Canonicity

Introduction

The term "canon" or "canonicity" in Christianity refers to a collection of many books acknowledged or recognized by the early church as inspired by God. Both Jews and Christians possess canons of Scripture. We must remember that the first Christians did not possess a New Testament canon but rather they relied on the gospel that was being proclaimed to them by the apostles and others. They also relied on the books of the Old Testament canon. The Jewish canon consists of thirty-nine books while on the other hand the Christian canon consists of sixty-six for Protestants and seventy-three for Catholics. The Protestant canon has thirty-nine Old Testament books like the Jews and twenty-seven works compose the New Testament.

The subject of canonicity is an extremely important subject for the Christian to grasp since it answers the question as to why certain books found their way into the Bible and why others did not. It answers the question as to whether or not the church determined what was in the Bible and what would not be included. Did the church determine which books got into the Bible or did the church merely recognize that certain Christian literary works were inspired and others were not? This article seeks to answer this important question. The subject of canonicity also answers the question as to whether or not certain criteria was employed by the church to determine which books were inspired by God and which were not. If there was certain criteria employed, then what tests did the church use to identify certain works as inspired and those which were not.

In the twentieth-century, movies like *The Da Vinci Code* have drawn attention to the subject of canonicity by communicating the idea that there were "other" Gospels in addition to the four that got into the Bible. It alleges that there was a conspiracy in the church to deliberately keep certain books out of the Christian Bible because they would contradict the church's teaching that Jesus was God.

These "other" Gospels are a reference to such works as the Gospel of Peter and Thomas which are Gnostic productions which were discovered in Egypt in 1945 at Nag Hammadi. *The Da Vinci Code* amazingly claims that these Gnostic Gospels portray Jesus of Nazareth as purely human and never do they view Him as being God. This claim is based upon fiction and not fact since these Gnostic Gospels emphasize that Jesus was deity or a supernatural person with supernatural powers who was dubiously human. These books in reality downplayed the humanity of Jesus and many cases rejected His humanity altogether which is called "Docetic Gnosticism."

In this study we learn that canonicity is actually determined by God. In other words, a book is not inspired because men determined or decreed that it was canonical. Rather it is canonical because God inspired it. It was not the Jewish people who determined what should be in their Old Testament and it was not the Christian community that determined which Christian literary works would be in the New Testament canon. Therefore, inspiration determines canonization. Canonicity is determined authoritatively by God and this authority is simply recognized by His people.

The Terms "Canon" and "Canonicity"

The term English term "canon" comes from the Greek noun *kanōn* (κανών) which etymologically is a Semitic loanword and was most likely from the Hebrew *qāneh* and Akkadian, *qaň*.

The Greek noun *kanōn* originally meant "reed" but then later came to mean "measuring reed" and thus "rule, standard, norm." The term literally means: (1) a straight rod or bar; (2) a measuring rule as a ruler used by masons and carpenters; then (3) a rule or standard for testing straightness.

The term *kanōn* was employed six times in the Greek New Testament (2 Cor. 10:13, 15-16; Gal. 6:16; Phlp. 3:16). In 2 Corinthians 10:13, 15-16, the word speaks of a set of directions for an activity and is used of the sphere that God allotted to Paul for his work as a missionary. Paul uses the word in Galatians 6:16 where it means "rule, standard" referring to the means to determine the quality of the Christian's conduct.

The early patristic writers would use the word many times in the sense of "rule" or "standard." During the first three centuries, the noun *kanōn* was used of those doctrines which were accepted as the rule of faith and practice in the Christian church. Eventually, from about 300 A.D. onwards, the term was applied to the decisions or decrees or regulations of the church councils or synods as rules by which Christians were to live by.

By the fourth century though, the term came to refer to the list of books that constitute the Old and New Testaments. In other words, it was used for the catalogue or list of sacred books which were distinguished and honored as belonging to God's inspired Word. This is how the word is used today by Christians meaning it refers to the closed collection of documents that constitute authoritative Scripture.

The biblical canon is not, of course, primarily a collection or list of literary masterpieces, like the Alexandrian lists, but one of authoritative sacred texts. Their authority is derived not from their early date, nor from their role as records of revelation (important though these characteristics were), but from the fact that they

were believed to be inspired by God and thus to share the nature of revelation themselves. This belief, expressed at various points in the OT, had become a settled conviction among Jews of the intertestamental period, and is everywhere taken for granted in the NT treatment of the OT. That NT writings share this scriptural and inspired character is first stated in 1 Timothy 5:18 and 2 Peter 3:16. Pagan religion also could speak of 'holy scriptures' and attribute them on occasion to a deity (see J. Leipoldt and S. Morenz, *Heilige Schriften* [Leipzig, 1953], pp. 21f., 28–30), but the Jewish and Christian claims were made credible by the different quality of biblical religion and biblical literature. In a dictionary of biblical theology, the canon provides both boundaries and a basis. We are not engaged in producing a general survey of ancient Jewish and Christian religious ideas; if we were, all the surviving literature from the period would have an equal claim to our attention. Rather, we are engaged in interpreting the revelation of God, and for this the books which are believed to embody that revelation, and their text, are alone directly relevant. The accepted ways of arranging the canonical books are also significant, in so far as they highlight the historical progression of revelation and the literary forms in which it was given.[1]

There were other terms used when speaking in regards to the Old and New Testament canons. In the early church the Old Testament was called "Scripture" (John 2:22; Acts 8:32; 2 Tim 3:16; etc.) or "the scriptures" (Mark 12:24; 1 Cor 15:3–4, etc.). Other terms used were "holy scriptures," "the writings," "the sacred scriptures," "the book," "the sacred books." However the use of such terms does not indicate exactly which books were being referred to beyond the Law and the Prophets in the Law, Prophets, and Writings. "Holy writings" (*kitbê haqqōdeš*), is used to refer to holy or inspired writings but not exclusively to the Bible (*Šabb.* 16:1; *B. Bat.* 1: end; *t. Beṣa* 4 [Blau *JEnc*, 141]), another indication of the necessity to distinguish between "inspired" and "canonical" (Leiman 1976: 127; Metzger 1987: 254–57); the term is reflected in Greek in Rom 1:2; John 5:47; 2 Tim 3:15–16; *Ant* 1.13; 10.63; etc.[2]

The word "Torah," has both a narrow (*sensus strictus*) and a broad meaning (*sensus latus*) since it can refer exclusively to the Pentateuch and the entire Bible.

OT Old Testament
NT New Testament
OT Old Testament
NT New Testament
[1] Alexander, T. D., & Rosner, B. S. (Eds.). (2000). In *New dictionary of biblical theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
Šabb Šabbat
. Šabbat
B. Bat. Baba Batra
Beṣa Beṣa (= Yom Ṭob)
JEnc The Jewish Encyclopaedia, 12 vols., ed. I. Singer et al. New York, 1901–6
Ant Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities (= Antiquitates Judaicae)*
[2] Sanders, J. A. (1992). Canon: Hebrew Bible. In (D. N. Freedman, Ed.)*The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*. New York: Doubleday.

Likewise the Greek word *nomos* in the New Testament and elsewhere can mean "law," or it may mean custom, instruction, or doctrine.

Another term used of Scripture is *hakkātûb*, "that which is written," but the term is usually accompanied by the name of a book of the Bible; "all that which is written" or perhaps "all Scripture" is early and may be reflected in 2 Tim 3:16 (*pasa graphē*). The terms "covenant" or "testament" were principally Christian terms used in reference to the Old Testament (2 Cor 3:14).

The Old Testament

The Jewish community recognized thirty-nine books as canonical. This corresponds to the number accepted by the apostolic church and by Protestant churches since the time of the Reformation. The Roman Catholic church adds fourteen other books which composed the Apocrypha. They consider these books as having equal authority with the Old Testament books.

Among Jews, the oldest canon appears to have been the one defining the Torah (the first five books of modern Bibles), which was not only the central document of Jewish faith but also the fundamental law of the Jewish nation. These five books reached final form and were set apart not earlier than the mid-sixth and not later than the fourth century B.C. It is the one canon upon which all Jewish groups, and also Samaritans and Christians, have usually agreed. Alongside the Torah, most Jews of the first century A.D. appear also to have accepted a second canon of somewhat less authority, called the 'Prophets.' This included historical books (Joshua through 2 Kings, but not Ruth), as well as the more strictly prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Prophets (Hosea through Malachi in the Protestant order). The remaining titles of the Hebrew Bible—the total list corresponding to the canon of the Protestant OT—are known as the 'Writings' (Ruth, Esther through Song of Solomon). The canon of Prophets may be almost as old as that of Torah, but neither it nor the Writings was accepted by Samaritans or, perhaps, by Sadducees. The canon of Writings probably reached final form only after the first Jewish war against Rome (A.D. 66-70), under the leadership of the rabbinic courts at Jabneh (Jamnia). In the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were hidden away during that war, a wide variety of writings are found, with no obvious canonical distinctions among them. The Hebrew canon was developed among Jews who spoke Hebrew or Aramaic. Many Jews of late antiquity, however, spoke only Greek. As early as the third century B.C., Greek versions of the Hebrew books were being made for their use. Some of these Greek books have rather different forms from those they took in the Hebrew canon (e.g.,

OT Old Testament

Jeremiah and Daniel); others were ultimately excluded from the Hebrew canon (e.g., Ecclesiasticus). There were also original works written in Greek, such as the Wisdom of Solomon, which came to be canonical only in the Greek language realm. The result was a larger, but somewhat ill-defined, canon of writings revered among Greek-speaking Jews. The early Christian church achieved its greatest successes in the Greek-speaking world and inherited these Greek-language scriptures (often called, collectively, the Septuagint). Christians never fully agreed, however, on the exact boundaries of the canon. Eastern and Western churches used somewhat different lists. St. Jerome (d. A.D. 420) attempted to introduce the Hebrew canon into the West through his Latin translation, the Vulgate, but failed to win assent. The Ethiopian Church continued to revere books such as *1 Enoch* that disappeared elsewhere. During the Reformation, Protestants on the European continent used the Hebrew canon to define their OT, while Anglicans granted a 'deutero' or secondary canonical status to books not found in the Hebrew canon but long accepted among Western Christians (the so-called OT Apocrypha).[3]

Geisler and Nix write "The ancient Jews did not use the word canon (*kaneh*) in reference to their authoritative writings, although the theological concept of a canon or divine standard is certainly applicable to their sacred writings. Nevertheless, several other phrases or concepts used by the Jews are equivalent to the word canon. An inspired or canonical writing was considered sacred and was kept by the Ark of the Covenant (Deut. 31:24–26). After the Temple was built, the sacred writings were kept in the Temple (2 Kings 22:8). This special attention and reverence paid to the Jewish Scriptures is tantamount to saying that they were considered canonical. Another concept that is synonymous with canonicity is 'authority.' The rulers of Israel were to be subject to the authority of the Scriptures. The Lord commanded that when a king 'sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll … and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God' (Deut. 17:18–19). The Lord enjoined the same authoritative writings unto Joshua, saying, 'This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night' (Josh. 1:8). Some assert that in the later Talmudic tradition the canonical, or sacred, books were called those that 'defile the hands' of the users, because the books were considered holy.[4] W. O. E. Osterley, and others since,[5] suggest that contact with the Scriptures really sanctified the hands, but it was called uncleanness because the

1 Enoch Ethiopic Enoch
OT Old Testament
OT Old Testament

[3] Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In *Harper's Bible dictionary*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

[4] See for example Robert H. Pfieffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 68 n. 10, who cites Tosefta Yadim 3.5 of the Talmud: "The Gospel and the books of the heretics are not canonical (lit., 'do not make the hands unclean'); the books of Ben Sira and whatever books have been written since his time are uncanonical."

[5] W. O. E. Osterley, *The Books of the Apocrypha* (London: Scott, 1914), pp. 177–82. Also see the discussion in Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence*, pp. 104–120, esp. pp. 117–20.

hands had to be washed before touching other things, in accordance with Leviticus 6:27f; 16:23f, 26, 28. Still others, such as Roger Beckwith, fall back on the reason given by the Mishnah and Tosephta themselves, where Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai answers the Sadducean objection to the teaching that the Scriptures make the hands unclean but the writings of Homer do not, by explaining that as their preciousness, so is their uncleanness' (M. Yadaim 4.6), and continuing, so that they may not be made into spreads for beasts' (Tos. Yadaim 2.19). By declaring that the Scriptures made the hands unclean, the rabbis protected them from careless and irreverent treatment, since it is obvious that no one would be so apt to handle them heedlessly if he were every time obliged to wash his hands afterwards.[6] The books of the Old Testament, in contrast, do make the hands unclean, that is, they are canonical. Indeed, Paul refers to the inspired Old Testament as 'sacred' writings (2 Tim. 3:15)."[7]

The doctrine of biblical inspiration is fully developed only in the NT. But far back in Israel's history certain writings were being recognized as having divine authority, and serving as a written rule of faith and practice for God's people. This is seen in the people's response when Moses reads to them the book of the covenant (Ex. 24:7), or when the book of the Law found by Hilkiah is read, first to the king and then to the congregation (2 Ki. 22–23; 2 Ch. 34), or when the book of the Law is read to the people by Ezra (Ne. 8:9, 14–17; 10:28–39; 13:1–3). These form a part or the whole of the Pentateuch-in the first case quite a small part of Exodus, probably chapters 20–23. The Pentateuch is treated with the same reverence in Jos. 1:7f; 8:31; 23:6–8; 1 Ki. 2:3; 2 Ki. 14:6; 17:37; Ho. 8:12; Dn. 9:11, 13; Ezr. 3:2, 4; 1 Ch. 16:40; 2 Ch. 17:9; 23:18; 30:5, 18; 31:3; 35:26. The Pentateuch presents itself as basically the work of Moses, one of the earliest, and certainly the greatest of the OT prophets (Nu. 12:6–8; Dt. 34:10–12). God often spoke through Moses orally, as he did through later prophets, but Moses' activity as a writer is also frequently mentioned (Ex. 17:14; 24:4, 7; 34:27; Nu. 33:2; Dt. 28:58, 61; 29:20f, 27; 30:10; 31:9–13, 19, 22, 24–26). There were other prophets in Moses' lifetime and more were expected to follow (Ex. 15:20; Nu. 12:6; Dt. 18:15–22; 34:10), as they did (Jdg. 4:4; 6:8), though major prophetic activity began with Samuel. The literary work of these prophets started, as far as we know, with Samuel (1 Sa. 10:25; 1 Ch. 29:29), and their earliest writing was mostly history, which afterwards became the basis of the books of Chronicles (1 Ch. 29:29; 2 Ch. 9:29; 12:15; 13:22; 20:34; 26:22; 32:32; 33:18f), and probably of Samuel and Kings too, which have so much material in common with Chronicles. It is possible that Joshua and Judges were also based on prophetic histories of this kind. That the prophets on occasion wrote down oracles also is clear from Is. 30:8; Je. 25:13;

[6] Beckwith, p. 280.
[7] Geisler, N. L., & Nix, W. E. (1986). *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Rev. and expanded., pp. 204–205). Chicago: Moody Press.

29:1; 30:2; 36:1–32; 51:60–64; Ezk. 43:11; Hab. 2:2; Dn. 7:1; 2 Ch. 21:12. Of course, to say all this is to accept the *prima facie* evidence of the OT books as historical. The reason why Moses and the prophets wrote down God's message, and did not content themselves with delivering it orally, was sometimes to send it to another place (Je. 29:1; 36:1–8; 51:60f; 2 Ch. 21:12); but quite as often to preserve it for the future, as a memorial (Ex. 17:14), or a witness (Dt. 31:24–26), that it might be for the time to come for ever and ever (Is. 30:8). The unreliability of oral tradition was well known to the OT writers. An object-lesson here was the loss of the book of the Law during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon: when it was rediscovered by Hilkiah its teaching came as a great shock, for it had been forgotten (2 Ki. 22–23; 2 Ch. 34). The permanent form of God's message was therefore not its spoken but its written form, hence the rise of the OT Canon. How long the *PENTATEUCH took to reach its final shape we cannot be sure. However, we saw in the case of the book of the covenant, referred to in Ex. 24, that it was possible for a short document like Ex. 20–23 to become canonical before the whole book was complete. The book of Genesis also embodies earlier documents (Gn. 5:1), Numbers includes an item from an ancient collection of poems (Nu. 21:14f.), and the main part of Deuteronomy was laid up as canonical beside the ark in Moses' lifetime (Dt. 31:24–26), before the account of his death can have been added. The analogy between the *COVENANTS of Ex. 24; Dt. 29–30 and the ancient Near Eastern treaties is suggestive, since the treaty documents were often laid up in a sacred place, like the tables of the Ten Commandments and the book of Deuteronomy; and this was done when the treaty was made. The covenants between God and Israel were undoubtedly made when the Pentateuch says they were made, at the Exodus, when God formed Israel into a nation; so it is in that period that the laying up of the Decalogue and Deuteronomy in the sanctuary should be dated, in accordance with the Pentateuchal account. This means that their public recognition as binding and indeed divine should also be dated as from then. The preservation of sacred books in the sanctuary was a custom which continued right down to the destruction of the second temple in AD 70. While there was a succession of prophets it was possible for earlier sacred writings to be added to and edited in the manner indicated above, without committing the sacrilege spoken of in Dt. 4:2; 12:32; Pr. 30:6. The same applies to other parts of the OT. Joshua embodies the covenant of its last chapter, vv. 1–25, originally written by Joshua himself (v. 26). Samuel embodies the document on the manner of the kingdom (1 Sa. 8:11–18), originally written by Samuel (1 Sa. 10:25). Both these documents were canonical from the outset, the former written in the very book of the Law at the sanctuary of Shechem, and the latter laid up before the Lord at Mizpeh. There is a sign of the growth of the book of Proverbs in Pr. 25:1. Items from an ancient collection of poems are included in Joshua (10:12f), Samuel (2 Sa.

