

In response to my previous two posts about how the Hebrew Bible came to be copied over the years, several readers have asked me a related (though also very different) question about how the books of the Hebrew Bible were chosen - why do we have these books and not some others? Who decided what the canon of the Hebrew Bible would be? When did they decide? And what were their criteria? These are important questions, and even though not quite as directly related to the thread I'm making my way through, I think they are worth a couple of posts.

Before giving the standard scholarly view of such things, I will need to explain in the simplest terms I can what the layout, structure, and divisions of the Hebrew Bible are, and define and explain a number of terms. That will occupy us in the present post.

I have once more taken this information from the discussion in my book [The Bible: A Historical and Literary Introduction](#).

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### **BOX 1.1 THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE**

The English term "canon" comes from a Greek word that originally meant "ruler" or "measuring rod." A canon was used to make straight lines or to measure distances. When applied to a group of books, it refers to a recognized body of literature. Thus, for example, the canon of Shakespeare refers to all of Shakespeare's authentic writings.

With reference to the Bible, the term "canon" denotes ...

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