## Biblical Canon History

**What is the Canon?**

The Bible is composed of 2 testaments of 66 books (39 Old Testament, 27 New Testament), written by approximately 40 authors over a span of about 1,500 years. How did the writings of Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Matthew, John, Paul, etc, come to us today? We can answer this question when we understand the topic of the “canonicity” of the Bible.

This PowerPoint presentation is written in easy English for people who do not have English as their main language. It provides a brief historical overview of where our Bible comes from, and in the process, will show why we can know the 66 books of the Bible belong in our Bibles today.

**Instructions for using this PowerPoint:**   
*Read from these notes as you are showing the PowerPoint. Each time you see “Slide #” or “[+], press the Next button to go to the next PowerPoint slide.* Encourage your audience to draw the basic Bible Timeline (Slides 1 and 2) to help them become familiar with the different historical people and events on the timeline.

Slide 1

To see the history of the Bible’s composition and canonicity,

[+] we should start by creating a simple but accurate Bible timeline. It is easy to make an accurate Bible timeline. This timeline will help us better understand the events of human history.

Begin by

[+] drawing a horizontal line from left to right.

[+] On the far left, draw a circle to represent eternity past,

[+] and add a mark for Adam in 4,000BC.

[+] On the far right, put a mark to represent today. We’ll round it off to 2,000AD.

[+] Add a mark in the middle. This is for King David at 1,000BC.

[+] If we subdivide the left half of the timeline into two even segments,

[+] we have Noah at 3,000BC and Abraham at 2,000BC.

[+] Now let’s subdivide the right half of the timeline into two even segments.

[+] The first point is Jesus Christ at 0BC.

[+] This is the event that all of human history is centered on.

[+] The last event is the Crusades in 1,000AD, where the Christians in Europe finally rose up to fight off 400 years of Muslim oppression.

Slide 2

Now let’s add more detail to the timeline by subdividing each of the segments in half.

[+] Enoch is at 3,500BC. He is the man who “walked with God, and then he was not.”

[+] Noah’s Flood takes place at approximately 2,500BC.

[+] Moses is at 1500BC,

[+] the Babylonian Exile and the rule of Persia is in 500BC. This is the time of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther

Now let’s look at a few events after Christ.

[+] In 500AD, the Byzantine Era rules the Roman Empire, and they built the Hagai Sophia cathedral in the city of Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul, Turkey). This cathedral remained the world’s largest cathedral for almost 1,400 years.

[+] In 1500AD, the Protestant Reformation grows across Europe, with Luther and Calvin changing the face of the Roman Catholic Church.

And now we have a pretty accurate Bible Timeline. This can be useful for helping us learn and remember many stories about the Bible, and see their relation to each other on a timeline.

Slide 3

[+] So how did our Bible come down to us? It’s the Word of God. Did it come directly from heaven? Where was it in the past?

[+] Most of us know that the first five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) were written by Moses. The Jews referred to these books as “the Pentateuch”. They include the Ten Commandments, and were written by Moses in 1446BC.

[+] This time period is the beginning of the Mosaic Covenant between God and the people of Israel. You can read more about it in Exodus 19. This Covenant lasts from Moses at Mt. Sinai until the death of Christ.

[+] 2 Peter 1:20-21 tells us that it is during this time that the prophets wrote the books of the Old Testament as they were guided by the Holy Spirit. It was not of their own will or invention.

[+] Moses wrote the first 5 books;

[+] David wrote the Psalms; Solomon wrote Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon,

[+] followed by the prophets Isaiah and Jonah.

[+] During the time of the Babylonian Captivity (586BC - 539BC), Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel wrote their books.

[+] Zecharaiah and Malachi and some others were written after the exile.

[+] And then there was 430 years of silence from the prophets.