1:17–27) and Kings (1 Ki. 8:53, LXX). Kings names as its sources the Book of the Acts of Solomon, the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel and the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah (1 Ki. 11:41; 14:19, 29, *etc.*; 2 Ki. 1:18; 8:23, *etc.*). The latter two works, combined together, are probably the same as the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah, often named as a source by the canonical books of Chronicles (2 Ch. 16:11; 25:26; 27:7; 28:26; 35:27; 36:8; and, in abbreviated form, 1 Ch. 9:1; 2 Ch. 24:27). This source book seems to have incorporated many of the prophetic histories which are also named as sources in Chronicles (2 Ch. 20:34; 32:32). Not all the writers of the OT books were prophets, in the narrow sense of the word; some of them were kings and wise men. But their experience of inspiration led to their writings also finding a place in the Canon. The inspiration of psalmists is spoken of in 2 Sa. 23:1–3; I Ch. 25:1, and of wise men in Ec. 12:11f. Note also the revelations made by God in Job (38:1; 40:6), and the implication of Pr. 8:1–9:6 that the book of Proverbs is the work of the divine Wisdom.[8]

The critical consensus of the past two centuries was that the Old Testament came to be canonically recognized in three steps and until recently this has gone relatively unchallenged. First of all, there is the Torah meaning the first five books of our English Bible which is also called the Pentateuch. It achieved canonical status in Israel toward the end of the fifth century B.C. The writings of the Prophets also achieved similar status about 200 B.C. and the Writings only toward the end of the first century A.D. at the Council of Jamnia or Jabne. However, this is not accepted by everyone in critical scholarship. There is no longer wide acceptance of the role of the Council of Jamnia in determining the Hebrew canon. This council did discuss the merits of Ecclesiastes but in no way did they decide what was canonical or not.

The Hebrew Scriptures were recognized as authoritative at their inception, and were immediately accepted as such by the Jewish people. The acceptance of the Pentateuch, for example, is recorded in Deuteronomy 32:46-47, and in Joshua 1:7, 8. As a matter of course, the church of the first century regarded the Hebrew Scriptures as inspired. Jesus, in Luke 24:44, refers to the Law, the prophets, and the psalms (or the writings) as divinely authoritative and canonical.

Jerusalem and the Temple had been destroyed and the Jews had gone into the Babylonian captivity (2 Ch. 36:11-21), and during their captivity (586-516 B.C.) the Jews realized why they had disintegrated as a nation. This led to the resurgence of the study of the Word of God. At last the Jews became aware of the importance of the written Word as a part of their spiritual heritage-so much so, that we have

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LXX Septuagint (Gk. version of OT)

[8] Beckwith, R. T. (1996). Canon of the Old Testament. In (D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman, Eds.)*New Bible dictionary*. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

extra-Biblical evidence with regard to their consciousness of the canon as it then existed.

There were men like Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, who kept reminding the people of the importance of the Scriptures. There were other outstanding leaders like Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel, who led the advance column out of captivity back to Jerusalem. They all recognized that they had the canon.

Philo (20 B.C. - A.D. 50), the learned Jew in Alexandria, accepted the Hebrew canon. For him, the Law (the five books of Moses, or the first five books of the Bible) was pre-eminently inspired, but he also acknowledged the authority of the other books of the Hebrew canon. He did not regard the apocryphal books as authoritative. This suggests that, although the apocryphal books were included in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures); they were not really considered canonical by the Alexandrian Jews.

Flavius Josephus, the eminent historian who lived in the first century A.D., also echoes prevailing opinion about which books were canonical and which ones were not. Although he used the Septuagint freely, he, also, did not regard the Apocrypha as canonical. He was not a Christian. By race he was a Jew; by mannerism, adoption and citizenship he was Roman; and by profession he was an outstanding soldier and eminent historian. From the time that Josephus had been promoted to the rank of a Roman general, he was pro-Roman all the way. Yet for all this, he simply could not let Apion's scurrilous accusations against the validity of the Canon go without a formal objection. He sat down and refuted Apion's claim, point by point, in a book called Contra Apion. Because Josephus was an unbeliever, he was not emotionally involved and therefore could write clearly, objectively and concisely on this matter. His one passion in life was an accurate presentation of history. He once said that a historian should record the facts of history without interpreting the facts. He must report accurately what was said, what was done, what was expressed.

So Josephus could not let Apion get away with historical inaccuracy. In Contra Apion, Josephus describes the sacred books of the Jews. He states that the time during which these books were written extended from Moses to Artaxerxes I, who reigned from 465 to 424 B.C. Furthermore, he demonstrates that there never was a time that the Jews did not accept this text as the Word of God. Canonicity was a definite part of Jewish history. He further states that nothing was ever added to the Canon after the death of Artaxerxes in 424 B.C.; the line of prophets had ceased to exist, and no one dared make any addition, subtraction or alteration to the canon of Scripture. Josephus was not personally interested in defending the Hebrew canon, but only in proving historically the existence of the canon.

Jesus Christ Himself endorsed the canon (Luke 11:51; Mt. 23:36) which takes us from Genesis 4:10 to 2 Chronicles 24:20-21. Chronicles was the last book in the Hebrew Canon.

The earliest extant Christian list of Old Testament books was recorded by Melito, bishop of Sardis in A.D. 170. This list does not mention Lamentations (which was usually understood to be part of the book of Jeremiah), or Nehemiah, which was normally appended to Ezra. The only other omission was the book of Esther which could have been grouped with Ezra and Nehemiah.

The late fourth century writer Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, quoted another ancient list from the second century which included all the books corresponding to our thirty-nine, except Lamentations, which was probably considered an appendix to Jeremiah. Origen (A.D. 185-254) also provided a list of the Old Testament books in use corresponding to what we now accept as the Old Testament.

The Talmud is the written opinion of the Rabbis recorded from 400 B.C. to 500 A.D. over a period of nearly 900 years. The word Talmud comes from another Hebrew word *lamad* meaning "to teach." Throughout the Talmud there was always canonicity-consciousness.

Then there is Eusebius who was a famous historian of the Patristic era (fourth century A.D.) who stated that the entire Old Testament was recognized and accepted in his day. Tertullian who was another famous historian of that same era and one of the Patristic writers concurred but included Esther in the Old Testament Canon whereas Eusebius did not.

The Text of the Old Testament

The accuracy of the present-day Hebrew version of the Old Testament is a result of the fastidious care with which the Sopherim and the Masoretes transmitted it. The Sopherim copied manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures from about 300 B.C. until A.D. 500. According to the Talmud, they came to be called Sopherim because, in their endeavor to preserve the text from alteration or addition, they counted the number of words in each section of Scripture, as well as the number of verses and paragraphs.

During this time, there were two general classes of manuscript copies, the synagogue rolls and private copies. Even the private copies, or "common copies" of the Old Testament text, which were not used in public meetings, were preserved with great care. For the synagogue rolls, however, there was a very elaborate set of rules for the copyists.

The manuscript had to be prepared by a Jew, written on the skins of clean animals and fastened together with strings taken from clean animals. Every skin

was to contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the codex. The length of each column was to be no less than 48 and no more than 60 lines. The breadth was to be 30 letters. The ink was to be prepared according to a definite special recipe. An authentic copy was to be used from which to copy, and the transcriber was not to deviate from it in the least. No word or letter, not even a yod, was to be written from memory.

The scribe was to examine carefully the codex to be copied. Between all of the consonants of the new copy, a space of at least the thickness of a hair or thread had to intervene. Between every *parashah*, or section, there was to be a breadth of nine consonants. Between every book, there was to be three lines.

During the period A.D. 500-900, the text of the Hebrew Bible was standardized by the Masoretes, who were also very careful in the transmission of the text. They counted every letter and marked the middle letter and middle word of each book, of the Pentateuch and of the whole Hebrew Bible, and counted all *parashas* (sections), verses, and words for every book. These procedures were a manifestation of the great respect they had for the sacred Scriptures, and secured their minute attention to the precise transmission of the text.

The Masoretes also introduced a complete system of vowel pointings and punctuation for the text. Because of their high regard for faithfulness to the text in transmission, wherever they felt that corrections or improvements should be made, they placed them in the margin. They retained certain marks of the earlier scribes relating to doubtful words and offered various possibilities as to what they were. Among the many lists they drew up was one containing all the words that occur only twice in the Old Testament.

Dr. Ryrie has the following comment, he writes "The original copies of the Old Testament were written on leather or papyrus from the time of Moses (c. 1450 b.c.) to the time of Malachi (400 b.c.). Until the sensational discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 we did not possess copies of the Old Testament earlier than a.d. 895. The reason for this is simply that the Jews had an almost superstitious veneration for the text which impelled them to bury copies that had become too old for use. Indeed, the Masoretes (traditionalists) who between a.d. 600 and 950 added accents and vowel points and in general standardized the Hebrew text, devised complicated safeguards for the making of copies. They checked each copy carefully by counting the middle letter of pages, books, and sections. Someone has said that everything countable was counted. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, they gave us a Hebrew text from the second to first century b.c. of all but one of the books (Esther) of the Old Testament. This was of the greatest importance, for it provided a much earlier check on the accuracy of the Masoretic text, which has now proved to be extremely accurate. Other early checks on the Hebrew text include the Septuagint translation (middle of third century b.c.), the

Aramaic Targums (paraphrases and quotes of the Old Testament), quotations in early Christian writers, and the Latin translation of Jerome (a.d. 400) which was made directly from the Hebrew text of his day. All of these give us the data for being assured of having an accurate text of the Old Testament."[9]

Formation of the Old Testament Canon

Some Christians are unnerved by the fact that nowhere does God itemize the sixty-six books that are to be included in the Bible. Many believers have at best a vague notion of how the church arrived at what we call the canon of Scripture. Even after becoming more aware, some believers are uncomfortable with the process by which the New Testament canon was determined.

For many, it appears to have been a haphazard process that took far too long. Furthermore, whether talking with a Jehovah's Witness, a liberal theologian, or a New Ager, Christians are very likely to run into questions concerning the extent, adequacy, and accuracy of the Bible as God's revealed Word. Just how did Israel decide which books were inspired and how did the church decide on the books for inclusion in the New Testament?

So the complete process by which these books in both the Old and New Testament came to be generally recognized as exclusively authoritative is not known. It is commonly accepted by Christians that this process transpired under the influence and direction of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer writes "The investigation of the Canon of the Bible is an attempt to discover the true basis of its authority. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament form a canon because of the fact that they are authoritative Oracles. By the term authoritative it is implied that the Bible in all its parts is the voice of God speaking to men. Its authority is inherent, being, as it is, no less than the imperial edict-'Thus saith the LORD.' When the Scriptures are deemed to be authoritative because of decrees by ecclesiastical councils or laws enacted by human governments, they may be considered to be binding only insofar as human influence extends. But, in contradistinction to such a conception, the Scriptures go so far as to declare God's will to ecclesiastical councils and human governments. Similarly, as worthy authority presupposes the ability to execute decrees, God's Word not only proclaims His assured purposes, but also sets forth the penalty which must follow whenever and wherever men are not amenable to it. Since the Scriptures are imbued with the legitimate and wholly justifiable authority of God and since they were written at the hand of men and since the Canon was, to some extent, determined by men, it is pertinent to inquire as to the nature of that divine

[9] Ryrie, C. C. (1972). *A survey of Bible doctrine*. Chicago: Moody Press.

authority and as to how it resides in these Oracles. Since doubt has arisen concerning the full inspiration of the Scriptures because of the human share in the authorship, so, and in like manner, doubt has arisen regarding the authority of the Scriptures because of the part the human share has exercised in determining what writings should enter the Canon. It has been demonstrated in connection with the study of the doctrine of Inspiration that God has used human authors in the writing of the Scriptures and in such a way as to preserve those writings from the imperfections which human limitations might impose. It now remains to exhibit the truth that God, though having used men in the formation of the Canon, has used them in such a way that only those writings have been chosen which comprise the divinely constituted Oracles with their perfections of unity and balance and completeness of their parts."[10]

J. Hampton Keathley III commenting on the logical necessity for a canon of Scripture and its preservation has the following excellent comment, he writes "That God would provide and preserve a Canon of Scripture without addition or deletion is not only necessary, but it is logically credible. If we believe that God exists as an almighty God, then revelation and inspiration are clearly possible. If we believe in such a God, it is also probable that He would, out of love and for His own purposes and designs, reveal Himself to men. Because of man's obvious condition in sin and his obvious inability to meet his spiritual needs (regardless of all his learning and technological advances), special revelation revealed in a God-breathed book is not only possible, logical, and probable, but a necessity. The evidence shows that the Bible is unique and that God is its author. The evidence declares that "all Scripture is God breathed and profitable …" (2 Tim. 3:16) and that "no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet. 1:20-21). In view of this, the logical question is: "Would it not be unreasonable for God to fail to providentially care for these inspired documents to preserve them from destruction and so guide in their collection and arrangement that they would all be present with none missing and none added that were not inspired?"[11][12]

Ryrie lists several important considerations when approaching the subject of canonicity, he writes "1. Self-authentication. It is essential to remember that the Bible is self-authenticating since its books were breathed out by God (2 Tim. 3:16). In other words, the books were canonical the moment they were written. It was not necessary to wait until various councils could examine the books to determine if they were acceptable or not. Their canonicity was inherent within them, since they

[10] (1938). *Bibliotheca Sacra*, *95*(378), 136–138.
[11] For an excellent treatment of these evidences, see Josh McDowell's book, *Evidence Demands a Verdict, Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith*, Revised Edition, Here's Life Publishers, Inc. San Bernardino, CA, 1979.
[12] Bibliology, The Doctrine of the Written Word, Biblical Studies Press, 1997; www.bible.org, pages 26-27.

came from God. People and councils only recognized and acknowledged what is true because of the intrinsic inspiration of the books as they were written. No Bible book became canonical by action of some church council. 2. Decisions of men. Nevertheless, men and councils did have to consider which books should be recognized as part of the canon, for there were some candidates that were not inspired. Some decisions and choices had to be made, and God guided groups of people to make correct choices (not without guidelines) and to collect the various writings into the canons of the Old and New Testaments. 3. Debates over canonicity. In the process of deciding and collecting, it would not be unexpected that some disputes would arise about some of the books. And such was the case. However, these debates in no way weaken the authenticity of the truly canonical books, nor do they give status to those which were not inspired by God. 4. Completion of canon. Since A.D. 397 the Christian church has considered the canon of the Bible to be complete; if it is complete, then it must be closed. Therefore, we cannot expect any more books to be discovered or written that would open the canon again and add to its sixty-six books. Even if a letter of Paul were discovered, it would not be canonical. After all, Paul must have written many letters during his lifetime in addition to the ones that are in the New Testament; yet the church did not include them in the canon. Not everything an apostle wrote was inspired, for it was not the writer who was inspired but his writings, and not necessarily all of them. The more recent books of the cults which are placed alongside the Bible are not inspired and have no claim to be part of the canon of Scripture. Certainly so-called prophetic utterances or visions that some claim to be from God today cannot be inspired and considered as part of God's revelation or as having any kind of authority like that of the canonical books."[13]

It is important to remember that it took more than a thousand years to write the Old Testament canon with the oldest parts being written by Moses and the latest after the Babylonian exile. This means that during the entire period of biblical history the Jewish people lived without a closed canon of Scripture. Thus, we can see that God did not consider a closed canon essential to worshipping Him. The books which now compose the Old Testament were of course collected into a canon as an act of God's providence. However, historically it was prompted by the emergence of apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature in the intertestamental period and the increasing need to know what the limits of divine revelation were. By the time of Jesus and His apostles, the Old Testament which is called Tanaach by modern Judaism was composed of the Law, Prophets and Writings (Luke 24:44). Opinions about the full extent of the canon seem not to have been finalized until sometime after the first century A.D.

[13] Ryrie, electronic media. For other articles on canonicity, see our web page at www.bible.org under "Theology," and then under "Bibliology--The Doctrine of the Written Word." cited by J. Hampton Keathley, Bibliology, page 27.

So the problem of how we came by thirty-nine books known as the Old Testament is a historical investigation which involves their history and not their origin or contents. It involves determining who made them into a collection and not who wrote them.

The canon of Scripture was, of course, being formed as each book was written, and it was complete when the last book was finished. When we speak of the "formation" of the canon we actually mean the recognition of the canonical books. This took time. Some assert that all the books of the Old Testament canon were collected and recognized by Ezra in the fifth century b.c. References by Josephus (a.d. 95) and in 2 Esdras 14 (a.d. 100) indicate the extent of the Old Testament canon as the thirty-nine books we know today. The discussions by the teaching-house at Jamnia (a.d. 70–100) seemed to assume this existing canon.

Jesus delimited the extent of the canonical books of the Old Testament when He accused the scribes of being guilty of slaying all the prophets God had sent Israel from Abel to Zacharias (Lk 11:51). The account of Abel's death is, of course, in Genesis; that of Zacharias is in 2 Chronicles 24:20–21, which is the last book in the order of the books in the Hebrew Bible (not Malachi as in our English Bibles). Therefore, it is as if the Lord had said, "Your guilt is recorded all through the Bible—from Genesis to Malachi." Notice that He did not include any of the apocryphal books which were in existence at that time and which contained the accounts of other martyrs.

Now, it is important to remember that certain books were canonical even before any tests were put to them. No church nor church council made any book of the Old or New Testament canonical or authentic. The book was either authentic or it was not when it was written. Ancient Israel and the church or its councils recognized and verified certain books as the Word of God, and in time those so recognized were collected together in what we now call the Bible. What tests did the church apply?

