

The Attackers: The Historical Integrity of Biblical Content: Canonicity of the Tripartite *Tanakh*: the Hebrew Canon: Developed c. 444–100 B.C.; Masoretic Text: Oldest Surviving Manuscript of Old Testament, c. A.D. 916; Accuracy Confirmed by the Dead Sea Scrolls, c. 200 B.C.–A.D. 60, discovered in 1947

49. The integrity of these reports is authenticated by the fact that the Old Testament is an anthology of the writings of 30 plus authors over the course of a thousand years while maintaining integrity of content.
50. This integrity has been confirmed by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, a trove of over 900 documents found in eleven caves near Qumran, Israel, at the northwest shore of the sea.
51. The Hebrew canon was closed by in the mid fifth century B.C. when Malachi completed his prophecy. However, the next task was to assemble what God had inspired into the canon of the Tanakh \tä-näk'\, the Jewish term for the Old Testament.
52. The development of the canon occurred over the course of the next 400 years B.C. and is summarized by this excerpt from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

In the Jewish canon the books of the Old Testament are divided into three parts: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. In every ordinary Hebrew Bible the books are arranged accordingly in the following three divisions:—

1. **The Torah [Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy].**
2. **The Prophets, consisting of eight books, divided into two groups:—**
 - (a) **The Former Prophets; Joshua, Judges, Samuel; Kings.**
 - (b) **The Latter Prophets; Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Minor Prophets (called by the Jews “the Twelve,” and counted by them as *one* book).**
3. **The Writings, consisting of three groups, containing eleven books:**
 - (a) **The poetical books, Psalms, Proverbs, Job.**
 - (b) **The five *Megilloth* (or Rolls)—Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther.**

(c) The remaining books, Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah (forming *one* book), Chronicles.

These are thus, according to Jewish computation, twenty-four “books” in the Hebrew canon.

The Tripartite division of the Hebrew canon thus recognized by Jewish tradition can, however, be traced back far beyond the Talmud. The Proverbs of Jesus, the son of Sirach (c. 200 B.C.), which form now the apocryphal book Ecclesiasticus, were translated into Greek by the grandson of the author at about 130 B.C.; and in the preface prefixed by him to his translation he speaks of “the law, and the prophets, and the other books of our fathers,” and again of “the law, and the prophets, and the rest of the books,” expressions which point naturally to the same threefold division which was afterwards universally recognized by the Jews. Another allusion to the tripartite division is also no doubt to be found in the expression “the law, the prophets, and the psalms,” in **Luke 24:44**.

This threefold division of the Old Testament, it cannot reasonably be doubted, rests upon historical basis. It represents three successive stages in the history of the collection. The Law was the first part to be definitely recognized as authoritative or canonized; the Prophets were next accepted as canonical; the more miscellaneous collection of books was recognized last. In the absence of all external evidence respecting the formation of the canon, we are driven to internal evidence in our endeavor to fix the dates at which these three collections were thus canonized. And internal evidence points to the conclusion that the Law could scarcely have been completed, and accepted formally, as a whole, as canonical before 444 B.C.; that the Prophets were completed and so recognized about 250 B.C., and the Hagiographa [the Writings] between about 150 and 100 B.C.¹

53. The verse cited above is a quote by our Lord:

Luke 24:44 - “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets, and the Psalms [**the Writings**] must be fulfilled.

¹ Crawford Howell Toy, “Bible,” in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 13th ed. (New York: The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1926), 3:850.

54. The “fullness of time” spoken of by Paul in Galatians 4:4 included not only the political circumstances and biblical prophecies that we observed about a year ago, but also the completion of the Old Testament canon, called the Tanakh, which the Lord memorized prior to His public ministry.
55. A significant clarification of the authenticity of the preserved canon came from the abundant manuscripts that were contained in sealed earthen jars within the Qumran caves.
56. The Qumran community was located at the northwestern area of the Dead Sea, populated by an ascetic people over the course of the second and first centuries B.C. and the first century A.D.
57. The manuscripts discovered contain each of the books of the Old Testament in whole or in part with the lone exception of Esther.
58. Prior to the discovery of the Qumran manuscripts in 1947, the oldest extent copy of the Old Testament canon was the Masoretic Text.
59. Some definitions will be helpful:

MASORAH \ma-saw'-rah\ (from the Hebrew, meaning “tradition”). The literary activity centering around the text of the Bible. This activity took place in Tiberias \tī-bir'-ē-as²\ in Palestine during the eighth century. The result of this labor was a standard text of the Bible.

²“... following the destruction of Jerusalem ... Tiberias became a center of Talmudic scholarship and the capital of Jewish Palestine. The families of Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali at Tiberias made important contributions to the preservation of the traditional (or Masoretic) text of the Old Testament” (Charles F. Pfeiffer and Howard F. Vos, *The Wycliffe Historical Geography of the Bible Lands* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1967], 128).

The Massoretes,³ \ma-sa-rēt' or scholars who devoted themselves to establishing the Masoretic \ma-sa-re'-tic\ text, introduced the division of the Biblical books into chapters and verses—lacking in the original text—and set down the correct pronunciation of Biblical words—often unclear because vowel and accent marks were unknown in early times. They compiled spelling lists and introduced a system of vowel and accent marks which enabled every Jew to read and study the Bible. The Masoretic activity was brought to a close at the beginning of the tenth century by the last of the Masorettes, Aaron ben Asher.⁴

60. This original amalgamation of Old Testament manuscripts into a single volume was accomplished allegedly by the “men of the Great Synagogue.”
61. The Masoretic text, developed during the latter part of the first millennium A.D., was considered the only authentic copy of the Old Testament since the completion of the canon in the first century B.C.
62. The question that arises, however, is how accurate a copy is it? How close is the Masoretic text to those that were developed over the few centuries before the birth of Christ?

³ “Scribes who compiled the Masorah” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v.: “massorete.”)

⁴ Naomi ben-Asher and Haim Leaf, eds., “Masorah,” in *The Junior Jewish Encyclopedia*, 14th rev. ed. (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1996), 209.