[+] During this time of 430 years of silence, more books were being written by the Jews, but these books are literature, poetry and commentary. They are not Scripture. These 14 books are referred to as the Apocrypha, and they include 1 & 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Enoch, 1 & 2 Macabees, etc. In the Macabees, we read of how the prophets wrote the Word of God and were silent from the time of Malachi. We know from the Jewish history and their literature that the Jews knew which books belonged in the Bible. In all the history of the Israelites, we do not see them argue about whether or not certain books belong in the Scriptures. They all knew when they were hearing from God, even if some of them did not believe what they heard.

The Israelites were not the only people writing religious and legal documents before the time of David.

[+] Sometime between 1500BC and 1100BC, the Enuma Elish was written. It is a Babylonian document that explains how they believed their god, Marduk, created the world and everything in it. Some of the elements in the story are similar to Genesis 1 & 2. Some false teachers and scholars believe that Moses got his ideas of Genesis from the Enuma Elish, but the Bible says God told him to write these things. (Exod 17:14; Exod 34:1; Exod 34:7; Deut 27:3, 8)

[+] Another famous writing is called the Code of Hammurabi. It dates to about 1800BC, about 300 years before Moses. It is a stone pillar with engraved writing. It gives a list of laws by King Hammurabi, the king of ancient Mesopotamia, and claims that he got the laws from his god, Shamash. Many of the laws of Hammurabi are similar to the Laws of Moses, but some of the laws for Hammurabi are not as noble as the laws in the books of Moses.

[+] The Nuzi Tablets also predate Moses. These ancient tablets are legal records for the ancient people of Nuzi. In them, we see many laws and customs that are similar to what we read in Genesis. For example, a barren woman could legally have her handmaiden sleep with her husband, and then she couldADopt the child as her own. If she later had a child of her own, then the choice was up to her to let the first child go back to the birth mother and have her own son become the heir. These laws are consistent with the behavior of Abraham and Sarah.

[+] The Epic of Gilgamesh is the oldest work of literature known to man. It was written about 700 years before Moses. It is a story about a hero named Gilgamesh and his amazing travels. It also speaks of how the gods were angry and wanted to destroy the earth. One of the gods told a man named Utnapishtim to build a boat and save his family and many animals. Many false teachers and scholars say that Moses got the story of Noah from the Epic of Gilgamesh. But the Bible says Moses wrote by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:20-21).

Now we must ask a few questions:

**Question**: Were there any other writings by God-fearing men who lived before Moses?

[+] **Answer**: If we look carefully, we will see that it appears that the book of Job was written before the time of Abraham. Several clues in the book that lead us to believe that it was written about 2,200BC. The city of Uz was most likely located in ancient Mesopotamia, where Abraham came from.

**Question:** How did the book of Job get from south Mesopotamia in 2200BC to Moses in Canaan in 1450BC?  
**Answer:** We don’t know for certain, but it appears that perhaps the story of Job was passed to Abraham, and Abraham carried it with him when he left Ur of the Chaldees (Mesopotamia) to go to Canaan.

**Question:** Were there other stories that were passed down to Moses?  
**Answer:** We don’t know for certain, but if we look at a Bible timeline, we will see that it is easy for stories from Adam to be passed down to Moses.

Slide 4

[+] Let us look closely at the first few thousand years of Bible history.

[+] Genesis chapters 1-11 tells us about the time before Abraham.

[+] In chapter 5 and chapter 10, we see two genealogies that are very different from other genealogies in the Bible. These genealogies list the age of each father when he produced the next son, and how long the father lived till he died (Read Gen 5:3-8 on the slide).

Slide 5

[+] With this information, we can construct a timeline of each of the patriarchs before and after Noah, and show how their lives overlapped each other. Notice that the timeline for Adam is 930 years long. And when he was 130, you can see Seth’s timeline begin and last for 807 years. And when he was 105, you can see that he fathered Enosh. Etc, etc.

[+] The flood separates the names in green from the names of left from the names on the right. Notice that before the flood, most men lived to be about 900 years old, but after the flood, men’s lives are much shorter.