Tests for Canonicity

Dr. Ryrie lists these tests: 1. There was the test of the authority of the writer. In relation to the Old Testament, this meant the authority of the lawgiver or the prophet or the leader in Israel. In relation to the New Testament, a book had to be written or backed by an apostle in order to be recognized. In other words, it had to have an apostolic signature or apostolic authorization. Peter, for instance, was the backer of Mark, and Paul of Luke. 2. The books themselves should give some internal evidences of their unique character, as inspired and authoritative. The content should commend itself to the reader as being different from an ordinary book in communicating the revelation of God. 3. The verdict of the churches as to

the canonical nature of the books was important. There was in reality surprising unanimity among the early churches as to which books belonged in the inspired number. Although it is true that a few books were temporarily doubted by a minority, no book whose authenticity was doubted by any large number of churches was later accepted.[14]

Dr. Hodge writes "What books are entitled to a place in the canon, or rule of faith and practice? Romanists answer this question by saying, that all those which the Church has decided to be divine in their origin, and none others, are to be thus received. Protestants answer it by saying, so far as the Old Testament is concerned, that those books, and those only, which Christ and his Apostles recognized as the written Word of God, are entitled to be regarded as canonical. This recognition was afforded in a twofold manner: First, many of the books of the Old Testament are quoted as the Word of God, as being given by the Spirit; or the Spirit is said to have uttered what is therein recorded. Secondly, Christ and his Apostles refer to the sacred writings of the Jews—the volume which they regarded as divine—as being what it claimed to be, the Word of God. When we refer to the Bible as of divine authority, we refer to it as a volume and recognize all the writings which it contains as given by the inspiration of the Spirit. In like manner when Christ or his Apostles quote the 'Scriptures,' or the 'law and the prophets,' and speak of the volume then so called, they give their sanction to the divine authority of all the books which that volume contained. All, therefore, that is necessary to determine for Christians the canon of the Old Testament, is to ascertain what books were included in the 'Scriptures' recognized by the Jews of that period. This is a point about which there is no reasonable doubt. The Jewish canon of the Old Testament included all the books and no others, which Protestants now recognize as constituting the Old Testament Scriptures. On this ground Protestants reject the so-called apocryphal books. They were not written in Hebrew and were not included in the canon of the Jews. They were, therefore, not recognized by Christ as the Word of God. This reason is of itself sufficient. It is however confirmed by considerations drawn from the character of the books themselves. They abound in errors, and in statements contrary to those found in the undoubtedly canonical books. The principle on which the canon of the New Testament is determined is equally simple. Those books, and those only which can be proved to have been written by the Apostles, or to have received their sanction, are to be recognized as of divine authority. The reason of this rule is obvious. The Apostles were the duly authenticated messengers of Christ, of whom He said, 'He that heareth you, heareth me.'[15]

[14] Ryrie, C. C. (1972). *A survey of Bible doctrine*. Chicago: Moody Press.
[15] Hodge, C. (1997). *Systematic theology* (Vol. 1, pp. 152–153). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Dr. Chafer writes "The authority of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments which gives to them their canonical preëminence is attributable to at least seven different sources. (1) The Scriptures are authoritative being God-breathed. (2) The Scriptures are authoritative being written by chosen men who were "borne along" by the Holy Spirit. (3) The Scriptures are authoritative being accredited by those who first received them. (4) The Scriptures are authoritative being attested by the Lord Jesus Christ-the Second Person of the Godhead. (5) The Scriptures are authoritative being received, delivered, and attested by the Prophets. (6) The Scriptures are authoritative being the Word employed by God the Holy Spirit. (7) The authority of the Bible is seen in the fact that without the slightest deflection it vindicates and satisfies its every claim."[16]

J. Hampton Keathley III writes "Specific tests to consider canonicity may be recognized. (1) Did the book indicate God was speaking through the writer and that it was considered authoritative? Compare the following references: (a) God was speaking through the human author—Ex. 20:1; Josh. 1:1; Isa. 2:1; (b) that the books were authoritative—Joshua 1:7-8; 23:6; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; 21:8; 23:25; Ezra 6:18; Nehemiah 13:1; Daniel 9:11; Malachi 4:4. Note also Joshua 6:26 compared with 1 Kings 16:34; Joshua 24:29-33 compared with Judges 2:8-9; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 compared with Ezra 1:1-4; Daniel 9:2 compared with Jeremiah 25:11-12. (2) Was the human author recognized as a spokesman of God, that is, was he a prophet or did he have the prophetic gift? Compare Deuteronomy 18:18; 31:24-26; 1 Samuel 10:25; Nehemiah 8:3. (3) Was the book historically accurate? Did it reflect a record of actual facts? There are a number of important historical evidences drawn from the ancient writings that give support to the Old Testament canon as we have it in our Protestant Bible. 1. Prologue to Ecclesiasticus. This noncanonical book refers to a threefold division of books (namely, the Law, the Prophets, and hymns and precepts for human conduct) which was known by the writer's grandfather (which would be around 200 B.C.). 2. Philo. Philo (around A D. 40) referred to the same threefold division. 3. Josephus. Josephus (A. D. 37-100) said that the Jews held as sacred only twenty-two books (which include exactly the same as our present thirty-nine books of the Old Testament). 4. Jamnia. Jamnia (A. D. 90), was a teaching house of rabbis who discussed canonicity. Some questioned whether it was right to accept (as was being done) Esther, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. These discussions concerned an existing canon. 5. The church fathers. The church fathers accepted the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament. The only exception was Augustine (A. D. 400) who included the books of the Apocrypha (those "extra" books that some Bibles include between the books of the Old and New Testaments). However, he did

[16] (1938). *Bibliotheca Sacra*, *95*(378), 143–156.

acknowledge that they were not fully authoritative. The books of the Apocrypha were not officially recognized as part of the canon until the Council of Trent (A.D. 1546) and then only by the Roman Catholic church.[17] New Testament Evidence for the Canonicity of the Old Testament: (1) Old Testament quotations in the New. There are some 250 quotes from Old Testament books in the New Testament. None are from the Apocrypha. All Old Testament books are quoted except Esther, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. (2) Old Testament quotations by Jesus Christ. In Matthew 5:17-18, the Lord declared that the Law and the Prophets, a reference that includes all of the Old Testament, then summarized as "the Law" in verse 18, would be fulfilled. This declared it was therefore God's authoritative Word. Christ's statement in Matthew 23:35 about the blood (murder) of Abel to the blood of Zechariah clearly defined what Jesus viewed as the Old Testament canon. It consisted of the entire Old Testament as we know it in our Protestant English Bible. This is particularly significant in view of the fact there other murders of God's messengers recorded in the Apocrypha, but the Lord excludes them suggesting He did not consider the books of the Apocrypha to belong in the Canon as with the books from Genesis to 2 Chronicles. The above evidence shows the books of the Old Testament, as we have them in our Protestant Bible, were God breathed and therefore authoritative and profitable the very moment they were written. "There was human recognition of the writings; normally this was immediate as the people recognized the writers as spokesmen from God. Finally, there was a collection of the books into a canon."[18][19]

As we can see from these authors, one of the tests used to determine whether a book was part of the canon of the Old and New Testaments was inspired authorship. An inspired prophet could be identified using the tests for prophets in Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:14-22. Moses wrote the Pentateuch (Ex. 17:14; 24:4-7; 34:27; Deut. 31:9,22,24; Ezra 7:6; Ps. 103:7; Josh. 8:31, 23:6; I Kings 2:3). Some prophets clearly state that they were ordered to write (Jer. 30:2; Ezek. 43:11; Is. 8:1). Each of the twelve Minor Prophets call themselves prophets. The historical books were written by prophets (I Chron. 29:29; II Chron. 9:29; 12:15; 13:22; 20:34; 32:32; 33:19). Daniel accepted the book of Jeremiah as scripture (Dan. 9:2). Joshua received Moses' writing as scripture (Josh. 1:26). Isaiah and Micah accepted each other's writings as scripture contemporaneously (Is. 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-4). Solomon, Samuel, Daniel, Isaiah and Ezekiel all had dreams and visions, which squares with God's description of a prophet (Deut. 13:1; Num. 12:6-8).

The New Testament quotes the Old Testament over 600 times (all of the Old Testament books are quoted except Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, and

[17] Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1987, electronic media.
[18] Enns, p. 171.
[19] Bibliology, The Doctrine of the Written Word, Biblical Studies Press 1997; www.bible.org. pages 29-30.

Song of Solomon). Acts 2:30 and Matthew 24:15 identify David and Daniel as prophets. Therefore, only Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are unproven if Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon were written by Solomon. Melito, Origen and Jerome agreed with the Jewish canon. Only Augustine and his councils accepted apocryphal books.

Dr. Chafer writes "The problems related to the formation of the Canon are greatly simplified by a certain actuality, namely, that the Bible is present, and in evidence with its exhibition of divine perfection. Thus the problem becomes one only of tracing back from the starting point which the infallible Scriptures provide. There is no occasion to theorize as to whether it is possible to assemble a collection of writings-from many human authors whose lives have been lived in different countries and dispersed through many centuries-into one Book, which book is worthy of God. Such a stupendous phenomenon is achieved and its reality cannot be disregarded. Reasonable attention to the facts involved will disclose the truth that the method employed in the formation of the Canon of the Bible is both natural and supernatural. In this undertaking there is a display of the coordination of divine determination with human coöperation. However, the element of divine determination is paramount in the formation of the Canon just as it is in the dual authorship. Reason compels the conclusion that as God has brought to fruition the genesis of certain incomparable writings, He will, as faithfully, overrule not only the assembling of these writings into one unit, and without an error as to their selection, but will determine their final order in this relationship to the end that its unique continuity may be exhibited. Far-reaching and determining conditions existed at the time the Bible was written and its Canon was formed which do not exist now. Full recognition of these conditions must be sanctioned if a true evaluation of the problem of canonicity is consummated. (a) The Scriptures of both Testaments were written when there were exceedingly few literary efforts being produced. It was not then as now when every individual writes letters freely, when a prodigious array of people aspire to authorship of one kind or another, and when the output of religious literature has reached to staggering proportions. There was then little competition and comparatively little need of elimination. Of the restricted company who could write at all, only those who were moved by God would have experienced the impelling motive that inspiration imparts. (b) In the case of the Old Testament, the writings were produced, in the main, by the men who were in authority over the religious and, to some extent, civil life of the people. Moses was recognized as Jehovah's representative and lawgiver. His writings, like those of the accredited prophets, were none other than the preservation in written form of what had been proclaimed by word of mouth and with undisputed authority. Few indeed ever resisted the message of Jehovah's recognized messengers. (c) In the case of the New Testament, the writing was

performed, for the most part, by men whom Christ had chosen. The Apostle Paul was no exception in this classification since the Lord appeared to him and called him when on the Damascus road. These men, it is true, exercised no influence in the world about them and the world had nothing to do with the formation of the Canon of the New Testament. The New Testament Scriptures were addressed to a little band of despised (cf. 1 Cor 1:26–29) believers; yet the spiritual response to these writings on the part of those who constituted the 'Little Flock' had everything to do with the determination as to what would eventually enter into the final form of the Canon of the New Testament. Communication was restricted, and for many years the writings which were current and effective in one locality did not reach to all localities. It is probable that no church came to possess a complete copy of all that enters into the New Testament Canon until early in the second century. All copies of portions of Scripture were hand-written and few, indeed, could possess these treasures. The portion possessed by the local church was preserved with greatest care and its reading was a large part of the fellowship of believers when they assembled together. They could not have been concerned as to a canon or what belonged to a canon. They knew that their spiritual needs were satisfied as they read these writings and thus the portions became appreciated everywhere, and that is the basis of the formation of the Canon. Without design or effort the Canon thus came to be approved and upon the peculiar merit of each portion. Without consciousness as to the momentous thing they were doing and apart from strife and design of men, the one great and final proof as to what writings were of God's own inspiration was wrought out. The perfection of the plan and the completeness of the result is an indisputable evidence of the sovereign working of God-working through human agencies. It was natural that the Latin church would be slow in recognizing the supernatural value of the anonymous letter to the Hebrews, and other existing prejudices were doubtless reflected in various localities. In due time and under the guidance of the Spirit of God, all difficulties were overcome and the last book-The Revelation-was added to complete the whole. It would be impossible to determine just when the complete New Testament was acknowledged as such. Accepting the date of The Revelation at 96 AD, it may be observed that the writings of Ignatius in 115 AD are but twenty years later. From these and others of the early Fathers, it is evident that, apart from a natural prejudice among Jewish believers for the Old Bible, the New Testament as it now stands was distinguished as such and obeyed as Scripture early in the second century. No record exists as to what church first acquired a complete Bible, or the precise date of such an occurrence. There is no way of knowing all that may have entered into the process by which any church received a new installment of Scripture to be added to that which they already cherished. No doubt, the fact that a new portion was accepted without question by some other

assembly would go far in its favor. The way in which the New Testament Canon was formed was wholly natural, and yet the thing achieved was as wholly supernatural. (d) There is no reason to believe that there was anything that would correspond to a Bible-forming consciousness among these early Christians. They were exceedingly grateful for any message from one who, because of association with Christ or His Apostles, could write or speak with authority. It is evident that not all the messages thus received, though true to facts, were designed of God to be a part of the Bible. That living element which inspiration imparts was-and probably without specific identification of it by any who read those pages-with an irresistible determination sanctifying (by setting apart as infinitely sacred and infallibly true) those particular portions which were divinely appointed to constitute the Canon of the New Testament. (e) In the days of Christ's ministry on the earth, the Old Testament Canon was ostensibly as it is now; but, as in the case of the New Testament, no one person or group of persons had acted with authority in the selection of the Old Testament books. The same inherent divine character which inspiration secures had made these particularized books the Word of God in distinction to all other human writings. It is inconceivable that this ineffable element belonging to inspiration should not then, as now, so impress all concerned that dissension, if any, would be negligible. Other writings, such as they were, fell behind, wanting this specific divine quality. However, the Canon of the Old Testament had not been closed for there was no human authority to close it. The early church had received the Old Testament with binding supremacy. This is evident from the extent and manner of its quotation in the New Testament. New books were added as an accretion which grew upon, and was thus closely related to, the Old Testament Scriptures. The apostles and prophets who served as writers of the New Testament were every bit as qualified in themselves and as worthy to write by inspiration of the Spirit as were the prophets of the Old Testament. In fact, the fitness of the human author, though of value in the general usefulness of his writings, was not the final basis of evaluation of the sacred text. This is proved by the inclusion into the Canon of both Testaments of anonymous portions. The formal closing of the New Testament Canon is at least intimated in Revelation 22:18. The dissimilarity between the manner in which the two Testaments end is significant. All the unfulfilled expectation of the Old Testament is articulate as that Testament closes and the last verses give assurance of the coming of another prophet. But no continued revelation is impending as the New Testament is terminated; rather the announcement is made that the Lord Himself will soon return and the natural conclusion is that there would be no further voice speaking from heaven before the trumpet heralds the second advent of Christ. (f) Of no small moment is the fact that since the Canon of the Bible was divinely closed no attempts have been made to add to it. (g) Finally, though brought to fruition

through human assent and cooperation, God accomplished in the formation of the Canon-as He did in the dual authorship of the text of the Scriptures-a stupendous miracle. His own inerrant Word was not only received and penned in incomparable writings, but was as inerrantly assembled into one volume and preserved from that confusion, injury, and miscarriage of the divine purpose which either subtraction from or addition to the Canon would impose. God's determining care over the formation of the Canon of the Scriptures is as much in evidence and to His eternal glory as His care over the precise transmission of His truth through human authors. Since any portion of the Bible is canonical because of the fact that it is an authoritative document, being God's Word written, it is highly commendable to investigate most carefully as to the precise source and nature of this authority. The objective in so doing need not necessarily be one of dispelling doubt as to the God-like constitution of the Scriptures; it may well be the desire to arrive at a more worthy conception of their transcendent import. Regardless of the infinity of proof that the Bible is God's Word written and therefore imbued with the same authority which the Creator exercises over His creation and that heaven exercises over earth, the human family are not all amenable to the supremacy and dominion of the Bible. Unregenerate men, who "have not God in all their thoughts," ignore the Scriptures. The world now weltering in the demoralizing influence of satanic ideals and philosophies cannot be expected to appreciate or to commend the Bible. Nor is their disregard of it other than an indirect proof of its heavenly character.[20]

So the question is not where a book received its divine authority because that can only come from God. Rather the question should be how did men recognize that authority? So canonicity is recognized by men of God. Inspiration determines canonicity. If a book was authoritative, it was so because God breathed it and made it so. A book received authority from God. How men recognize that authority is another matter altogether. Therefore, the reason there are only sixty-six books in the canon is that God only inspired sixty-six books!

J. I. Packer notes, 'The Church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity. God gave us gravity, by His work of creation, and similarly He gave us the New Testament canon, by inspiring the individual books that make it up."[21]

Edward J. Young writes "When the Word of God was written it became Scripture and, inasmuch as it had been spoken by God, possessed absolute authority. Since it was the Word of God, it was canonical. That which determines the canonicity of a book, therefore, is the fact that the book is inspired by God. Hence a distinction is properly made between the authority which the Old

[20] (1938). *Bibliotheca Sacra*, *95*(378), 138–142.
[21] J. I. Packer, *God Speaks to Man*, p. 81.

Testament possesses as divinely inspired, and the recognition of that authority on the part of Israel."[22]

Archer comments on the tests of canonicity, he writes "First we may consider certain inadequate tests which have been proposed in recent times. 1. J. G. Eichhorn (1780) considered age to be the test for canonicity. All books believed to have been composed after Malachi's time were excluded from consideration. But this theory does not account for the numerous older works like the Book of Jashar (Josh. 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18) and the Book of the Wars of Jehovah (Num. 21:14) which were not accounted authoritative. 2. E Hitzig (ca. 1850) made the Hebrew language the Jewish test of canonicity. But this does not explain why Ecclesiasticus, Tobit, and 1 Maccabees were rejected even though they were composed in Hebrew. It also raises questions as to the acceptability of the Aramaic chapters of Daniel and Ezra. 3. G. Wildeboer[23] makes conformity to the Torah the test of canonicity for the later books. But later on in his discussion he introduces many other criteria which render this worthless: (a) canoncial books had to be written in Hebrew or Aramaic; and they either had to (b) treat ancient history (like Ruth or Chronicles), or (c) speak of the establishment of a new order of things (Ezra, Nehemiah), or (d) be assigned to a famous person of ancient times, such as Solomon, Samuel, Daniel, or (perhaps) Job, or (e) be in complete harmony with the national sentiment of people and scribes (Esther). Here indeed we have a bewildering profusion of tests. As for Wildeboer's original criterion, how can we be sure that the Words of Nathan the prophet (referred to in 2 Chron. 9:29) or Isaiah's Acts of Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:22) or Jeremiah's Lamentation for Josiah (2 Chron. 35:25) were not in conformity to the Torah, at least as much so as their other words or writings which have been preserved in the canon? As for (e), many of the pseudepigraphical works, like Enoch, Lamech and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Testament of Adam, and several others, were assigned to famous men of old, and it is not absolutely certain that none of them was originally composed in Aramaic (if not in Hebrew). The only true test of canonicity which remains is the testimony of God the Holy Spirit to the authority of His own Word. This testimony found a response of recognition, faith, and submission in the hearts of God's people who walked in covenant fellowship with Him. As E. J. Young puts it, 'To these and other proposed criteria we must reply with a negative. The canonical books of the Old Testament were divinely revealed and their authors were holy men who spoke as they were borne of the Holy Ghost. In His good providence God brought it about that His people should recognize and receive His Word. How He planted this conviction in their hearts with respect to the identity of His Word we may not be able fully to understand or explain. We may, however,

[22] Edward J. Young, The Canon of the Old Testament, in Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Revelation and the Bible*, p. 156.
[23] Wildeboer, p. 97.

follow our Lord, who placed the imprimatur of His infallible authority upon the books of the Old Testament.'[24] We may go further than this and point out that in the nature of the case we could hardly expect any other valid criteria than this. If canonicity is a quality somehow imparted to the books of Scripture by any kind of human decision, as Liberal scholars unquestioningly assume (and as even the Roman Church implies by her self-contradictory affirmation: "The Church is the mother of the Scripture"), then perhaps a set of mechanical tests could be set up to determine which writings to accept as authoritative and which to reject. But if, on the other hand, a sovereign God has taken the initiative in revelation and in the production of an inspired record of that revelation through human agents, it must simply be a matter of recognition of the quality already inherent by divine act in the books so inspired. When a child recognizes his own parent from a multitude of other adults at some public gathering, he does not impart any new quality of parenthood by such an act; he simply recognizes a relationship which already exists. So also with lists of authoritative books drawn up by ecclesiastical synods or councils. They did not impart canonicity to a single page of Scripture; they simply acknowledged the divine inspiration of religious documents which were inherently canonical from the time they were first composed, and formally rejected other books for which canonicity had been falsely claimed.[25]

Geisler and Nix write "In a real sense, Christ is the key to the inspiration and canonization of the Scriptures. It was He who confirmed the inspiration of the Hebrew canon of the Old Testament; and it was He who promised that the Holy Spirit would direct the apostles into all truth. The fulfillment of that promise resulted in the writing and collection of the New Testament. As Carl F. H. Henry writes, Jesus altered the prevailing Jewish view of Scripture in several ways: (1) he subjected the authority of tradition to the superior and normative authority of the Old Testament; (2) he emphasized that he himself fulfills the messianic promise of the inspired writings; (3) he claimed for himself an authority not below that of the Old Testament and definitively expounded the inner significance of the Law; (4) he inaugurated the new covenant escalating the Holy Spirit's moral power as an internal reality; (5) he committed his apostles to the enlargement and completion of the Old Testament canon through their proclamation of the Spirit-given interpretation of his life and work. At the same time he identified himself wholly with the revelational authority of Moses and the prophets—that is, with the Old Testament as an inspired literary canon insisting that Scripture has sacred, authoritative and permanent validity, and that the revealed truth of God is conveyed in its teachings.[2627]

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[24] E. J. Young, "The Canon of the Old Testament," in *Revelation and the Bible*, p. 168.
[25] Archer, G., Jr. (1994). *A survey of Old Testament introduction* (3rd. ed., pp. 84–86). Chicago: Moody Press.
[26] Carl F. H. Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, vol. 3: God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses, Part Two, p. 47.
[27] Geisler, N. L., & Nix, W. E. (1986). *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Rev. and expanded., pp. 207–208). Chicago: Moody Press.

