apostle’s authoritative interpretation of the fulfillment of the Old Testament in the form of the gospel of Christ. The apostle’s did not preach the Old Testament alone; they bore witness to the person and work of Jesus Christ, who had come to fulfill the Old Testament (Matt. 5:17, 18-48 also; Luke 24:25-27, 44-48; etc.). Thus, they announced a New Covenant that was the fulfillment of the Old or Mosaic Covenant (2 Cor. 3:6, 14). Carson and Morris write,

> The locus and source of all authoritative new-covenant revelation rests, finally, in the Son. The apostles, in the narrower sense of the term, were viewed as those who mediated such revelation to the rest of the church; but precisely because that revelation was tied to the Jesus who appeared in real history, an implicit closure was built into the claim. There could not be an unending stream of “revelations” about Jesus if those revelations were detaching themselves from the Jesus who presented himself in real history and who was confessed by the first eyewitnesses and apostles. Thus, there was both extraordinary authority and implicit closure from the very beginning.  

> Thus, the canon is a collection of authoritative books, rather than an authoritative collection of books. Its authority was not given to it by the Church, which, as Catholics believe, has authority to do that. Nor is it possible to talk of a “canon within the canon.” Notions of canon and Scripture both forbid such an approach to the Bible. If a book is included in the canon, which receives its authority from the risen Christ, as mediated through the apostles, its authority must stand, and it must not be marginalized or excluded from questions of doctrine and practice in the Church.

Marcion was the first to recognize a closed list, and his canon fairly well-known. Influenced by Syrian dualism, he rejected the whole Old Testament and all the New,

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92 Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 738. What about documents that were lost, if they would ever be found, like 1 Cor. 5:9; Col. 4:16; 2 Cor. 2:4?  
except his heavily edited Gospel of Luke and ten Pauline Epistles (omitting the Pastorals). Some go too far in giving him credit for the idea of a Christian Bible, since Paul’s letters were already circulating in collected form (2 Pet. 3:15-6) and probably the four canonical Gospels were as well. It is more likely that the very idea of New Testament Scripture, which would have existed already at the beginning of the second century, presupposed some sort of canonical limit.

The Montanist movement, which sought to elevate the voice of prophecy to supreme authority in the Church as well as Gnostics and heretics all would have forced the Church to make public decisions concerning the standard of orthodoxy. The Muratorian canon (c. AD 170) reflects the view of the Church in recognizing a New Testament canon not very different from the traditional Christian canon.

Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260-340) is our main source of the lists of books held canonical by the various Fathers. He was largely indebted to the Alexandrian fathers Clement and Origen. Eusebius employed a tripartite classification of the books: (1) recognized (homologoumena), (2) disputed (antilegomena), and (3) those books put forth by heretics in the name of an apostle but rejected by those Eusebius regarded as orthodox. This last group contains clearly heretical writings. The second category, the disputed books, was divided into two groups, those generally accepted, like James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John), and those that are not genuine (Acts of Paul, Apocalypse of Peter, Hermas, Didache, and Barnabas). Most of the contours of the New Testament canon were clearly established by the time of Eusebius.

It is good to note that there are different opinions in contemporary Christianity about what should be included in the canon of Scripture. For example, as we have already
learned, the Catholic Church includes the Deutero-canonical books, called the Apocrypha, in its Old Testament. There is also some difference of opinion concerning the New Testament canon. The Eastern Church, represented by the Syriac Peshitta and non Greek speaking Syrians, omits 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and the Apocalypse. And the Ethiopian Church recognizes the standard twenty-seven books, but it adds eight others, mostly dealing with church order.95

**Conclusion**

So, what does all of this mean for a Christian apologist? The evidence presented leaves no doubt that the Church has a rational basis on which to defend the traditional Christian canon of Scripture. Rational arguments should be used to defend the integrity of the Christian canon, wherever necessary, and the history of canon discussion in the Church, and the canon itself, has left us with many proofs, reasons, and arguments. However, as I have tried to demonstrate tonight, the Church’s acknowledgement of the biblical canon is not only based on rational arguments; spiritual men and women came to the conviction that these books contained the very oracles of God, as the Spirit of God spoke to them through the words in these books. Thus, it seems to me, we must distinguish between the way that the Church recognized its canon, which involved, along with other factors, the witness of God’s Spirit in the hearts of his people, and the way that we would defend it to those who would question and attack it, which must involve prayer and dependence on God, but certainly also includes historical, biblical, and rational evidence that can influence the hearts and minds of honest and reasonable people.

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95 Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 735; also in Beckwith, “The canon of Scripture.”