Let us consider some possibilities:

[+] If Adam wrote out his life’s story when he was 900 years old [STAR], and then gave that document to his descendant,

[+] you can see that the youngest descendant at that time was Lamech, his great, great, great, great, great, great grandson. Perhaps they did not live in the same city. Or perhaps they did. We do not know. But it is not difficult to see that it is possible that if Adam wrote out his life story, Lamech could have received it while Adam was still alive.

[+] And if Lamech kept these stories till he was old, he could have passed them down to his grandson, Shem.

[+] Shem would take them on the ark, and afterwards, he would give them to

[+] Isaac. The lifespan after the flood was greatly reduced. Before the flood, men lived till they were about 900 years old. But after the flood, men began to die sooner and sooner. Abraham, for example, died when he was 175. If you look closely at the chart, you will see that Abraham was born and died before Shem died. Because Shem was old enough to e alive when Abraham was alive, many ancient Jewish rabbis believed that Shem was the same person as Melchizadek.

From Isaac to Moses, there are about 7 generations. So you can see that it would be very easy for a document to go 2,500 years from Adam to Moses by going through only a few people. Additionally, if these stories from Adam were told to their generations, it is easy to see how many civilizations could change these stories from their forefathers and make them fit their own gods. This would help explain why we see so many different cultures around the world with similar ancient stories of creation, the flood, etc.

Slide 6 - From Ezra to Early Church

[+] Now let us look at the middle section of the timeline. We will now talk about the time during the Babylonian Captivity, around 500BC.[+]

[+] Ezra was a priest and scribe while he was in Babylonian captivity (Ez 7:6). A scribe is a person who copies the word of God. He is usually also skilled in theology and history, and he must know the Scriptures very well. Since Ezra was skilled as a scribe, we believe that he copied the Scriptures for many Jews while they were in Babylonian Captivity.

[+] As Ezra and other scribes copied the Scriptures for Jews, the Jews took those copies when they traveled to other countries. In this same way, the Word of God was spread everywhere the Jews went: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Persia.

[+] During the Babylonian captivity, Jewish leaders became teachers of the Law of Moses, and when the Word of God was read, they would explain what was read so the people could understand the Word (Neh 8:8). These commentaries and explanations of God’s Word were eventually called **the Talmud**. They were carefully repeated for other Jews so that they would all have God’s Word and an explanation. As the Jews spread out to other countries and took the Bibles with them, they also brought the commentaries.

[+] About 250BC, 70 translators came together in Alexandria, Egypt, in order to translate the Hebrew Bible (OT) into Greek. At this time,Across the entire Greco-Roman world, Greek was the main language, so it was of great benefit to many people that the Bible was translated to Greek. After 300 years, when Latin became popular, the Bible was translated to Latin. In the 1500s, Martin Luther wanted the people to have the Bible in their own German language, so he assembled Bibles in the original Greek and Hebrew languages, and then translated it into German. Today, whenever people want to translate the Bible, they use the original Greek and Hebrew Bibles.

[+] Around 150BC, a group of secluded Jewish people, called the Essenes, were copying the Hebrew Scriptures. They stayed away from Jerusalem because they believed that Roman influence had corrupted the worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. They wanted to separate themselves from the corruption, so they moved out to the Dead Sea area and established a village named Qumran, where they could be separated from the Jews in Jerusalem.

[+] While they lived in their city Qumran, they made many Hebrew copies of the Bible and buried them in caves. These Bibles remained hidden in the ground and in the caves for almost 2,000 years, and were discovered in 1948.

Slide 7 - From NT Authors to Modern Day Bibles

[+] Now let’s look at the last portion of the timeline to see how the Bible came to us.

[+] From about 45AD to 70AD, the Apostles were writing the New Testament. The Gospel of Mark was most likely the first NT book to be written. Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. Paul wrote many others (Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Titus, Philemon, etc), and other Apostles wrote James, John, Revelation, etc.

[+] By the end of the first century, all the NT books of the Bible were complete, and were being copied by the Christians and passed around from church to church.