"Community-Canon" Approach Verses "Intrinsic-Canon" Approach

Some adopt the view that the community determines the scope of the canon. This is called the "community-canon" approach. Therefore, this view adopts the idea that the canon is a collection of writings which are authoritative because this authority has been determined by the community. So in other words, this view believes that the community shaped the canon.

The approach that the community merely recognized the authority of certain writings and that God gave these particular writings their authority is called the "intrinsic-canon" approach. It views God as determining the scope of the canon and the community recognizes it. In other words, the canon is a collection of books that are authoritative for the simple reason that God commissioned these books. Therefore, the "intrinsic-canon" approach to canonicity contends that recognizing the canon does not determine its canonicity but rather simply determines only whether that particular community will allow the canon to function as its highest authority.

John Peckham writes "It is important to clarify what the intrinsic-canon approach is not. This approach does not overlook or ignore the variegated history of receiving and recognizing the canon. The historical information regarding the numerous canon-lists and council-discussions is intriguing and important. It is by no means presumed that the community received the canon without controversy or criticism, yet this approach nevertheless maintains that the history of canon-recognition does not change the intrinsic nature of the canon if it was divinely revealed, inspired, and preserved. In other words, if the concept of canon is defined as writings appointed by God, then the history of a canon's recognition does not itself bear on its canonicity, as such."[28]

There are several questions that one must answer with regards to the "community-canon" approach, if one is to adopt this view of canonicity. First of all, if this view is the correct one, then how does one reconcile the fact that the message of many of the canonical prophets was rejected by many people in the nation of Israel and many times only a small remnant responded favorably to the message of these prophets such as Jeremiah. If we look at many of these prophets in the Old Testament we find that the supposedly authoritative community rejected their prophetic message!

Elijah's prophetic message was rejected by the nation of Israel and he was persecuted by the king and queen of Israel for this message (1 Kings 18:7-10; 19:2). Ahab and Jezebel were determined to kill him because of his messages

[28] Intrinsic Canonicity and the Inadequacy of the Community Approach to Canon-Determination; Themelios, volume 36, Issue 2, pages 203-215.

which condemned their behavior. The Israelite community failed to respond to Elijah's message (1 Kings 18:21) prior to the victory God gave him over the prophets of Baal.

Jeremiah was also persecuted for his message which told Israel to capitulate to Nebuchadnezzar. The so-called authoritative community rejected this message and he was imprisoned (Jeremiah 18:18; 37-39).

Furthermore the gospel message of Jesus Christ Himself and His apostles was rejected by the majority in Israel. Jesus was crucified by the so-called authoritative community.

Therefore, when we approach the "community-canon" approach in relation to the Old Testament prophets and Jesus and His apostles, we can see it is defective. If the Jewish community determined the canonicity of certain prophets, then why then did the Jews reject the message of Old Testament prophets and Jesus and His apostles? If the "community-canon" approach is correct then how did the writings of the Old Testament prophets which were rejected by Israel, find their way into the Jewish canon? If the Jewish community determined which writings were canonical, then how did the gospel of Jesus Christ and the writings of His apostles find their way into the New Testament when their message was rejected by the supposed authoritative community of their day, the nation of Israel? The "intrinsic-canon" approach does not have these problems that are related to the "community-canon" approach.

Again, we turn to Peckham, he writes "the intrinsic-canon approach recognizes that the variegated and complex history of canon-reception is important, yet it does not believe that history bears on the canonicity of the writings themselves. This is based, not on ignorance or indifference regarding history, but on the differentiation between what something *is* and what it is *recognized to be*. To say otherwise would raise an enormous difficulty for Christian theology. For instance if what something *is* is relegated to what the community recognizes it to be, then Jesus Christ is divine only to the extent that he is recognized as such. For Christians, this would have the objectionable result that the nature of Jesus Christ is itself relative to community-recognition, calling to mind the failure of such recognition by the vast majority of Christ's contemporaries. From a Christian perspective, this magnifies the inadequacy of a community approach to determine the canon. Importantly, however, the intrinsic-canon approach does not intend to rule out the community from the canon-recognition process, which is essential to the *functional* (not intrinsic) authority of the canon. Rather, from the standpoint of the intrinsic-canon approach, the community should recognize its own inadequacy to *determine* the canon and, accordingly, seek to *discover* the scope of the canon as divinely intended. This encourages humility in approaching divine revelation, promoting a healthy spirit of submission in seeking divine revelation to reform the community

as opposed to the intentional or unintentional re-forming of divine revelation. At the same time, the intrinsic-canon approach celebrates the community's role in preserving and recognizing the canon. It recognizes that the community approach is inadequate for determining the canon, but that does not mean that all communities inadequately recognize the canon. On the contrary, the community has been integral to preserving and passing down (*traditio*) the canon to all future generations. From an intrinsic-canon perspective, God uses the willing community throughout the ages to preserve and disseminate his canonical revelation. Thus, the intrinsic-canon approach recognizes the community's competence to preserve information (i.e., the canon itself as well as relevant history) that affords the opportunity to recognize the canon. It is not necessary to disparage the community's contribution in the history of the canon in order to concurrently recognize the community's inherent limitations with regard to the ability to determine that same canon."[29]

Erroneous Views of Determining Canonicity

Some have argued that age or we can say antiquity determines canonicity. The argument is that if the book were ancient it would have been revered because of its age and recognized as part of the Hebrew canon. However, this view is clearly wrong because it does not measure up to the facts.

First of all, many ancient books are not in the canon. That antiquity does not determine canonicity is apparent from the fact that numerous books, many of which are older than some canonical books, are not in the canon.

For instance, "The Book of the Wars of the Lord" is mentioned in Numbers 21:14, and "the book of Jasher" in Joshua 10:13 and neither of which is part of the Hebrew canon. Secondly, most, if not all, of the canonical books were received into the canon soon after they were written. For example, Moses' writings were placed by the ark while he was yet alive (Deut. 31:24–26).

Daniel who was a younger contemporary of Jeremiah, accepted Jeremiah's book as canonical (Dan. 9:2). Ezekiel, another contemporary, made reference to the prophet Daniel (Ezek. 28:3). In the New Testament, Peter had a collection of Paul's books and considered them to be Scripture (2 Peter 3:15–16).

Therefore, since many old books were not accepted in the canon, and many young books were received, age could not have been the determining factor of canonicity.

Some scholars argue that the Hebrew language determines canonicity meaning that if a book were written in the language of the Jews, it would have been

[29] Ibid.

recognized as being a part of the canon and if not, it would have been rejected. This view is faulty as well because many books in the Hebrew language are not in the canon.

Most of the books written by the Hebrews were obviously in the Hebrew language, but they were not all accepted in the canon. For example, Ecclesiasticus and other Apocryphal books were written in the Hebrew language and yet they were not received into the Hebrew canon. Interestingly some books are not totally written in the Hebrew language are in the canon. Daniel 2:4b–7:28 are written in the Aramaic language and so is Ezra 4:8–6:18 and 7:21–26.

Some argue that agreement with the Torah determines canonicity. In other words, they believe that all Hebrew religious literature that agreed with the teachings of the Torah was accepted into the canon, and all those books that disagreed with it were not. Now we know that no book which contradicted the Torah would be accepted since the Torah was recognized as being God's Word and God would not contradict Himself.

The problem with this view is that it does not take into account that there are numerous books which agreed with the Torah but yet were not accepted into the canon. For example, the prophet Shemaiah kept records that agreed with the Torah (2 Chron. 12:15) but are not in the canon.

Also the Jews were of the conviction that the Talmud and Midrash agreed with the Torah, however they did not consider them to be canonical. We also must keep in mind that there were no writings prior to the time of the Torah by which its canonicity could be judged.

There is also the view that the religious value of a given book was the determining factor of its reception into the canon. The problem with this view is that it fails to take into account that there are many books of religious value that were not accepted into either the Old or New Testament collections. The Apocrypha has much material which is of religious value (cf. Ecclesiasticus). Even if a book was accepted because of its religious value, it in no way explains how it received its religious value.

Another erroneous view of canonicity is that the religious community determines canonicity since a book is not the Word of God because it is accepted by the people of God but rather, it was accepted by the people of God because it is the Word of God. In other words, God gives the book its divine authority and not the people of God. The people are simply recognizing the divine authority which God gives to it.

The problem with all of these erroneous views is that they all fail to distinguish between determination and recognition of canonicity. Canonicity is determined by God. Man merely recognizes a book being inspired by God. Therefore, we can see that a book is canonical because God inspired it. Canonicity is determined or fixed

conclusively by authority, and authority was given to the individual books by God through inspiration.

The Close of the Old Testament

The oldest surviving list of the Old Testament canon comes from about 170 A.D. and is the product of a Christian scholar named Melito of Sardis who made a trip to Palestine to determine both the order and number of books in the Hebrew canon. His order and contents do not agree exactly with our modern English Bibles. In fact there is no agreement in order or content in the existing manuscripts of Hebrew, Greek or Latin Bibles. The modern English Protestant Bible follows the order of the Latin Vulgate and the content of the Hebrew Bible.

Opinions vary considerably over the date of the closing of the Old Testament canon, from 500 B.C. for the Law and the Prophets to about 200 A.D. However, it is now recognized that any date later than the first century B.C. flies in the face of considerable amount of evidence to the contrary.

There is considerable evidence that pre-Christian Judaism considered that prophecy had ceased and that the canon of the Old Testament was closed well before the first century A.D. First of all, First Maccabees 9:23-27 written in approximately 100 B.C. expresses sorrow that the line of prophets had ceased.

The Dead Sea Scrolls quote from all three divisions as scripture and refer to all three as "the Law and the Prophets" or "Moses and the Prophets." The fact that the Qumran community wrote commentaries on only biblical books strongly suggests that they viewed these books in a distinguished category.

Josephus and the Old Testament Canon

Josephus wrote twenty years before Jamnia and over three hundred years before the Talmud's Tractate *Baba Bathra*, which is used to support the theory of the three-part development. He had the actual Temple scrolls in his possession as a gift from Titus. We would conclude from these facts that Josephus should be considered more authoritative than the Talmud regarding the first century view of the canon. Josephus had the same canon we do. He says there were 22 books in the canon of the Old Testament (see "Against Apion" 1:8, where he mentions 5 books of Moses, 13 Prophets, and 4 Writings). This corresponds to our 39 books. He recognized Jeremiah and Lamentations as one book, as he also did Judges and Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, and Ezra and Esther.

Josephus is an accurate historian as confirmed by the excavations at Masada under Y. Yadin.[30]

The twelve Minor Prophets were also recognized as one book, called "The Book of the Twelve." Josephus included Daniel in the Prophets instead of in the Writings, which refutes an important part of the proof used to support the three-part theory. He also indicates that there was unbroken succession of prophets from Moses to Malachi, and that the histories written since Malachi were not inspired, because there had been no succession of prophets since the time of Malachi.

Josephus writes "For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another [as the Greeks have], but only twenty-two books,[g] which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; (39) and of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; (40) but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life. (41) It is true, our history hath been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time; (42) and how firmly we have given credit to those books of our own nation, is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them; but it becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their very birth, to esteem those books to contain divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them. (43) For it is no new thing for our captives, many of them in number, and frequently in time, to be seen to endure racks and deaths of all kinds upon the theatres, that they may not be obliged to say one word against our laws and the records that contain them; (44) whereas there are none at all among the Greeks who would undergo the least harm on that account, no, nor in case all the writings that are among them were to be destroyed; (45) for they take them to be such discourses as are famed agreeably to the inclinations of those that write them; and they have justly the same opinion of the ancient writers, since they see some of the present generation bold enough to write about such affairs, wherein they were not present, nor had concern enough to inform themselves about them from those that

[30] Yigael Yadin, Masada [1966], pp. 15, 16

[g] Which were these twenty-two sacred books of the Old Testament, see the Supplement to the Essay on the Old Testament, 25–29–*viz*., those we call *canonical*, all excepting the Canticles; but still, with this farther exception, that the first book of *apocryphal* Esdras be taken into the number, instead of our *canonical* Ezra, which seems to be no more than a later epitome of the other; which two books of Canticles and Ezra, it no way appears that our Josephus ever saw.

knew them: (46) examples of which may be had in this late war of ours, where some persons have written histories, and published them, without having been in the places concerned, or having been near them when the actions were done; but these men put a few things together by hearsay, and insolently abuse the world, and call these writings by the name of Histories."[31]

Notice that Josephus fixes the number of Jewish writings that are recognized as sacred at twenty-two. Ruth and Judges were considered one book and so were Lamentations and Jeremiah. He also classifies them according to a three-fold division: (1) Five books written by Moses (2) Writings of the thirteen prophets (3) Four hymns and maxims for living one's life. The books of Moses were of course the Pentateuch and the thirteen prophets included eight plus Daniel, Job, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah and Esther. The four hymns and maxims consisted of Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes. There is very little doubt that these twenty-two books are those of our present Hebrew canon.

Furthermore, antiquity is the standard by which he gives canonicity. He says that since Artaxerxes' age, the succession of prophets had ceased! The tradition of Josephus' time was that the prophetic tradition had ceased with Malachi. The tradition in the time of Josephus was that the Hebrew canon was closed between 445-432 B.C. Therefore, the Hebrew canon was closed in the reign of Artaxerxes (465-425 B.C.).

Josephus does not attempt to give any account of the closing of the canon but simply assumes it as fact. For him, prophecy had ceased and the canon was thus closed. It is significant that the closing of the canon did not need any official proclamation. The value of Josephus' statement about the canon is great because he was simply expressing the popular belief of his age among his fellow Jewish countrymen. He was voicing a truth that was universal and undisputed among the Jews of his day.

The Septuagint and the Old Testament Canon

In the centuries, which followed the Babylonian Captivity, many changes took place for the Jews. The Persian Empire, which had been favorably inclined toward the Jews, collapsed. Alexander the Great extended his conquests. He too, was pro-Semitic, and the Jews prospered during his reign and under his successors, the Ptolemies. At that time the largest group of Jews in the world had settled at Alexandria, Egypt.

The city had been founded by Alexander the Great, and the Ptolemies had made it their capital. They loved books and collected them. They built one of the finest

[31] Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). *The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

universities in the world, the Museion, which contained an immense library. Alexandria was the home of many brilliant Greek philosophers, scientists, mathematicians and writers. It was here that the finest translation of the Hebrew canon was made.

By the year 280 B.C. the large Jewish community at Alexandria had been influenced by Greek culture to such an extent that its citizens had adopted the Hellenistic Greek of Alexander the Great as their own language. They could no longer read the Scriptures in the original Hebrew. Hellenistic Greek was the transitional Greek between classical Attic Greek and the Koine of the New Testament.

The Jews clamored for a translation of the Holy Scriptures into Greek. This required real experts and therefore 72 Alexandrian Hebrew scholars gathered together and produced an amazingly accurate translation from the manuscripts in their possession. It was named in their honor and memory the Septuagint. It was widely circulated among the Greek-speaking Jews and was employed in Palestine during the incarnation of Jesus and in the time of the Apostles. So the existence and acceptance of the Septuagint in the year 280 B.C. gives us yet another historical proof of the canon of the Old Testament was closed well before the first century B.C.

New Testament Writers and the Old Testament Canon

The New Testament writers quoted the Old Testament extensively but there is not enough evidence which declares emphatically that they viewed the Old Testament as closed. However, this does not mean they did not view it as closed. There is strong evidence that strongly suggests that they considered the Old Testament canon closed.

First, the patterns in which the New Testament writers quote the Old Testament correspond with predominant Jewish evidence for the shape of the canon. The New Testament writers quote every book of the Pentateuch in its Jewish form including the books from the Prophets like Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Minor Prophets as well as the Writings such as Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Daniel and Chronicles. Other Old Testaments books are alluded to as well such as Joshua 1:5 in Hebrews 13:5 and Judges in Hebrews 11:32.

Secondly, when literature outside of the body of writings which are now recognized to be the Old Testament canon is cited, it is not referred to as Scripture nor is the Holy Spirit mentioned as its ultimate author (Cleanthes in Acts 17:28; Menander in 1 Corinthians 15:33; Epimenides in Titus 1:12; 1 Enoch in Jude 14-15.

