

A. Concept of Canon

1. The **term** and the **idea**

The essential concept of canon is that of a rule of practice. The canon of law, for example, describes the legal principles that govern a particular action. But in this study the term is given a more technical meaning as well so that the phrase canon of Scripture refers both to the books that constitute the rule of practice and the principle whereby those books were added to the collection. In a practical sense, then, the term means:

--the collection of books comprising the sacred Scriptures...

--and the principles under which those books were gathered and identified as authoritative.

Thus when we speak of something as being "non-canonical" we intend that it is either not a part of the list of books or it is outside the ideology for maintaining the collection. And you will remember that simple terms are the hardest to define.

2. The Development of the Idea

The concept of **canon** has its foundation in the Old Testament with a general concept in the New Testament as well. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word **רֹדֵד** meaning "rod" or "reed of measure" is the obvious antecedent for the Greek term **κανών** used in Galatians 6:16 and translated "according to this rule." The Hebrew term can be seen in the determinative sense in Ezekiel 40:3 5 and Isaiah 46:6 (English Bible numbering) and in both cases the rod indicates truthness and size of proportion, each being important in its setting. Anything beyond the length of the rod would be called non-canonical. The article on the Greek term **κανών** in Kittel: THEOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT is worth reading albeit, like other Kittel articles, it is taken up with a lot of detail we could probably have done without.

Classically the term **רֹדֵד** served as a straight rod or bar that aligned other materials. This made it a mark of truth somewhat like our present T-square. The great literary works of the ancients became the "canons" of literature and newer authors were judged by comparison with the excellence of the past.