**There are many ways in which the Scriptures were copied. For the remainder of this presentation, we will look at some main points in the history of the Bible as the Church continued to copy and spread the Word of God.**

[+] As Christianity was growing in the first century, many pagans did not like the Christians. The pagans did not like to hear the Christians preach about repentance from their idols. Likewise, the Jews did not like to hear the truth about Jesus being the Messiah. So they persecuted the Christians. Stephen was the first martyr in Acts 7. Then James (Acts 12) and many more. The persecution of the Christians increased even after Saul became Paul in Acts 9. Because of the persecution, the Christians ran away to different cities and brought their OT and NT Scriptures with them, and would establish churches in the cities they spread to. Many times, they did not have all the books of the Bible. Some churches would only have the OT + the Gospels. Or perhaps the OT + some of Paul’s letters. So the churches would copy the scriptures from other churches so they could have a complete copy of all the books of the Bible.

In 64AD, Rome burned and Emperor Nero blamed the Christians. Persecution continued to increase greatly against the Christians. They were thrown in jail, beheaded, burned or put in amphitheaters to be burned and eaten by lions while the pagans watched for sport. This persecution continued for almost 300 years, and as the Christians continued to flee persecution, they brought their Scriptures with them. [+]

[+] In 312AD, as the Byzantine Empire was becoming the main empire of the known world, Emperor Constantine claimed to convert to Christianity. He made a new law for all of the Roman Empire to stop persecuting Christians. This new law was called the “Edict of Milan”. After this new law was passed, the Christians could come out of hiding and could share their faith without fear of persecution. Ten years later, Christianity became the official religion of the Byzantine Empire. Many of the Christians built large churches so that many people could hear the Word of God. But then the church leaders found that many preachers and teachers had different ideas about the Gospel and the nature of Jesus Christ.

[+] So in 325AD, the Emporor Constantine ordered all the bishops in the Roman Empire to come together in the city of Nicea to discuss the matter. This meeting was called the **Council of Nicea**.

[+] One of the bishops at the Council of Nicea was a very wise man from Alexandria (Egypt) named **Athanasius**. He used the Scriptures to persuade the council that Jesus was God. All agreed except for a bishop named Arius. At the end of the council, Arius and all his followers were rejected from the church because they believed that Jesus was created and they denied that Jesus was eternal. In his writings, Athanasius spoke of each of the books of the New Testament. So we know that in his day, the Christians knew which books properly belonged in the Bible. [+]

[+] As the Church grew, many people were speaking Latin instead of Greek. So a theologian named **Jerome** collected Greek and Hebrew copies of the Bible and translated them to Latin in 382AD. This is the first full copy of the Bible translated to Latin. [+] It was called the Latin Vulgate. It contained all 66 books of the Bible, plus 14 books of the Apocrypha. Jerome did not consider the Apocrypha to be Scripture, but because it is rich with history of the Jews, the Pope commanded him to include it. [+]

[+] The Bible continued to be copied in Latin even though the Church continued to grow and change languages. In 1382, a theologian at Oxford named **John Wycliffe** was deeply troubled that none of the English people had a Bible in their language. Some people had made some small translations of the Bible to English, but these were not good translations. If people wanted to hear the Word of God, they had to find a preacher who knew Latin, have him read it, and then have him interpret it to English. This was a great burden on the people. So to correct the problem, John Wycliffe translated the entire Bible from Latin to English. Like Jerome, he used all 66 books, and included the Apocrypha. Many preachers and church leaders did not like this, because they believed that Latin was the best language. They did not care if the common people could not read Latin. Wycliffe had many disagreements with the Roman Catholic Pope, and was the first person to begin the Protestant Reformation. The king commanded all of John Wycliffe’s writings to be destroyed. [+]

[+] The process to copy a Bible was a very slow and tedious work. A skilled scribe or copyist would have to work for about a year to copy the Bible by hand. [+] About 1450AD, a man named **Johann Gutenberg** invented the printing press. This was a very amazing invention because it allowed people to print many copies very quickly. Because of this invention, when a theologian wrote out his ideas, if it was printed, the theologian was able to quickly make many copies and spread his ideas much faster than in previous centuries. As a result, ideas about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Church spread much faster. From now on, all new Bibles would be printed instead of copied by hand. This would allow the printer to make more copies at a cheaper cost. [+]