Thirdly, the New Testament writers give absolutely no indication whatsoever that they want to get rid of the canonical Old Testament because it is not in line with their Christian faith. In fact the Old Testament was used in defense of the Christian gospel (Rom. 3:21). Paul even says that the Old Testament Scriptures were written for the Christian's instruction and encouragement (Rom. 15:3-6; 1 Cor. 10:11; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; Heb. 11:39-40).

There is a fourth piece of evidence, namely many New Testament passages when dealing with problems in Jewish theology and traditions, appeal to what both sides have in common, namely the Old Testament Scriptures (e.g. Mark 7:6-7, 10-13; 11:17; 12:10-11, 24; Luke 4:16-21; John 6:45; 10:34-35; 15:25; Acts 17:2-3, 11; 18:24, 28; 24:14-15; 26:22; Rom. 3:1-2; Gal. 3).

Last but certainly not least is Jesus' reference to all the blood shed from that of Abel to that of Zechariah son Berekiah in Matthew 23:35. This reference is to the first man in the Hebrew canon to be killed to the last one (Zechariah son Jehoiada in 2 Chron. 24:20, 22). Zechariah was not the last to be killed on any chronological scale since Uriah son of Shemaiah (Jer. 26:20-23) was probably the last to be killed chronologically within the period of time represented by the Old Testament. However if the identification with the Zechariah of 2 Chronicles 24:20, 22 is correct, then he was chosen by the Lord because of his place in the recognized canon in the first century A.D.!

Organization of the Old Testament Canon

There are two systems of dividing the Old Testament books: (1) Two-fold (2) Three-fold.

The two-fold division: (1) Law or Moses (2) The Prophets.

The three-fold division: (1) The Law or Moses (2) The Prophets (*Nabhiim*) (3) The Writings (*Kethubim*).

The present Hebrew Bible has this three-fold division and the Talmud shows this same three-fold division as does Jerome in approximately 400 A.D. Josephus, Philo and the New Testament have this three-fold division. However, there is no evidence for this three-fold division prior to 400 A.D.

The first section is called the Torah meaning "the Law" contained: (1) Genesis (2) Exodus (3) Leviticus (4) Numbers (5) Deuteronomy.

The second section was the Prophets which were divided into two sections: (1) The Former Prophets (2) The Latter Prophets.

The Former Prophets: (1) Joshua (2) Judges (3) Samuel (4) Kings.

The Latter Prophets were divided into two categories: (1) Major (2) Minor.

Major Prophets: (1) Isaiah (2) Jeremiah (3) Ezekiel.

The Minor Prophets were also called the Twelve because they were all contained 1 Book: (1) Hosea (2) Joel (3) Amos (4) Obadiah (5) Jonah (6) Micah (7) Nahum (8) Habakkuk (9) Zephaniah (10) Haggai (11) Zechariah (12) Malachi.

The third and last section was called the Writings: (1) The Poetical Books: Psalms, Proverbs and Job (2) The Five Rolls (*Megilloth*): Song of Solomon, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Esther and Lamentations (3) The Historical Books: Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah (1 book) and Chronicles.

Archer writes "The Masoretic edition of the Old Testament differs in certain particulars from the order of books followed in the Septuagint, and also from that of Protestant churches. The compilers of the Greek Version (LXX) observed a more or less topical arrangement, as follows. The 5 books of law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The 15 books of history: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings (generally these last four are named, 1, 2, 3, and 4 Kingdoms), 1 and 2 Chronicles, 1 and 2 Esdras (the first being apocryphal, the second being canonical Ezra), Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, and Esther. The 7 books of poetry and wisdom: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Wisdom of Solomon, and Wisdom of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus). The 19 books of prophecy: the 12 Minor Prophets—Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi;[32] the p 76 7 Major Prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Baruch, Lamentations, Epistle of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel (including Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, and the Song of the Three Holy Children).[33]

The Apocrypha

The term "apocrypha" is a name given to a collection of books that were thought to contain "hidden" or "secret" truths (from the Gk *apokryptō*, "to hide, conceal"). The books of the Apocrypha are considered canonical by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches but are not included in the Jewish or most Protestant Scriptures.

The Apocryphal Old Testament includes books that are still deemed important for Judaism and Protestant Christianity, such as 1 and 2 Maccabees and Wisdom of Solomon, even though they are not considered canonical.

The Apocryphal books are nowhere held to be of either prophetic or apostolic authorship. They were universally rejected as scripture in their own day by both Jew and Christian. Josephus rejected the canonicity of the apocryphal books,

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LXX Septuagint Version of the Old Testament

[32] This order of the Minor Prophets in the Greek Septuagint was altered in the Latin Vulgate to the order followed in modern Bible translations, with Joel coming after Hosea rather than after Micah. Even the present day Greek Orthodox editions of the LXX conforms to the Vulgate order.

[33] Archer, G., Jr. (1994). *A survey of Old Testament introduction* (3rd. ed., pp. 75–76). Chicago: Moody Press.

apparently reflecting current Jewish thought. Jamnia held the same view. The apocryphal books themselves admit that the prophetic succession ended with Zechariah and Malachi (I Macc. 4; 46; 9:27; 14:41). This view is also reflected in the *Manual of Discipline* in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Melito and Origen rejected the Apocrypha, as does the Muratorian Canon. The only relatively early acceptance of the Apocrypha was by Augustine and the council of Hippo (393 AD), although even he says of books like Judith, "They are not found in the canon which the people of God received, because it is one thing to be able to write as men with the diligence of historians, and another as prophets with divine inspiration."[34]

The Apocrypha was sometimes included at the end of a New Testament codex copy. Since the codex was cut and assembled before copying began, pages were left over. These were often filled with one or more apocryphal books.

Jerome vigorously resisted including the Apocrypha in his Latin Vulgate Version, but was over-ruled. As a result, the standard Roman Catholic Bible throughout the medieval period contained it. Thus, it gradually came to be revered by the average clergyman. Still, many medieval Catholic scholars realized that it was not inspired.

Pope Gregory the Great (ca 600 AD) when quoting 1 Maccabees says, "We address a testimony from books though not canonical, yet published for the edification of the Church."

Not until the Council of Trent in the late 1500's was the Apocrypha declared to be scripture, and then only by the Catholic Church. The Apocrypha (literally: "hidden, secret, spurious, fraudulent, forged") includes fourteen books which are found in the Septuagint (LXX) and Vulgate but never in the Hebrew Canon and were so named due to their doubtful authenticity.

Apocrypha contains the following works: (1) Tobit (2) Judith (3) The Wisdom of Solomon (4) Sirach or Ecclesiasticus (5) Baruch (6) Azariah and the Three Jews (6) Susanna (7) Bel and the Dragon (8) 1 Maccabees (9) 2 Maccabees (10) 1 Esdras (11) The Prayer of Manasseh (12) 3 Maccabees (13) 2 Esdras (14) 4 Maccabees.

Neither Jesus Christ nor any of the New Testament writers ever quoted from the Apocrypha. Josephus expressly excluded them from his list of sacred Scripture in his book.

No mention of the Apocrypha was made in any catalogue of canonical books in the first four centuries A.D. These Apocryphal books were never asserted to be divinely inspired, or to possess divine authority in their contents. No prophets were

[34] De Civitate Dei, xviii, 36

connected with these writings. These books contained many historical, geographical and chronological errors.

The Apocrypha teaches doctrines and upholds practices, which are contrary to the canon of Scripture. Documentation regarding the false doctrine found in the Apocrypha is as follows: (1) Prayers and Offerings for the Dead (2 Macc. 12:41-46 cf. Jn. 3:18, 36). (2) Suicide Justified (2 Macc. 14:41-46 cf. Ps. 31:15). (3) Atonement and Salvation by Almsgiving (Tob. 4:11; cf. 1 Jn. 1:9; Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5). (4) Cruelty to Slaves Justified (Ecc. 33:25-29; cf. Dt. 23:15-16). (5) The Doctrine of Emanations (Wis. 7:25). (6) The preexistence of souls.

Antilegomena and Homologoumena and Pseudepigrapha

Objections had been raised by some of the Jews to the canonical recognition of a few books (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Esther), and their canonicity was reaffirmed. These books which were disputed are called "Antilegomena," which is a term which is used to describe books in both the Old and New Testament whose inspiration and canonicity were disputed as opposed to those that were accepted by universally by the church. All of the books that the Jews decided to acknowledge as canonical were already generally accepted, although questions had been raised about some of them. On the other hand, those that they refused to admit, such as Ecclesiasticus, had never been included.

Gleason Archer commenting on the "Antilegomena" ("the books spoken against") writes "The Mishnah mentions the existence of controversy in some Jewish circles during the second century a.d. relative to the canonicity of Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. Doubts were expressed by some during the same period as to the book of Proverbs. Ezekiel had also, according to the Gemara, been under discussion as to its authority until the objections to it were settled in a.d. 66. We are told that the disciples of Shammai in the first century b.c. contested the canonicity of Ecclesiastes, whereas the school of Hillel just as vigorously upheld it. The scholarly discussions held at Jamnia in a.d. 90[35] sustained the claims of both Ecclesiastes and Canticles to divine authority. These minority objections should not be misconstrued as having delayed the canonicity of the five books concerned, any more than Martin Luther's sixteenth-century objections to James and Esther delayed canonical recognition of these books. To deal with the charges against

[35] There is, incidentally, very little support for the supposition that there ever was an official synodical meeting at Jamnia, or Jabneh, either in A.D. 90 or at any other time. R. K. Harrison asserts: "As far as the facts of the situation are concerned, very little is known about the supposed Synod of Jamnia. After Jerusalem was destroyed by the forces of Titus in A.D. 70, Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai obtained permission from the Romans to settle in Jamnia, where he purposed to carry on his literary activities. The location soon became an established center of Scriptural study, and from time to time certain discussions took place relating to the canonicity of specific O.T. books including Ezekiel, Esther, Canticles, Ecclesiastes and Proverbs. There can be little doubt that such conversations took place both before and after this period and it seems probable that nothing of a formal or binding nature was decided in these discussions, even though, as Rowley had indicated, the various debates helped to crystallize and establish the Jewish tradition in this regard more firmly than had been the case previously" Harrison, OTI, p. 278. (Cf. H. H. Rowley, *The Growth of the Old Testament*, p. 170; E. J. Young, in C. F. H. Henry's *Revelation and the Bible*, p. 160.)

these disputed books, we must take them up one by one. The criticism of Ecclesiastes was based upon its alleged pessimism, its supposed Epicureanism, and denial of the life to come. But thoughtful students of the book came to the conclusion that none of these charges was justified when the work was interpreted in the light of the author's special technique and purposes. The criticism of the Song of Solomon was based on the passages in it which speak of physical attractiveness in bold and enthusiastic imagery bordering on the erotic (if taken in a crassly literal way). But the allegorical interpretation of Hillel, who identified Solomon with Jehovah and the Shulamite with Israel, revealed spiritual dimensions in this truly beautiful production. Christian exegetes followed this lead in applying the figure of Solomon to Christ and the bride to the Church, and attained thereby richer insight into the love relationship between the Savior and His redeemed. As for Esther, the objection was that the name of God does not appear in it. But this drawback (difficult though it is to explain) was more than offset by the remarkable manifestations of divine providence working through every dramatic circumstance in order to deliver the Jewish race from the greatest threat to its existence ever faced in their history. In the case of Ezekiel, the problem it presented consisted in the disagreements of detail between the latter-day temple and ritual of the last ten chapters and those of the Mosaic tabernacle and Solomonic temple. But it was pointed out in rebuttal that these differences were found only in minor details and might pertain to a still future temple, rather than to the second temple erected by Zerubbabel. In any event, it was to be confidently expected that Elijah upon his return to earth would clear up all these difficulties for the faithful. The objections to Proverbs were not so serious, but centered rather in a few apparently contradictory precepts, such as 26:4–5: 'Answer not a fool according to his folly.… Answer a fool according to his folly.'[36]

The "homologoumena" is a term to describe books which once they were accepted into the canon were not subsequently questioned or disputed. They were recognized not only by early generations but by succeeding generations as well. The "homologoumena" is composed of thirty-four of the thirty-nine books in the English versions of the Protestant Old Testament. All of the Old Testament except the antilegomena are in this body of books. The "homologoumena" includes every book of the Protestant English Old Testament except Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Ezekiel, and Proverbs.

The term "pseudepigrapha" refers to a large number of false and spurious writings. The New Testament writers make use of a number of these books, for example, Jude 14–15 have a possible quotation from the Book of Enoch (1:9) and the Assumption of Moses (1:9); and an allusion from the Penitence of Jannes and

[36] Archer, G., Jr. (1994). *A survey of Old Testament introduction* (3rd. ed., pp. 77–79). Chicago: Moody Press.

Jambres is found in 2 Timothy 3:8. Of course, it should be remembered that the New Testament also quotes from the heathen poets Aratus (Acts 17:28); Menander (1 Cor. 15:33); and Epimenides (Titus 1:12). Truth is truth no matter where it is found, whether uttered by a heathen poet, a pagan prophet (Num. 24:17), or even a dumb animal (22:28). Nevertheless, it should be noted that no such formula as "it is written" or "the Scriptures say" is connected with these citations. It should also be noted that neither the New Testament writers nor the Fathers have considered these writings canonical.

The "pseudepigrapha" books are those that are distinctly spurious and unauthentic in their overall content. Even though they claim to have been written by biblical authors, they actually don't express sound doctrine but rather religious fancy and magic from the period between about 200 B.C. and 200 A.D.

The Roman Catholic Church considers these books as the Apocrypha, which is a term not to be confused with an entirely different set of books known in Protestant circles by the same name which we noted earlier.

The actual number of these books is not known certainly, and various writers have given different numbers of important ones. There are at least eighteen worth mentioning. They are the book of Jubilee, the letter of Aristeas, the book of Adam and Eve, the martyrdom of Isaiah, 1 Enoch, the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Sibylline Oracle, the Assumption of Moses, 2 Enoch, 2 and 3 Baruch, 3 and 4 Maccabees, Pirke Aboth, the story of Ahikar, the Psalms of Solomon, Psalm 151, and the Fragment of a Zadokite Work.

The Books of History: 1 and 2 Maccabees

Dr. Archer provides an excellent article on 1 and 2 Maccabees, he writes "In general the Latin Vulgate follows the same order as the Septuagint, except that 1 and 2 Esdras is Apocryphal equal of our Ezra and Nehemiah, whereas the Apocryphal parts (3 and 4 Esdras) are placed after the New Testament books, as is also the Prayer of Manasseh. Also, in the Vulgate the Major Prophets are placed before the Minor Prophets. From this listing it will be apparent that the Protestant Bible follows the same topical order of arrangement as the Vulgate, except that all the Apocryphal parts (including the considerable additions to Esther) are omitted. In order, then, the Protestant Bible follows the Vulgate, but in content it follows the MT. It should also be noted that in the Syriac Peshitta the original order of the books was: Pentateuch, Job, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, Canticles, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Twelve Minor Prophets, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The order of books

MT Masoretic Text of the Old Testament (Hebrew)

in the Masoretic Text is as follows: the Torah (or Pentateuch); the prophets (Nebiʾîm) in the following order: Former Prophets—Joshua, Judges, (1 and 2) Samuel, and (1 and 2) Kings; Latter Prophets—Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets (in the same order as in the English Bible); the Writings (Kethûbîm, Greek, Hagiographa, "Holy Writings"): Poetry and Wisdom—Psalms, Proverbs, and Job (but Leningrad Codex has Psalms, Job, and Proverbs); the Rolls or Megilloth—Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther (but Leningrad: Ruth, Song, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther); Historical—Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles. It ought to be mentioned, however, that the order of the books composing the MT represents a later division (largely resorted to in order to facilitate discussion with Christian apologists who appealed to the Old Testament in their polemic against Judaism). The earlier division consisted of the same content as the thirty-nine books listed above, but arranged in only twenty-four books. This meant that 1 and 2 Samuel were counted as one book; likewise 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles. The twelve Minor Prophets were also counted as one book, (since they could all be contained quite easily in a single scroll) and Ezra and Nehemiah formed a single unit. Josephus, however, who wrote near the end of the first century a.d., gives evidence of a twenty-two book canon.[37] This apparently involved the inclusion of Ruth with Judges and of Lamentations with Jeremiah. Yet essentially, whether thirty-nine books, or twenty-four, or twenty-two, the basic divisions of the Hebrew canon have remained the same. The reason Ruth and Lamentations were later separated from Judges and Jeremiah, respectively, is that they were used in the Jewish liturgical year, along with the three other units in the Megilloth. That is to say, Canticles (Song of Solomon) was read at Passover (in the first month); Ruth was read at Pentecost (in the third month); Lamentations was read on the ninth of Ab (fifth month); Ecclesiastes was read at the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month; and Esther was read at the Feast of Purim in the twelfth month. This accounts for the MT order in the Megilloth: Canticles, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. From what has just been said about the inclusion of Ruth in Judges and Lamentations in Jeremiah, it is apparent that the list of Kethûbîm was by no means fixed and rigid. If under the twenty-two book division of Josephus these two units (Ruth and Lamentations) of the Kethûbîm were earlier

MT Masoretic Text of the Old Testament (Hebrew)

[37] The passage from Josephus reads as follows: "We have but twenty-two [books] containing the history of all time, books that are justly believed in; and of these, five are the books of Moses, which comprise the laws and earliest traditions from the creation of mankind down to his death. From the death of Moses to the reign of Artaxerxes King of Persia, the successor of Xerxes, the prophets who succeeded Moses wrote the history of the events that occurred in their own time, in thirteen books. The remaining four documents Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) comprise hymns to God and practical precepts to men" (*Contra Apionem*. 1.8). Apparently these thirteen "prophets" were: Joshua, Judges Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Isaiah, Jeremiah–Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, the twelve Minor Prophets, and possibly Song of Solomon. This means that the assignment of Chronicles, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, and Song of Solomon to the third division of the Hebrew canon was later than the first century A.D. Hence any argument against the authenticity of Daniel based upon its final assignment to the *Kethubim* lacks validity.

