

The Plumb Line

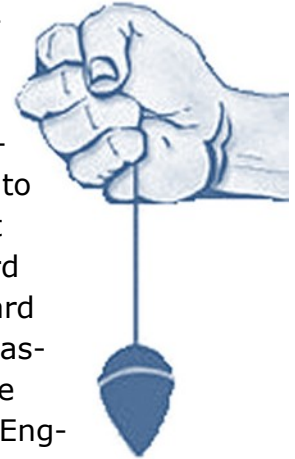
Few people today know that the Bible was once called a "plumb line." Yet, an understanding of this important concept sheds light on one of the many reasons why we have the Bible in the first place.

A plumb line is an ancient tool, very simple but effective. Technically, the word "plumb" comes from the French word *plon* which is "lead" in English, as in lead metal. Thus, a plumb line is a lead weight attached to a cord and used to measure height or depth. In other words, one could stand atop a wall or building, drop a plumb line, and determine how high it is. Or one could drop a plumb line into water and determine how deep it is.

However, I like the second use for a plumb line best. Architects and builders used it to determine how perpendicular a wall was to the ground. If you drop a plumb line next to a wall, gravity will hold the lead weight steady at the end of the line, and, eventually, the string or cord will represent perfect straightness. Thus, if a wall lined up with the plumb line, then it was perfectly straight or "plumb," as they would say.

In the early Church (33-300 AD), there was much confusion about Christianity. No one knew for sure what to teach. There were no guidelines. Because of the confusion, heresies crept into the Church. Contradictory messages were being preached everywhere. Church fathers became concerned that pure Christianity would be lost unless they somehow took steps to combat these heresies. But how could they combat them without a standard of right things to teach? They couldn't. Thus, they found themselves in a dilemma.

By 300 AD, church leaders began to call for a standard of truth to be established, so that everyone would know what to teach about Jesus Christ and His Gospel. The word they used for the standard of truth, by which to measure all doctrines, was the Greek word "canon." In English, the word "canon" is — plumb line. In other words, church fathers were asking that a plumb line be developed that would set everyone straight, so that they could take a doctrine that was being taught and hold it up next to this plumb line.



Thus, from 300-400 AD, several church councils were convened to discover God's standard for right teaching. By the end of that century, they had compiled 66 books that they believed to be inspired by God — authentic, authoritative, and accurate. When they had finished investigating the books, they grouped them into one book. They called this process "canonization," and the book they called the Canon (Greek) or Plumb Line (English).

Now, church leaders could take a doctrine, hold it up against the Plumb Line of God's Word and determine whether or not it was truth or a lie. You and I can do the same thing today. Hold up the philosophies of this culture, the thinking of man, and the ways of the world to the Scriptural plumb line and determine whether or not they are true or false. In fact, all that we do, say, and think should be measured against God's Plumb Line, the Bible.