

## THE CANON

*“Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures...”*

**Luke 24:27**

The Bible is one book made up of many books. Together, the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament form what we call the *canon*, a word meaning a fixed rule or standard. The canon answers an essential question: Which books belong in the Bible?

For the Old Testament, Jesus and the apostles recognized the Hebrew Scriptures as authoritative. Jesus referred to “the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44), a way of describing the established body of Scripture. These are the same books found in our Old Testament today, though arranged differently. Other writings, often called the Apocrypha, were known and sometimes read, but they were not regarded as part of the Hebrew canon.

The New Testament developed as God revealed his will through the apostles. The early church immediately recognized that apostolic writings carried divine authority. Peter, for example, referred to Paul’s letters as “Scripture” alongside the other Scriptures (2 Peter 3:15–16). While a few books were discussed for a time, the core of the New Testament was widely accepted early on, and by the fourth century, the full collection of twenty-seven books was formally recognized across the church.

Importantly, the church did not create the canon. Rather, it recognized the books that already bore God’s authority. The word of God forms the people of God, not the other way around. The church did not decide which books would be Scripture; it received those that proved to be apostolic, faithful, and consistent with the truth.

This means the canon is not the result of human selection but divine revelation. The books of the Bible are self-authenticating because they come from God. The church’s role was to recognize and receive what God had already given.

Because of this, we can trust that the Bible we hold is not a random collection, but the complete and sufficient word of God, given for our faith and life.

*Why is it important to understand that the church recognized the canon rather than creating it?*