MT Masoretic Text of the Old Testament (Hebrew)

included under the prophets, then the third category of the Hebrew canon must have been smaller in the first century a.d. than the later MT division would indicate. Josephus refers to the third category as having only four books, which he describes as containing 'hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life.' This would seem to exclude Daniel from the third division and imply its inclusion among the prophets, since Daniel is neither hymnic nor preceptive. The same would be true of the historical books such as Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles. The still earlier description of the third division by the prologue of Ecclesiasticus as 'others who have followed in the steps of the Prophets' and "other books of our fathers" is too vague to serve as a basis for any deductions. But it is rather striking that the New Testament never specifies any other book besides the Psalms as comprising the third division of the Old Testament (Luke 24:44 speaks of the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms). Usually the Hebrew Scriptures are referred to simply as 'the Law and the Prophets'; in one place even a passage from Psalms (Ps. 82) is spoken of as being written 'in your law' (John 10:34). The Qumran Manual of Discipline and the Zadokite Document refer to the Scriptures simply as 'Moses and the Prophets.'[38] No deductions as to the books in the *Kethûbîm* may safely be drawn from, since the later book-order is obviously not pre-Christian in its origin."[39]

The New Testament

The New Testament canon is composed of twenty-seven early Christian writings which along with the Old Testament canon, is recognized by the Christian church as inspired by God and her Scriptures. Both Old and New Testaments contain the final authoritative deposit of revelation from God.

The development of the New Testament canon took place in the period immediately following the passing of the apostles and is known as the period of the church fathers. Many of these men walked with the apostles and were taught directly by them. Polycarp and Papias, for instance, are considered to have been disciples of the apostle John.

Doctrinal authority during this period rested on two sources, the Old Testament and the notion of apostolic succession, being able to trace a direct association to one of the apostles and thus to Christ. Although the New Testament canon was written, it was not yet seen as a separate body of books equivalent to the Old Testament.

MT Masoretic Text of the Old Testament (Hebrew)

[38] Laird Harris, Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible, p. 146.

[39] Archer, G., Jr. (1994). *A survey of Old Testament introduction* (3rd. ed., pp. 76–77). Chicago: Moody Press.

Geisler and Nix write "God is the source of canonicity, and in His providence He utilized several stimuli that finalized the recognition and ratification of all twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Those stimuli—practical, theological, and political in nature—were instrumental in the collection and transmission of the New Testament Scriptures. It should be remembered, however, that the canon was actually completed when the last New Testament book was written. Within the New Testament itself may be seen the process of selecting and reading the prophetic and apostolic writings that were then being circulated, collected, and even quoted in other inspired writings. In support of this view of canonization, the apostolic Fathers may be cited as referring to all of the New Testament books within about a century of the time they were written. Individuals, translations, and canons show that all but a very few books were generally recognized as canonical before the end of the second century. During the next two centuries the controversy over those Antilegomena books gradually erased all doubts, and there was a final and official recognition of all twenty-seven books of the New Testament by the church universal."[40]

The Text of the New Testament

Accuracy was also a primary consideration in the transmission of the books of the New Testament. After Christianity became legal in A.D. 313, commercial book manufacturers, or scriptoria, were used to produce copies of the New Testament books.

Bruce Metzger wrote, "In order to ensure greater accuracy, books produced in scriptoria were commonly checked over by a corrector . . . specially trained to rectify mistakes in copying. His annotations in the manuscript can usually be detected today from differences in styles of handwriting or tints of ink."

When prose works were copied, a line called a stichos, having sixteen (or sometimes fifteen) syllables, was frequently used as a measure for determining the market price of a manuscript. The application of stichometric reckoning served also as a rough and ready check on the general accuracy of a manuscript, for obviously a document, which was short of the total number of stichoi, was a defective copy. In order to secure a high degree of efficiency and accuracy, certain rules pertaining to the work of scribes were developed and enforced in monastic scriptoria.

The following are examples of such regulations prepared for the renowned monastery of the Studium at Constantinople. About A.D. 800 the abbot of this monastery, Theodore the Studite, who was himself highly skilled in writing an

[40] Geisler, N. L., & Nix, W. E. (1986). *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Rev. and expanded., p. 295). Chicago: Moody Press.

elegant Greek hand, included in his rules for the monastery severe punishments for monks who were not careful in copying manuscripts. A diet of bread and water was the penalty set for the scribe who became so much interested in the subject-matter of what he was copying that he neglected his task of copying.

Monks had to keep their parchment leaves neat and clean, on penalty of 130 penances. If anyone should take without permission another's quaternion (that is, the ruled and folded sheets of parchment), fifty penances were prescribed. If anyone should make more glue than he could use at one time, and it should harden, he must do fifty penances. If a scribe broke his pen in a fit of temper (perhaps after having made some accidental blunder near the close of an otherwise perfectly copied sheet), he had to do thirty penances.

The accuracy of the present-day Greek version of the New Testament has resulted from the comparison of thousands of manuscripts by textual critics who have been able to separate them into families on the basis of certain variations that each manuscript family has in common.

The principles of textual criticism enable scholars to determine which versions of the text are predecessors of the others, thereby coming close to the original reading. While there are many variant readings in the documents of the New Testament, the vast majority of them are of very minor significance, and, according to A. T. Robertson, affect a "thousandth part of the text."

This minuscule portion of the text does not affect any aspect of cardinal Christian doctrine.

F. C. Grant wrote in his Introduction to the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament that, of the variant readings in the New Testament manuscripts, "none has turned up thus far that requires a revision of Christian doctrine."

Philip Schaff wrote that not one of the variant readings affects "an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of Scripture teaching."

The manuscript evidence for the text of the New Testament is vastly more abundant than that for any other ancient document. The oldest known manuscripts of the works of some of the Greek classical authors are copies made a thousand years or more after the author's death. The number of the manuscripts of the ancient classics is also limited about fifty manuscripts of the works of Aeschylus, a hundred of Sophocles, and only one each of the Greek Anthology and the Annals of Tacitus.

Of the New Testament, however, there are almost five thousand manuscripts of part or all of the Greek text, two thousand Greek lectionaries, eight thousand manuscripts in Latin, and one thousand additional manuscripts in other ancient versions.

These manuscripts include extensive parts of the New Testament copied hardly more than a century after the original, and fifty or more manuscripts, including two virtually complete New Testament codices, copied within three centuries after the New Testament books were originally written.

In addition, the writings of the ancient church fathers in Greek, Latin and Syriac contain thousands of quotations from the New Testament. Indeed, the available materials for the text of the New Testament are so extensive that their adequate study is a complicated task, but a task whose result is "to strengthen the proof of the authenticity of the Scriptures, and our conviction that we have in our hands in substantial integrity, the veritable Word of God."[41]

Textual criticism concerns itself with the problems suggested by various kinds of errors. New Testament textual evidence is so vast-exceeding that of any other literature so much so that two results follow: (1) Since copying by hand of any document of appreciable length most inevitably involves change and error, many textual errors and variants will be found in this great quantity of manuscripts. (2) Such a wealth of evidence makes it all the more certain that the original words of the New Testament have been preserved somewhere with the manuscripts.

Conjectural emendation (suggesting a reading that is not found in any manuscript), to which editors have resorted in the restoration of other ancient writings, has almost no place in the textual criticism of the New Testament. The materials are so abundant that at times the difficulty is to select the correct rendering from a number of variant readings in the manuscripts! It must not be overlooked, however, that the textual critic deals with a relatively small percentage of the text.

With the New Testament, as with ancient literature in general, the wording of perhaps eighty-five percent of the text is unquestioned. It is true that if the total number of variant readings of all the manuscripts were counted, the sum would be many thousand.

But the true perspective is probably given by E. Abbot: "About nineteen-twentieths (95%) of the variations have so little support that...no one would think of them as rival readings, and nineteen-twentieths of the remainder are of so little importance that their adoption or rejection would cause no appreciable difference in the sense of the passages in which they occur."

Textual criticism has gradually evolved certain rules, which are based upon patient classification and weighing of all the documentary evidence available, both internal (i.e., intrinsic probability) and external (i.e., the value of the manuscript). The basic principle of internal evidence is that the reading from which the other readings could most easily have arisen is probably the original reading. Bear in

[41] Kenyon, Story of the Bible, p. 144

mind that scribes were engaged in copying a manuscript, not in studying it. Errors could therefore have arisen through a scribe's superficial grasp of the meaning of what he was transcribing.

External evidence seeks to determine which reading the most reliable witnesses-Greek manuscripts, versions, and patristic quotations support. Many of the witnesses can be put into one of four groups or text-types: (1) Alexandrian (2) Caesarean (3) Byzantine (4) Western. By examining a large number of textual variants, the scholar can determine the relative reliability of these text-types.

There are six major codices: (1) Sinaiticus (Aleph 01) (2) Alexandrinus (02 A) (3) Vaticanus (03 B) (4) Ephraemi Rescriptus (04 C) (5) Bezae Cantabrigiensis (05 D) (6) Claromontanus (06 E).

A codice is what we call today a book. It is interesting to note that the books of the New Testament were almost certainly originally written on scrolls. We see evidence of this in the texts of Matthew and Luke, both of which drastically compressed the material in Mark in order to make their books fit on the largest possible scroll.

These scrolls were probably papyrus, which was the cheapest and most important writing material in the ancient world. But the urge to collect the writings that eventually made up the New Testament must have been very strong. It is generally believed that collections of Paul's writings were in existence by 100 A.D., if not earlier. This posed a problem: A collection containing the writings of Paul, or the four Gospels, was far too long for a single scroll. A complete New Testament would have been even more impossible.

The solution was the form of book known as the codex. This is, in fact, what we think of today as a book. Instead of sheets being placed side to side to produce an immensely long single "page," they were folded over each other, permitting books of any length-and, not insignificantly, saving expensive writing material (since codices could be written on both sides).

The Christian church seems to have adopted codices with great enthusiasm; over ninety-nine percent of known New Testament manuscripts are in codex form, and the few minor exceptions were already-written scrolls that Christians salvaged and reused. The earliest manuscripts rarely if ever contained complete New Testament's (for one thing the canon of the New Testament was not finally complete until about the fourth century).

Now, it must be noted that none of the original autographs still exist today and even in the first century the original autographs were copied. There are over five thousand manuscripts of the New Testament, which have been discovered up to the present time. These manuscripts have come to us in various forms: (1) Egyptian papyri: The oldest copies of parts of the Greek New Testament dating back to the A.D. 200. (2) Majuscules: The second oldest copies of New Testament

manuscripts. (3) Miniscules: Copies dating back to the ninth century. (4) Writings of the Early Church fathers: Early Christian writers from the first four centuries. (5) Lectionaries: Manuscripts which were not Scripture themselves but contain Scripture quotations. (6) Early versions: Translations of the New Testament from Greek. The best known is the Latin Vulgate by Jerome.

There are three major majuscules: (1) Codex Aleph (Codex Sinaiticus): Discovered in the mid-1840's by the great scholar Tischendorf at St. Catharine's Monastery, located at the foot of Mount Sinai. It contains the entire New Testament and is dated in the fourth century. (2) Codex A (Alexandrinus): Originated from the city of Alexandria in Egypt. (3) Codex B (Codex Vaticanus): Housed in the Vatican Library and along with the Sinaiticus, it is the main witness for the Egyptian text type. However, it is important to realize there are more than 3,000 differences between these two manuscripts in the Gospels alone. From the manuscripts, which have just been described, various types of Greek texts have been formed.

The two most prominent text types are the: (1) Byzantine: Also called the K (Koine), Syrian, Antiochian and Traditional. (a) It is generally believed to have been produced at Antioch in Syria, and then taken to Byzantium, later known as Constantinople. (b) For about 1000 years, while the Byzantine Empire ruled the Middle East, this was the text used by the Greek Orthodox Church. (c) It also influenced Europe. (d) Because of this background it became the basis for the 1st printed text editions, among others the famous Textus Receptus, called the "received or acknowledged text." (e) This description however, originated with the text produced by Elzevir. (f) He described his 2nd edition of 1633 by the Latin phrase Textus Receptus, or the "Received Text," that is, the one accepted generally as the correct one. (g) Among the oldest majuscules the Byzantine is, among others, represented by Codex Alexandrinus (02 A), 07, 08, 09, 010, 011, 012, 013, 015, and others. (2) Egyptian: This text type originated in Egypt and is the one, which gained the highest recognition and acceptance there in the fourth century. (a) It was produced mainly by copyists in Alexandria, from which it received the name Alexandrian. (b) This text form is represented mostly by two codices: Sinaiticus (01 Aleph) and Vaticanus (03 B) from the fourth century, also from Codex Ephraemi (04 C) from the 5th century. (c) The use of this text type ceased about the year 450 but lived on in the Latin translation, the Vulgate produced by the great scholar Jerome.

Dr. Ryrie writes "The original copies of the Old Testament were written on leather or papyrus from the time of Moses (c. 1450 b.c.) to the time of Malachi (400 b.c.). Until the sensational discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 we did not possess copies of the Old Testament earlier than a.d. 895. The reason for this is simply that the Jews had an almost superstitious veneration for the text which

impelled them to bury copies that had become too old for use. Indeed, the Masoretes (traditionalists) who between a.d. 600 and 950 added accents and vowel points and in general standardized the Hebrew text, devised complicated safeguards for the making of copies. They checked each copy carefully by counting the middle letter of pages, books, and sections. Someone has said that everything countable was counted. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, they gave us a Hebrew text from the second to first century b.c. of all but one of the books (Esther) of the Old Testament. This was of the greatest importance, for it provided a much earlier check on the accuracy of the Masoretic text, which has now proved to be extremely accurate. Other early checks on the Hebrew text include the Septuagint translation (middle of third century b.c.), the Aramaic Targums (paraphrases and quotes of the Old Testament), quotations in early Christian writers, and the Latin translation of Jerome (a.d. 400) which was made directly from the Hebrew text of his day. All of these give us the data for being assured of having an accurate text of the Old Testament. More than 5,000 manuscripts of the New Testament exist today, which makes the New Testament the best-attested document in all ancient writings. The contrast is quite startling. Perhaps we can appreciate how wealthy the New Testament is in manuscript attestation if we compare the textual material for other ancient historical works. For Caesar's Gallic War (composed between 58 and 50 b.c.) there are several extant MSS, but only nine or ten are good, and the oldest is some 900 years later than Caesar's day. Of the 142 books of the Roman history of Livy (59 b.c.–a.d. 17), only 35 survive; these are known to us from not more than twenty MSS of any consequence, only one of which, and that containing fragments of Books III–VI, is as old as the fourth century. Of the fourteen books of the Histories of Tacitus (c. a.d. 100) only four and a half survive; of the sixteen books of his Annals, ten survive in full and two in part. The text of these extant portions of his two great historical works depends entirely on two MSS, one of the ninth century and one of the eleventh.… The History of Thucydides (c. 460–400 b.c.) is known to us from eight MSS, the earliest belonging to c. a.d. 900, and a few papyrus scraps, belonging to about the beginning of the Christian era. The same is true of the History of Herodotus (c. 480–425 b.c.). Yet no classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Herodotus or Thucydides is in doubt because the earliest MSS of their works which are of any use are over 1,300 years later than the originals.[42] Not only are there so many copies of the New Testament in existence, but many of them are early. The approximately seventy-five papyri fragments date from a.d. 135 to the eighth century and cover parts of twenty-five of the twenty-seven books and about 40 percent of the text. The many hundreds of parchment

[42] F. F. Bruce, *Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity, 1943), pp. 16–17.

copies include the great Codex Sinaiticus (fourth century), the Codex Vaticanus (also fourth century), and the Codex Alexandrinus (5th century). In addition, there are 2,000 lectionaries (church service books containing many Scripture portions), more than 86,000 quotations of the New Testament in the church Fathers, old Latin, Syriac, and Egyptian translations dating from the third century, and Jerome's Latin translation. All of this data plus all of the scholarly work that has been done with it assure us that we possess today an accurate and reliable text of the New Testament."[43]

J. Hampton Keathley III writes "Just how reliable are the New Testament documents? There are now more than 5,300 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Add over 10,000 Latin Vulgate and at least 9,300 other early versions (MSS) and we have more than 24,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament. This means that no other document of antiquity even begins to approach such numbers and attestation. In comparison, the Iliad by Homer is second with only 643 manuscripts that still survive. The first complete preserved text of Homer dates from the 13th century.[44] This contrast is startling and tremendously significant. Perhaps we can appreciate how wealthy the New Testament is in manuscript attestation if we compare the textual material for other ancient historical works. For Caesar's Gallic War (composed between 58 and 50 B.C) there are several extant MSS, but only nine or ten are good, and the oldest is some 900 years later than Caesar's day. Of the 142 books of the Roman history of Livy (59 B.C-A.D 17), only 35 survive; these are known to us from not more than twenty MSS of any consequence, only one of which, and that containing fragments of Books III-VI, is as old as the fourth century. Of the fourteen books of Histories of Tacitus (c. A.D. 100) only four and a half survive; of the sixteen books of his Annals, ten survive in full and two in part. The text of these extant portions of his two great historical works depends entirely on two MSS, one of the ninth century and one of the eleventh.… The History of Thucydides (c. 460-400 B.C.) is known to us from eight MSS, the earliest belonging to about the beginning of the Christian era. The same is true of the History of Herodotus (c. 480-425 B.C.). Yet no classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Herodotus or Thucydides is in doubt because the earliest MSS of their works which are of any use are over 1,300 years later than the originals."[4546]

The fact of the many documents plus the fact that many of the New Testament documents are very early (hundreds of parchment copies from the fourth and fifth centuries with some seventy-five papyri fragments dating from A.D. 135 to the

[43] Ryrie, C. C. (1972). *A survey of Bible doctrine*. Chicago: Moody Press.
[44] Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict, Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith*, Revised Edition, Here's Life Publishers, Inc., San Bernardino, 1979, p. 39.
[45] F. F. Bruce, *Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?*, InterVarsity, Chicago, 1943, p. 16-17.
[46] Bibliology: The Doctrine of the Written Word, pages 32-33; Biblical Studies Press, 1997; www.bible.org

eighth century) assures us we have a very accurate and reliable text in the New Testament.

The History of the New Testament

The history of the New Testament can be divided into three periods: (1) 70-170 A.D.: This was the period of circulation of the separate New Testament writings among the churches and their gradual collection into one book called the New Testament. (2) 170-303 A.D.: This was the time of the early church fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and Origen and was the period where the New Testament canon was definitely and clearly established. (3) 303-394 A.D.: This was the period of great debate over such books as 2 Peter, Hebrews, 2 and 3 John, Jude, James and Revelation.

Six church leaders are commonly referred to, namely Barnabas, Hermas, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Papias, and Ignatius (Berkhof, The History of Christian Doctrines, 37). Although these men lacked the technical sophistication of today's theologians, their correspondence confirmed the teachings of the apostles and provides a doctrinal link to the New Testament.

Christianity was as yet a fairly small movement. These church fathers, in the early church, were consumed by the practical aspects of Christian life among the new converts. Therefore, when Jehovah's Witnesses argue that the early church did not have a technical theology of the Trinity, they are basically right. There had been neither time nor necessity to focus on the issue. On the other hand these men clearly believed that Jesus was God as was the Holy Spirit, but they had yet to clarify in writing the problems that might occur when attempting to explain this truth.

