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Question 28 - When, where, and by whom were the Biblical Books acknowledged to be canonical in nature?

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101 MOST ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE

28. When, where, and by whom were the Biblical Books acknowledged to be canonical in nature?

A. The Old Testament books:

1. About A.D. 90 at Jamnia (or Jabneh, a town near Joppa, Israel), an official council of Jewish leaders ratified the Old Testament canon, which had already been accepted for nearly 500 years.

2. Note the Savior's words at this point:

"That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation" (Lk. 11:50-51).

Terry Hall observes:

"Jesus said the Old Testament revelation spanned from Genesis, the first book in the Hebrew Bible, which records Abel's murder, to 2 Chronicles, the last book in the Hebrew Bible, which records Zechariah's martyrdom. This is the exact equivalent of our referring to the whole Old Testament in English as 'from Genesis to Malachi.'

"Josephus, a respected Jewish historian and contemporary of the New Testament apostles (A.D. 37-95), said no Hebrew Scriptures were added after the time of the Persian King Artaxerxes (464-424 B.C.), the era of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi. Josephus' reason is:

"Because the exact succession of the prophets ceased . . . no one has dared to add anything to them, or to take anything from them, or to alter anything in them . . . only 22 books, which contain the records of all time, and are justly believed to be divine (*Against Apion*, 1:8).

"Josephus combined Ruth with Judges and Lamentations with Jeremiah to make 22 books from the Hebrews' 24. Leaving no room for doubt, Josephus named the 22 books in the Hebrew Old Testament."

(*How the Bible Became a Book*, Victor Books, Division of Scripture Press Pub., Inc. USA, Canada, England. 1990, p. 75)

3. Thus, by the year 300 B.C. (at the latest) all Old Testament books had been written, collected, revered, and recognized as official, canonical books. Many believe Ezra the prophet led the first recognition council.

B. The New Testament books. Consider the following dates:

1. 100 A.D. - Paul's epistles may have been collected at this early date.
2. 150 A.D. - Polycarp, Disciple of John the apostle, quoted from two thirds of the New Testament in a letter.
3. 170 A.D. - Irenaeus, Disciple of Polycarp, either quoted from, or considered canonical 23 of the 27 New Testament books.
4. 200 A.D. - By this time all but 11 New Testament verses were quoted in more than 36,000 citations by the church fathers.
5. 363 A.D. - The Synod of Laodicea forbade the reading of non-canonical books in church services.
6. 367 A.D. - Athanasius of Alexandria was the first to declare as canonical all the 27 New Testament books.
7. 393 A.D. - The Council of Hippo recognized the 27 New Testament books as canonical.
8. 397 A.D. - The Synod of Carthage said only the 27 New Testament books were to be read in the churches.
9. 419 A.D. - The Council of Carthage reaffirmed its belief regarding the 27 canonical New Testament books.

Thus, then, was the canon established.

However, it absolutely *must* be understood that the Bible is *not* an authorized collection of books, but rather a collection of authorized books. In other words, the 27 New Testament books were not inspired because the Carthage Council proclaimed them to be, but rather the Council proclaimed them to be such because they were already inspired.

Norm Geisler has suggested the following:

1. "The church is the *discoverer* of and not the *determiner* of the canon."
2. "It is the *child* and not the *mother* of the canon."
3. "It is the *minister* and not the *magistrate* of the canon."
4. "It is the *recognizer* and not the *regulator* of the canon."

5. "It is the *witness* and not the *judge* of the canon."

6. "It is the *servant* and not the *master* of the canon."

(*A General Introduction to the Bible*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1991, p. 221)