[+] In the early 1500s, most of the Bibles were still based on the Latin Vulgate. Bible scholars were required to learn Latin, so they knew how to read the Latin Bible. [+] **Erasmus of Rotterdam** was a theologian and philosopher who knew Greek. In 1516, he decided to make a special New Testament Bible that would have the words in both Latin and the original Greek. This would allow other Bible scholars to be able to learn Greek and then read the New Testament in its original language. [+]

[+] Although there were many copies of Latin Bibles, the common man could not read Latin. [+] Like John Wycliffe, this troubled **Martin Luther**. He was a German priest, lawyer and theologian. He wanted the Bible in German so that the common German citizen could read it without having to go to a priest. He started to translate the NT from Latin to German, but was very frustrated with the inaccurate words. So he took a Greek/Latin Bible from Erasmus and translated the 27 books of the NT from Greek directly into German in 1522. In 1534, he completed the Old Testament and included the Apocrypha. He did not like the Apocrypha very much, because he knew it was not Scripture. But he knew it was important history, so he did as many other translators did, and included it in his Bible. As with Wycliffe, this Bible in the German language caused a big problem with the priests and bishops. They believed that only priests should read the Bible because the common man was not trained and he would misunderstand the Bible.

As Martin Luther continued to study the Bible, he was convinced that the Roman Catholic Church was wrong on several important doctrines such as justification by works, transubstantiation and indulgences. He tried very hard to change the Roman Catholic church, but eventually they rejected him as a heretic. This led to the Protestant Reformation and divided the Roman Catholic church. [+]

[+] In 1526, **William Tyndale** translated the Greek NT to English. He had all 27 books of the NT. Many people in England did not like the pope, so they accepted his Bible.

[+] In 1535, **Miles Coverdale** translated the complete OT, Apocrypha, and the NT to English. It was the first time that the English people had the complete OT and NT in English.

[+] in 1539, the **Great Bible** was the first English Bible that was authorized by the King. Like others before it, it had 39 books for the OT, 14 for the Apocrypha and 27 for the NT.

[+] In 1560, persecuted Christians escaped from England to Geneva, Switzerland and created the **Geneva Bible**. This was the first Bible to add verse numbers to the chapters, making the Bible easier to read. This was a very good translation, and also included study notes, commentaries, maps and verse citations for cross-referencing. It was available to anyone who wished to buy it, and it quickly became very popular. Many people preferred it over the Great Bible. It became the primary Bible of 16th-century English Protestantism and was used by William Shakespeare, Oliver Cromwell, John Knox, John Donne, and John Bunyan, author of The Pilgrim's Progress (1678). It was the Bible taken to America by the Pilgrims on the Mayflower.

[+] In 1611, King James printed the official **King James Bible**. It was an improvement over some errors in the Great Bible. The KJV was revised in 1769, and the Apocrypha was removed in 1885. The Apocrypha was removed in most Protestant Bible printings by the late 1800s, and only the Roman Catholics and Orthodox churches still keep the Apocrypha in their Bibles.

Slide 8 - We Believe the Bible is…

[+] Inspired

[+] **Inspiration** is the word we use to describe how the Holy Spirit moved the Prophets and Apostles to supernaturally write the Scriptures [+]

[+] Inerrant

[+] **Inerrancy** is the word we use to describe how the Bible is without mistakes. A good explanation of inerrancy is in the Chicago Statement of Inerrancy [+] [+]

[+] Infallible

[+] **Infallibility** is the word we use to describe how the Bible will never fail. [+]

Slide 9 - Biblical Support for Evangelical Claims of Inspiration, Inerrancy and Infallibility

[+] Biblical support for Inspiration, Inerrancy and Infallibility of Scriptures comes from many different verses.

Continue to the 2nd Power Point