

OT 501—Old Testament Introduction

Lecture Notes—Introduction, Canon, Text

--Hebrew & Christian Canons

--“Canon”=“reed” or “measuring rod,” which came to refer to a collection of authoritative books.

--The Hebrew canon and the Protestant canons contain the identical books, but they are divided and ordered quite differently (see handout, [OT Canon Chart](#)). For the purposes of this class, we will be utilizing the Hebrew canon, which means that we will study the OT books by an order that is different for most of us.

--The Catholic & Orthodox canons include extra books, which we call the Apocrypha.

--The Hebrew Canon

--*Torah*—“Law”—This section of the Hebrew Bible consists of the 1st five books of the Bible. We usually call these the Pentateuch, which means “five scrolls.”

--*Nebi'im*—“Prophets”—This section contains what we usually consider the historical books (w/o Chronicles & Ezra-Nehemiah), as well as the traditional prophetic books (w/o Daniel).

--*Kethubim*—“Writings”—This section consists of the poetic and wisdom books, as well as the historical books of Ruth, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther, as well as the prophetic book of Daniel.

--Together, these three sections make up the Hebrew *Tanakh*, taken from the 1st letter of each section of the Hebrew Bible.

--Development of the Hebrew Canon

--Josiah—In 2 Kings 22:3ff, Josiah led in a renovation of the temple, which led to the discovery of the “Book of the Law.” This scroll contained at least portions of the book of Deuteronomy, based upon the extent of the reform that followed. Of course, it may have contained more than this. Certainly at this point, Josiah and the priests recognized this text as canonical scripture, even if they did not call it that.

--Exile and Beyond—After the Babylonian exile, Ezra returned with the expressed purpose to teach to the Law (=Torah). In Ezra 7, his return is described in some detail.

--Ezra’s work may well have signaled a codification of the OT Law. We can at least see some concern with scripture and teaching of an authoritative torah.

--Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS)—

--The first Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947/1948 in caves near the Dead Sea. Over a period of several years, 11 caves were discovered containing scrolls (although many of these were very fragmentary nature).

--The scrolls contained biblical texts, *peshirim* (commentary-like texts on biblical documents), sectarian texts, and “apocryphal” & “pseudigraphical texts.”

--At least a fragment of every book in the accepted Hebrew Bible was included in the Dead Sea Scrolls except for Esther, some lengthier than others. [Nehemiah was also not included in the DSS biblical texts, but since Ezra-Nehemiah was likely considered a single document, Nehemiah would have been appended to Ezra.]

--*Peshirim* were discovered for several books as well. The extent of the canon of the Dead Sea Scrolls community is debatable, but they had fairly obviously accepted some as more authoritative than others.

--The Dead Sea Scrolls also moved the date of our earliest OT Hebrew manuscripts from the 9th c. AD to the 3rd c. BC.

--New Testament--

--The NT quotes the OT extensively. There are no quotations from what we consider apocryphal books, although the teachings of these books may be alluded to at a few points (Jude 14-15 quotes 1 Enoch, which is included in the Ethiopic Orthodox canon). The failure of the NT to quote these books has supported the rejection of the Apocrypha as authoritative scripture by many.

--Rabbinic Sources

--Council of Yabneh—About 90 AD, the new Jewish leaders after the destruction of Jerusalem established a somewhat official canon, however much of the debate actually centered on the canonicity of already accepted books, such as Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. They did accept the 22/24-book canon.

--Talmud—The Talmud (Jewish rabbinical writings), dated 70-200, accepts a 24-book canon.

--Josephus & the Early Church

--Josephus (1st c), Origen (3rd c), and Jerome (4th c) speak of a 22 book canon, with Ruth attached to Judges and Lamentations to Jeremiah. Jerome does mention the existence of a 24-book canon with Ruth & Lamentations separate.

--Augustine (4th c) accepted the apocrypha as part of the OT canon, & the Roman Catholic Church included them in the Vulgate.

--They were formally made part of the OT canon in 1546 at the Council of Trent, in response to the reformers' rejection of them.

--Language of the Old Testament

--Hebrew—

--Almost all of the OT is written in Hebrew. Hebrew developed alongside several other Semitic languages in the ANE.

--The Hebrew OT we have today is the product of the work of the Masoretes, a group of scribes who standardized the Hebrew text beginning in the 5th century. This is called the Masoretic Text (MT).

--Aramaic—

--Aramaic developed alongside Hebrew & became the *lingua franca* of the Persian Empire, which explains its use in Ezra & Daniel.

--Four passages in the OT are in Aramaic: Ezra 4:8-6:18, 7:12-26; Daniel 2:4b-7:28; Genesis 31:47 (two words); & Jeremiah 10:11.

--Greek—

--The OT was translated into Greek beginning about 250 BC. This translation is called the Septuagint (LXX), which means “70,” because of the tradition that 70 scholars translated the work. In some places LXX differs greatly from MT, but in most places the differences are minor. (Examples of major differences are in 1 Samuel & Jeremiah.)