The early church fathers had no doubt about the authority of the Old Testament, often prefacing their quotes with "**For thus says God**" and other notations. As a result they tended to be rather moralistic and even legalistic on some issues. Because the New Testament canon was not yet settled, they respected and quoted from works that have generally passed out of the Christian tradition. The books of Hermas, Barnabas, Didache, and 1 and 2 Clement were all regarded highly.[47]

As Berkhof writes concerning these early church leaders, "For them Christianity was not in the first place a knowledge to be acquired, but the principle of a new obedience to God."[48]

Although these early church fathers may seem rather ill-prepared to hand down all the subtle implications of the Christian faith to the coming generations, they form a doctrinal link to the apostles (and thus to our Lord Jesus Christ), as well as

[47] Hannah, Lecture Notes for the History of Doctrine, 2.2
[48] Berkhof, History of the Christian Church, 39

a witness to the growing commitment to the canon of Scripture that would become the New Testament.

As Clement of Rome said in first century, "Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit."[49]

After the early church fathers comes the era of the apologists and theologians, roughly including the second, third, and fourth centuries. It is during this period that the church takes the initial steps toward establishing a "rule of faith" or "canon." During this period both internal and external forces caused the church to begin to systematize both its doctrines and its view of revelation. Much of the systemization came about as a defense against the heresies that challenged the faith of the apostles.

Ebionitism humanized Jesus and rejected the writings of Paul, resulting in a more Jewish than Christian faith. Gnosticism attempted to blend oriental theosophy, Hellenistic philosophy, and Christianity into a new religion that saw the physical creation as evil and Christ as a celestial being with secret knowledge to teach us. It often portrayed the God of the Old Testament as inferior to the God of the New Testament. Marcion and his movement also separated the God of the Old and New Testaments, accepting Paul and Luke as the only writers who really understood the gospel of Christ (Berkhof, History of Christian Doctrine, 54). Montanus, responding to the Gnostics, ended up claiming that he and two others were new prophets offering the highest and most accurate revelation from God.

Although they were basically orthodox, they exalted martyrdom and a legalistic asceticism that led to their rejection by the church. Although Athanasius did not use the term canon in reference to the New Testament texts until the fourth century, there were earlier attempts to list the acceptable books.

Comfort has an excellent comment, he writes "The fact that the early Christian churches were making collections of the four Gospels—and only the four, as well as making collections of Paul's epistles (which often included Hebrews), shows that these works were considered canonized Scripture early in the history of the church. Since the collections were made for use in church meetings, these were the writings that the Christians deemed worthy of apostolic status—that is, they were the writings that formulated apostolic truth. In due course, the book of Acts and the General Epistles (the Praxapostolos) were given the same recognition. And the book of Revelation came last. Thus, the formation of the canon was a process, rather than an event, which took several hundred years to reach completion in all parts of the Roman Empire. Local canons were the basis for comparison, and out of them eventually emerged the general canon that exists in Christendom today, although some of the Eastern churches have a New Testament that is slightly

[49] Geisler, Decide For Yourself, 11

smaller than that accepted in the West. The twenty-seven books now included in the New Testament canon were first given notice (as far as we know) in what is called the *Muratorian Canon* (dated ca. 170). An eighth-century copy of this document was discovered and published in 1740 by the librarian L. A. Muratori. The manuscript is mutilated at both ends, but the remaining text names all twenty-seven books of the New Testament, while recording doubts about such books as 2 Peter, Jude, 2 and 3 John, and Revelation. Although we do not have such lists from the third century, the writings of the church fathers indicate the same inclusions and similar doubts about the same books. In the beginning of the fourth century, Eusebius was the chief proponent of establishing the four Gospels as well as other recognized books as comprising the New Testament canon. But it was not until the middle of the fourth century that the canon was established once and for all. In his *Festal Letter* for Easter (367), Athanasius of Alexandria included information designed to eliminate once and for all the use of certain apocryphal books. This letter, with its admonition, 'Let no one add to these; let nothing be taken away,' provides the earliest extant document which specifies the twenty-seven books without qualification. At the close of the century the Council of Carthage (397) decreed that 'aside from the canonical Scriptures nothing is to be read in church under the Name of Divine Scriptures.' This also lists the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as we have them today. Significantly, from the fourth century we have codices containing all twenty-seven books of the Greek New Testament, usually bound together with the Greek Old Testament. This is evident in Codex Vaticanus, Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus."[50]

Muratorian Canon

The Muratorian canon listed all the books of the Bible except for 1 John, 1 and 2 Peter, Hebrews, and James around A.D. 180 (Hannah, Notes, 2.5). Irenaeus, as bishop of Lyon, mentions all of the books except Jude, 2Peter, James, Philemon, 2 and 3 John, and Revelation. The Syriac version of the canon, from the third century, leaves out Revelation. It should be noted that although these early church leaders differed on which books should be included in the canon, they were quite sure that the books were inspired by God.

The Muratorian fragment also mentions the Shepherd of Hermas as worthy to be read in church, but not to be included with the apostolic writings. Curiously, the Wisdom of Solomon, an Old Testament Apocryphal book, is also included as canonical. Another early list appeared in the Codex Barococcio (A.D. 206), which included 64 of the 66 books of the present-day Bible. Esther and Revelation were

[50] Comfort, P. (2005). *Encountering the manuscripts: an introduction to New Testament paleography & textual criticism* (pp. 39–40). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman.

omitted, but Revelation had formerly been regarded as Scripture by Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and the Muratorian Canon.

The Muratorian Canon, which probably belongs to the same period and was originally composed in Greek, is fragmentary at the beginning, where Luke is mentioned as "the third Gospel book." It must have discussed Matthew and Mark first. In addition to the four Gospels, it lists Acts, thirteen letters of Paul, Jude, 1 and 2 John, Wisdom of Solomon, Revelation and *Apocalypse of Peter*, for a total of twenty-four books, though it is noted that some do not wish the *Apocalypse of Peter* to be read in the church. Explicitly rejected are an epistle of Paul to the Laodiceans and certain unnamed books of heretics. The *Shepherd* is named as suitable for reading, but not in the church. The Muratorian Canon is distinguished from other catalogs by its labored warrants for the various books it approves. The careless Latin translation in which we have it cautions against assuming that the original document is represented with full accuracy.[51]

Irenaeus, in his work Against Heresies, argues that, "The Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God [Christ] and His Spirit."[52]

By the fourth century many books previously held in high regard began to disappear from use and the apocryphal writings were seen as less than inspired. It was during the fourth century that concentrated attempts were made both in the East and the West part of the Roman Empire to establish the authoritative collection of the canon. In 365, Athanasius of Alexandria listed the complete twenty-seven books of the New Testament, which he regarded as the "only source of salvation and of the authentic teaching of the religion of the Gospel."[53]

While Athanasius stands out in the eastern church, Jerome is his counterpart in the West. Jerome wrote a letter to Paulinus, bishop of Nola in 394 listing just 39 Old Testament books and our current 27 New Testament ones.

Augustine included the Book of Wisdom as part of the canon and held that the Septuagint or Greek text of the Old Testament was inspired, not the Hebrew original.

The church fathers were sure that the Scriptures were inspired, but they were still not in agreement as to which texts should be included. As late as the seventh and eighth centuries there were church leaders who added to or subtracted from the list of texts. Gregory the Great added Tobias and Wisdom and mentioned 15 Pauline epistles, not 14. John of Damascus, the first Christian theologian who attempted a complete systematic theology, rejected the Old Testament apocrypha, but added the Apostolic Constitution and 1 and 2 Clement to the New Testament.

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[51] Gamble, H. (2000). Canonical Formation of the New Testament. In (C. A. Evans & S. E. Porter, Eds.)*Dictionary of New Testament background: a compendium of contemporary biblical scholarship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
[52] Geisler, Decide For Yourself, 12
[53] Hannah, Notes, 2.6

One historian notes that "things were no further advanced at the end of the fourteenth century than they had been at the end of the fourth."[54] This same historian notes that although we would be horrified at such a state today, the Catholicism of the day rested far more on ecclesiastical authority and tradition than on an authoritative canon. Thus Roman Catholicism did not find the issue to be a critical one.

Eusebius

Eusebius (270-340) who was the bishop of Caesarea, is commonly referred to as "the father of church history" because of the writing of his *Ecclesiastical History*. This history consists of ten books, and covers events and Christian doctrine of the church from the apostolic age to the time of Constantine. Eusebius's work enters into biblical studies for various reasons, most frequently for evidence he gives of what Christians of the first centuries thought about the authorship and canonicity of the NT books.[55] He was a trusted friend of Constantine who enjoyed access to all the church archives and he promptly set about to record the history of the Church. With scholarly precision, he set up a system for classifying the New Testament books. He employed the same categories that were set up for the classification of the Old Testament.

Eusebius list is composed of the following: (1) *Homologoumena* (the "acknowledged" books): The four Gospels, Acts, the letters of Paul (presumably including Hebrews), 1 John, 1 Peter and, "if it seems desirable," Revelation; (2) *Antilegomena* (the "disputed" or "spurious" (*notha*) books: James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Acts of Paul, Shepherd of Hermas, Apocalypse of Peter, Epistle of Barnabas, Didache, and, "if this view prevail," Revelation and the Gospel of the Hebrews; and (3) *Pseudepigrapha* (the "fabrications of heretics") namely, the Gospels of Peter, Thomas and Matthias and Acts of Andrew and John.

The issue of canonical authority finally is addressed within the bigger battle between Roman Catholicism and the Protestant Reformation. In 1545 the Council of Trent was called as a response to the Protestant heresy by the Catholic Church. As usual, the Catholic position rested upon the authority of the Church hierarchy itself. It proposed that all the books found in Jerome's Vulgate were of equal canonical value (even though Jerome himself separated the Apocrypha from the rest) and that the Vulgate would become the official text of the Church.

The council then established the Scriptures as equivalent to the authority of tradition. The reformers were also forced to face the canon issue. Instead of the authority of the church, Luther and the reformers focused on the internal witness of

[54] Hannah, Notes, 3.3
[55] Patzia, A. G., & Petrotta, A. J. (2002). In *Pocket dictionary of biblical studies*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

the Holy Spirit. Luther was troubled by four books, Jude, James, Hebrews, and Revelation, and though he placed them in a secondary position relative to the rest, he did not exclude them.

John Calvin also argued for the witness of the Spirit (Hannah, Notes, 3.7). In other words, it is God Himself, via the Holy Spirit who assures the transmission of the text down through the ages, not the human efforts of the Catholic Church or any other group. Calvin rests the authority of the Scripture on the witness of the Spirit and the conscience of the godly. He wrote in his Institutes, "Let it therefore be held as fixed, that those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture; that Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit. Enlightened by him, we no longer believe, either on our own judgment or that of others, that the Scriptures are from God; but, in a way superior to human judgment, feel perfectly assured as much so as if we beheld the divine image visibly impressed on it that it came to us, by the instrumentality of men, from the very mouth of God."

The Formation of the New Testament

The determination of the canon of the New Testament was not the result of any pronouncement, either by an official of the church or by an ecclesiastical body but rather, the canon was determined by God Himself. The establishment of the canon was the process by which formal recognition was given to the writings of Scripture already recognized as authoritative.

Carson and Moo write "Indeed, it is important to observe that, although there was no ecclesiastical machinery like the medieval papacy to enforce decisions, nevertheless the world-wide church almost universally came to accept the same twenty-seven books. It was not so much that the church selected the canon as that the canon selected itself."[56]

Barker, Lane, and Michaels write "The fact that substantially the whole church came to recognize the same twenty-seven books as canonical is remarkable when it is remembered that the result was not contrived. All that the several churches throughout the Empire could do was to witness to their own experience with the documents and share whatever knowledge they might have about their origin and character. When consideration is given to the diversity in cultural backgrounds and in orientation to the essentials of the Christian faith within the churches, their common agreement about which books belonged to the New Testament serves to suggest that this final decision did not originate solely at the human level."[57]

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[56] Carson, D.A. and Moo, Douglas J., *An Introduction to the New Testament-Second Edition*; page 735; copyright 1992, 2005; Zondervan

[57] The New Testament Speaks, page 29; ; Glenn W. Barker, William L. Lane, J. Ramsey Michaels; Harper and Row; New York; 1969

B.B. Warfield writes "IN order to obtain a correct understanding of what is called the formation of the Canon of the New Testament, it is necessary to begin by fixing very firmly in our minds one fact which is obvious enough when attention is once called to it. That is, that the Christian church did not require to form for itself the idea of a 'canon,'—or, as we should more commonly call it, of a 'Bible,' hat is, of a collection of books given of God to be the authoritative rule of faith and practice. It inherited this idea from the Jewish church, along with the thing itself, the Jewish Scriptures, or the 'Canon of the Old Testament.' The church did not grow up by natural law: it was founded. And the authoritative teachers sent forth by Christ to found His church, carried with them, as their most precious possession, a body of divine Scriptures, which they imposed on the church that they founded as its code of law. No reader of the New Testament can need proof of this; on every page of that book is spread the evidence that from the very beginning the Old Testament was as cordially recognized as law by the Christian as by the Jew. The Christian church thus was never without a 'Bible' or a 'canon.'"[58]

Differing conceptions of the history of the NT canon have turned largely upon definitions of terms. Until fairly recently, no sharp distinction was made between the terms Scripture and canon. If a writing was cited as authoritative by early witnesses, designated as Scripture (*graphē*) or quoted with a citation formula such as "it is written" (*gegraptai*), then it was commonly claimed that the document in question was at least functionally canonical. But the view that increasingly prevails rests upon a clear distinction between the terms Scripture and canon. Scripture (*graphē*) designates religiously authoritative literature, without regard to its scope or limits. The use or citation of a document as authoritative says nothing, however, about its canonical status. Canon, by contrast, signifies a definitive and closed list of religiously authoritative writings and thus explicitly addresses the question of their scope and limits (Sundberg). Although the Greek word *kanōn* means 'measuring rod' and, by extension, a norm or rule, in its earliest application to Christian writings it signified a list, specifically the list of Christian writings that were permitted to be read in the church, that is, publicly in the liturgical assembly. Once such a list was drawn up, the writings within it were held to be exclusively authoritative canonical Scriptures. Thus the formation of the canon presupposes the availability of Scriptures, but the existence of religious Scriptures does not of itself imply or require the formation of a canon. Although the recent emphasis on this distinction has tended to represent the fourth and fifth centuries as the critical period of canonical formation, this should not be permitted to obscure the early beginnings of the attribution of authority to Christian writings or the relatively rapid rise of certain Christian writings to scriptural status and use during the first

[58] Warfield, B. B. (2008). *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration* (Vol. 1, p. 451). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

three centuries. By the middle of the second century several Gospels and the Pauline letters, as well as a few other documents, had attained broad use and high authority in Christianity. The subsequent formation of the NT canon was therefore not a matter of conferring authority upon selected Christian writings but of clearly delineating the scope of those writings that had, at least for the most part, already acquired broad recognition as authoritative Christian Scripture and thus also of excluding others.[59]

Criteria for Determining Canonicity

The early church had certain criteria for determining which books were inspired and which ones were not: (1) Apostolicity: Every book of the New Testament must either be written by an apostle or someone closely associated with an apostle. (2) Reception by the churches: The books must be universally received by the local churches as authentic at the time of their writing. (3) Usage by the churches: Longstanding, widespread and well-established use among Christian communities. (4) Consistency or rule of faith: They must be consistent with the doctrine that the church already possessed, namely, the Old Testament and Apostolic teaching. (5) Inspiration: Each book must give evidence, internally and externally, of being divinely inspired and the spiritual gift of discernment was used to determine canonicity (1 Cor. 12:10). (6) Recognition: Each must be recognized as canonical in the catalogues of the church fathers (7) Internal: Each book must contain exhortation to public exegesis of the Word to be classified as canonical (Col. 4:16; 1 Th. 5:27; 1 Tm. 4:13; Rv. 1:3; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13; 2 Pet. 3:15-16).

Beyond the historical forces that were at work in the formation of the canon, certain theoretical considerations were also adduced, especially in the fourth and fifth centuries, by way of judging the suitability of writings for inclusion in the canon, most especially of writings about which there was some uncertainty. These so-called criteria of canonicity were mainly traditional use, apostolicity, catholicity and orthodoxy (Ohlig). *3.3.1. Traditional Use.* As previously indicated, the primary basis for the inclusion of any document in the canon of the NT was its longstanding, widespread and well-established use among Christian communities. Such traditional usage was a matter of fact before the church began to reflect on its historic practice and made it an explicit criterion for canonical standing. Certain writings, including the Gospels and Paul's letters, had been used so widely and so long that there could be no question about their place in the canon. But if customary use was a clear prerequisite, it was not in every case sufficient by itself. Some documents that adequately met this standard were not finally included in the

[59] Gamble, H. (2000). Canonical Formation of the New Testament. In (C. A. Evans & S. E. Porter, Eds.)*Dictionary of New Testament background: a compendium of contemporary biblical scholarship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

canon (e.g., *Shepherd of Hermas, Didache* and *1 Clement*). Other criteria were of a more theoretical sort. *3.3.2. Apostolicity.* From an early time Christians considered their Scriptures to be apostolic. This did not necessarily mean that authoritative documents must have been written by apostles, though from an early time apostolic authorship was valued. This is shown not only by the general authority that quickly accrued to Paul's letters but also by the development of traditions attributing certain anonymous Gospels (Matthew and John) to apostolic authors or at least to apostolic sources (Mark and Luke) by the use of apostolic pseudonymity (e.g., 2 Peter, the Pastoral Epistles, *Barnabas*), and by the disuse that affected some writings by reason of doubts raised about their apostolic authorship (Revelation, Hebrews). Yet some documents explicitly claiming apostolic authorship either failed to gain canonical standing (e.g., *Didache, Barnabas, Gospel of Peter, Apocalypse of Peter*) or gained it only with difficulty (e.g., 2 Peter, Jude). Thus the criterion of apostolicity in the narrow sense of authorship was hardly decisive. In fact, the conception of apostolicity was elastic and might refer, beyond direct authorship, to indirect authorship, derivation from the apostolic period or conformity of content with what was generally understood as apostolic teaching. *3.3.3. Catholicity.* Catholicity was another consideration: in order to be authoritative a document had to be relevant to the church as a whole and even intended to be so by its author. Writings addressed to only small groups or having a narrow purpose were accordingly devalued. Most of the writings that became canonical were originally intended for limited constituencies, and some even for individuals. Hence they failed to meet this criterion, but this was not so obvious to the ancient church or was counterbalanced by other factors. What is at work in the ideal of catholicity is a preference for broad accessibility and general usefulness, as against private, idiosyncratic or esoteric resources. *3.3.4. Orthodoxy.* It was a largely tacit judgment that for a writing to be authoritative, let alone canonical, it must be orthodox; that is, its content had to correspond with the faith and practice of the church as that was generally understood. Such a judgment presupposes that what the church took to be its proper teaching was somehow available independently of Scripture, namely, in the rule of faith (*regula fidei*), a terse, traditional summary statement of principal convictions (cf. Irenaeus *Haer.* 3.4.1–2; Tertullian *De Praescr.* 8–12). Since the rule of faith was itself understood to be a summary of apostolic teaching derived through apostolic tradition, there could scarcely be discord between it and Scriptures that were also taken to be apostolic. These criteria were variously applied in the history of the canon, but rarely with systematic rigor. The *Gospel of Peter* was removed from use in Rhossus by Serapion, bishop of Antioch, because of doubts about its orthodoxy (Eusebius *Hist.*

Haer. De Haeresibus
De Praescr. De Praescriptione Haereticorum

Eccl. 6.12.2–6), in spite of its putative apostolic origins. The *Shepherd of Hermas*, though catholic, orthodox and widely used, suffered because it did not derive from the time of the apostles (Muratorian Canon, ll. 73–80). The epistle to the Hebrews was ultimately accepted as canonical in the West in spite of persistent uncertainty about its authorship. Once established in general use, the catholic status of Paul's letters was taken for granted in spite of their particularity. Such examples indicate that the more theoretical criteria of apostolicity, catholicity and orthodoxy were selectively used. Although they may be distinguished in respect of their specific foci, these criteria are closely related. The ancient church assumed that whatever was apostolic, even in the broadest sense, was also catholic and orthodox, and although what was orthodox and catholic might not be apostolic in the strictest (authorial) sense, it conformed by definition to a tradition that was considered apostolic in substance. While they were important as traditional warrants, such criteria were rarely the effective reasons for the positive canonical recognition of any writing. Rather they were employed mainly either to disqualify the authority of certain writings or to warrant the standing that others had attained by reason of established use.[60]

Apostolicity

Apostolic authorship in the New Testament corresponds to prophetic authorship in the Old Testament. This is based on the "pre-authentication" passages where Christ authorized the apostles to write scripture in advance (Mt. 10:40; Lk. 10:16; Jn. 14:26; 15:26, 27; 16:13).

The thirteen letters of Paul all indicate that he is the author, although this is challenged by some modern scholars. The gospel of John indicates that John is the author (Jn. 21:23, 24). The three epistles of John are identical to the gospel in style. 1 John also claims to be written by an eye-witness (I Jn. 1:1). Revelation claims to have been written by John (Rev. 1:4, 9). Both 1 and 2 Peter claim Petrine authorship (I Pet. 1:1; II Pet. 1:1; 3:1). This leaves only Luke, Acts, Hebrews, Matthew, Mark, James, and Jude without direct internal claims to apostolic authorship.

Early church history connects Luke-Acts with Paul, saying that it was written by Luke under Paul's supervision and approval (Papias quoted in Eusebius). Papias and others also said that Mark wrote the memoirs of Peter.

Hebrews is of uncertain authorship, although it is theologically and conceptually connected with Paul. At the same time, the grammar and vocabulary

Hist. Eccl. Historia Ecclesiastica

[60] Gamble, H. (2000). Canonical Formation of the New Testament. In (C. A. Evans & S. E. Porter, Eds.)*Dictionary of New Testament background: a compendium of contemporary biblical scholarship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

are quite different from Paul's other books. Two options are possible: Paul wrote it in Hebrew or Aramaic (and it was later translated). This would account for the obvious difference in vocabulary and style. Clement of Alexandria states that this was the case according to his earlier sources. Or one of Paul's companions could have served as his amanuensis (see ch.13:23).

James and Jude -- two options are possible: The book may have been written by Christ's half-brothers (Mk. 6:3) who were evidently designated as apostles after the resurrection (I Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19).

Early church sources indicate that this theory is the correct one. It may have been written by James and Jude the Alpheus brothers, two of Jesus' original disciples (Lk. 6:16; Acts 1:13). This possibility comes about from a comparison of the crucifixion accounts, which seem to establish that James the Less (James Alpheus) and Jesus were first cousins on their mother's side. Therefore, James the Less might have called himself "the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19) within the common usage of the day. In either event, both books are of apostolic origin.

B.B. Warfield writes "Let it, however, be clearly understood that it was not exactly apostolic *authorship* which in the estimation of the earliest churches, constituted a book a portion of the 'canon.' Apostolic authorship was, indeed, early confounded with canonicity. It was doubt as to the apostolic authorship of Hebrews, in the West, and of James and Jude, apparently, which underlay the slowness of the inclusion of these books in the 'canon' of certain churches. But from the beginning it was not so. The principle of canonicity was not apostolic authorship, but *imposition by the apostles as* '*law*.' Hence Tertullian's name for the 'canon' is '*instrumentum*'; and he speaks of the Old and New *Instrument* as we would of the Old and New Testament. That the apostles so imposed the Old Testament on the churches which they founded—as their 'Instrument,' or 'Law,' or 'Canon'—can be denied by none. And in imposing new books on the same churches, by the same apostolical authority, they did not confine themselves to books of their own composition. It is the Gospel according to Luke, a man who was not an apostle, which Paul parallels in 1 Tim. 5:18 with Deuteronomy as equally 'Scripture' with it, in the first extant quotation of a New Testament book as Scripture. The Gospels which constituted the first division of the New Books,—of 'The Gospel and the Apostles,'—Justin tells us, were 'written by the apostles and their companions.' The authority of the apostles, as by divine appointment founders of the church, was embodied in whatever books they imposed on the church as law, not merely in those they themselves had written. The early churches, in short, received, as we receive, into their New Testament all the books historically evinced to them as given by the apostles to the churches as their code of law; and we must not mistake the historical evidences of the slow circulation and authentication of these books over the widely-extended church, for evidence of

slowness of 'canonization' of books by the authority or the taste of the church itself."[61]

Strictly speaking, the canonical formation of the NT occurred with the creation of closed lists of authoritative writings. Such catalogs apparently began to be drawn up only in the fourth and fifth centuries. While it has been commonly supposed that one such list, the Muratorian Fragment, was created in Rome in the late second or early third century, it is increasingly acknowledged that this list had a fourth-century, Eastern origin (Sundberg; Hahneman). Hence there is a widespread reluctance to use the terms *canon* and *canonical* in reference to the preceding period. At the same time, it has to be recognized that by the beginning of the third century not only had many Christian writings acquired the status of Scripture but also some had been shaped into smaller collections that were effectively closed and definitive, namely, the fourfold Gospel and the Pauline corpus.[62]

J. Hampton Keathley III writes "The question naturally arises, what process and by what means did the early church recognize which books were canonical and which books were not? The following summarizes the tests used to discern which books were canonical. (1) Authentication on the Divine side—Inspiration. Did the book give internal evidence of inspiration, of being God breathed? Was it of proper spiritual character? Did it edify the church? Was it doctrinally accurate? 'The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha were rejected as a result of not meeting this test. The book should bear evidence of high moral and spiritual values that would reflect a work of the Holy Spirit.'[63] (2) Authentication on the human side. Three issues were important here: (a) Was the author an apostle or did he have the endorsement of an apostle? Mark wrote the gospel of Mark, but he did so under Peter's endorsement. Luke, as a close associate of the Apostle Paul, wrote under the endorsement of his authority. (b) Universal acceptance was another key factor. On the whole, was the book accepted by the church at large? The recognition given a particular book by the church was important. By this standard, a number of books were rejected. There were some books that enjoyed an acceptance by a few, but were later dropped for a lack of universal acceptance. Then there were a few books that some questioned because of doubts about the author, not the content, but were later accepted because the majority accepted them."[64]

Dr. Ryrie writes "First of all it is important to remember that certain books were canonical even before any tests were put to them. That's like saying some students

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[61] Warfield, B. B. (2008). *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration* (Vol. 1, pp. 455–456). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

[62] Gamble, H. (2000). Canonical Formation of the New Testament. In (C. A. Evans & S. E. Porter, Eds.)*Dictionary of New Testament background: a compendium of contemporary biblical scholarship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

[63] Enns, p. 172-173.

[64] Bibliology: The Doctrine of the Written Word, page 32; Biblical Studies Press, 1997; www.bible.org

are intelligent before any tests are given to them. The tests only prove what is already intrinsically there. In the same way, neither the church nor councils made any book canonical or authentic; either the book was authentic or it was not when it was written. The church or its councils recognized and verified certain books as the Word of God, and in time those so recognized were collected together in what we now call the Bible. What tests did the church apply? 1. There was the test of the authority of the writer. In relation to the Old Testament, this meant the authority of the lawgiver or the prophet or the leader in Israel. In relation to the New Testament, a book had to be written or backed by an apostle in order to be recognized. In other words, it had to have an apostolic signature or apostolic authorization. Peter, for instance, was the backer of Mark, and Paul of Luke. 2. The books themselves should give some internal evidences of their unique character, as inspired and authoritative. The content should commend itself to the reader as being different from an ordinary book in communicating the revelation of God. 3. The verdict of the churches as to the canonical nature of the books was important. There was in reality surprising unanimity among the early churches as to which books belonged in the inspired number. Although it is true that a few books were temporarily doubted by a minority, no book whose authenticity was doubted by any large number of churches was later accepted."[65]

Geisler and Nix write "Within the New Testament itself, there is evidence of the concept of a developing canon of inspired books. This may be observed in the principle and progress of canonization in the New Testament. The principle of canonization The determining factor in New Testament canonization was inspiration, and the primary test was apostolicity (see chap. 12). If it could be determined that a book had apostolic authority, there would be no reason to question its authenticity or veracity. In New Testament terminology, the church was 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets' (Eph. 2:20) whom Christ had promised to guide unto 'all the truth" (John 16:13) by the Holy Spirit. The church at Jerusalem was said to have continued in the 'apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). The term apostolic as used for the test of canonicity does not necessarily mean 'apostolic authorship,' or 'that which was prepared under the direction of the apostles,'[66] unless the word 'apostle' be taken in its nontechnical sense, meaning someone beyond the twelve apostles or Paul. In this nontechnical sense, Barnabas is called an apostle (Acts 14:14, cf. v. 4), as is James (Gal. 1:19), and evidently others too (Rom. 16:7; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). It appears rather unnecessary to think of Mark and Luke as being secretaries of apostles, or to argue that the writer of James was an apostle, to say nothing of Jude or the writer of

[65] Ryrie, C. C. (1972). *A survey of Bible doctrine*. Chicago: Moody Press.
[66] R. Laird Harris attempts to defend this view, however, making Mark and Luke to be secretaries to Peter and Paul, respectively, etc.; see *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, p. 270.

Hebrews. In fact, the writer of Hebrews disclaims being an apostle, saying that the message of Christ 'was attested to us [readers and writer] by those [the apostles] who heard him' (Heb. 2:3). It seems much better to agree with Louis Gaussen, B. B. Warfield, Charles Hodge, J. N. D. Kelly, and most Protestants that it is apostolic authority, or apostolic approval, that was the primary test for canonicity, and not merely apostolic authorship.[67] In the terminology of the New Testament, a book had to be written by an apostle or prophet (cf. Eph. 2:20). The real question, then, was, 'Is a book prophetic?' that is, 'Was it written by a prophet of God?' The apostles were, of course, granted a prophetic ministry (John 14–16): John called himself 'a fellow servant [with] … the prophets' (Rev. 22:9), and Paul considered his books prophetic writings (cf. Rom. 16:25–26; Eph. 3:3–5). Individuals in the New Testament besides those called apostles were granted a prophetic ministry, in accordance with the promise on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17–18), as was manifest in Agabus and the other prophets from Jerusalem (Acts 11:27–28), not to mention the 'gift of prophecy' evident in the New Testament church (cf. 1 Cor. 12:29). The process of canonization A close look at the New Testament reveals that these prophetic writings were being sorted from among the nonprophetic writings, even from oral traditions, and a canon was being formed during apostolic times. Several procedures were involved in this process. 1. Selecting procedure. John implies that there was a selecting process going on among the apostles themselves, dealing with the problem of which particular truths should be preserved in written form. He writes that 'many other signs therefore Jesus also performed … which are not written in this book' (John 20:30); and 'if they were written in detail,' he adds, 'I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written' (John 21:25). Luke speaks of other accounts of the life of Christ, from which he compiled "an accurate account" based on 'eyewitnesses' in order that 'the exact truth' might be known (Luke 1:1–4). This evidence seems to imply that there were other written records of Christ's life that were not entirely true. There are several references to the authority of apostolic oral tradition or teaching (cf. 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 11:2). These 'traditions' meant that there was authoritative teaching by original eyewitnesses to Christ's life. Some have suggested that that was in fact the kerygma (authoritative apostolic pronouncement about Christ), or a sort of 'canon within the canon.'[68] Whether or not that kerygma was used as the test for canonicity is uncertain, but it is clear that there were apostolic criteria for sorting out oral traditions of an apocryphal nature. John speaks of a false belief regarding his own death, which 'went out among the brethren' as a distortion by Jesus' own disciples of something spoken from the lips

[67] Louis Gaussen, *Theopneustia*, p. 319; Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 455; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:153; J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp. 59–60.
[68] See Herman Ridderbos, "The Canon of the New Testament," in Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Revelation and the Bible*, pp. 191ff. Also see Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp. 29–31.

of Jesus (John 21:23–24). No doubt there were other incidents of this nature. However, though they may have been believed among the early disciples, they were nowhere taught as apostolic truth, at least not in the canonical writings. They were not part of the authoritative oral message of the eyewitnesses and therefore never became part of the teaching of the written record. 2. Reading procedure. Another indication within the New Testament itself that a canon was being formed is the repeated injunction that certain books should be read to the churches. Paul commanded that 1 Thessalonians be 'read to all the brethren' (5:27). Revelation 1:3 promised a blessing to all who 'read the words of the prophecy' and kept it; in fact, it gave a warning to those who 'hear the words of the prophecy' of this book and do not keep them. The key to canonicity implicit in those injunctions appears to be authority, or prophecy. If a writing was prophetic, it was to be read with authority to the churches. 3. Circulating procedure. Those writings that were read as authoritative to the churches were circulated and collected by the churches. The book of Revelation was circulated among the churches of Asia Minor, as John was told to 'write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches' (Rev. 1:11). Paul commanded the Colossians, saying, 'When this letter is read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea' (Col. 4:16).[69] This is a crucial passage, because it indicates that the authority of one epistle included a larger audience than just the one to which it was written. Thus, as the book of Revelation was circulated throughout the churches, so other epistles were to be exchanged, and prophetic messages were to be read with all authority. 4. Collecting procedure. The circulating procedure no doubt led to the habit of collecting prophetic and apostolic writings, such as those alluded to in 2 Peter 3:15–16, where the author speaks of 'all his [Paul's] letters' as being on a level with 'the rest of the Scriptures.' As has already been noted, the apostles considered the collection of Old Testament writings to be divine Scripture; therefore, as the New Testament prophets wrote inspired books, those were added to the collection of 'the other Scriptures.' Thus, by the time of 2 Peter (c. a.d. 66)[70] Paul's epistles were in the canon.[71] Since most of the general epistles were written after Paul's, it cannot be expected that they would be mentioned. Nevertheless, Jude probably is referring to Peter's book, and he seems to regard it as Scripture (cf. Jude 17–18 and 2 Peter 3:2–3). As Edward Lohse observes, 'The early Christian writings, originally written for particular

[69] Some scholars believe that this letter from Laodicea is the epistle called Ephesians in modern English Bibles. Cf. discussion of this matter in F.F. Bruce and E.K. Simpson, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians*, pp. 310–11. Others, however, have suggested that it is Philemon instead of Ephesians. See discussion in Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 308–9. Also see previous discussion in chap. 12.

[70] Harrison, p. 140.

[71] Lewis Foster argues that Luke made the earliest collection of Paul's epistles as a kind of third volume following his Gospel and Acts sequence. See his article "The Earliest Collection of Paul's Epistles," pp. 44–53.

situations, were gathered into collections very early.'[72] 5. Quotation procedure. If Jude quoted from Peter's writing when he said, 'You must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ' (v. 17), then he not only verified that Peter's writing was accepted into the canon by that time, but that the books received were immediately and authoritatively quoted as Scripture. Paul (1 Tim. 5:8) quoted from the gospel of Luke (10:7) with the same formula he used to quote the Old Testament. It would be too much to expect that every book of the New Testament would be verified in this way, but enough of them are referred to (at least some of Paul's, one of Luke's and perhaps one of Peter's—a substantial part of the New Testament) in order to demonstrate that there was a canon of New Testament books even during New Testament times. The absence of any quotation from some of the smaller and more personal epistles may be explained by their size and nature. In summary, the primary test of canonicity in New Testament times was apostolic or prophetic authority. Those writings that came to local churches (or individuals) were read, circulated, collected, and even quoted as a part of the canon of the Scriptures. Those writings supplemented and formed an integral part of the inspired Word of God along with the previously recognized Old Testament Scriptures."[73]

Events and Forces in Relation to the Formation of the New Testament Canon

There were two events in history during the period between 303-379 A.D. that were largely instrumental in the recognition of the extent of the canon: (1) The Diocletian Persecution: Great attempts at destroying the Scriptures were made. (2) Emperor Constantine: He ordered fifty copies of the Bible for use in the churches in Constantinople and during this period the great church councils took place.

There were several forces which contributed to the formation of the New Testament canon: (1) Confrontations with heterodoxy (2) The usage of certain books in the churches (3) Persecution (4) Influence of certain Christian teachers. (5) Development of the book.

The early church's confrontation with heterodoxy was one of the major contributing factors in the formation of the New Testament canon. The major conflicts were with Marcionism, Gnosticism and Montanism.

Marcionism was a movement which began with Marcion in the second century, which rejected the validity of the Old Testament witness for Christians because the God of the Old Testament was believed to be incompatible with the loving God revealed through Jesus. The heretic Marcion had excluded everything except ten Pauline epistles and certain selected portions of the Gospel according to Luke.

[72] Eduard Lohse, The Formation of the New Testament, p. 19.
[73] Geisler, N. L., & Nix, W. E. (1986). *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Rev. and expanded., pp. 283–288). Chicago: Moody Press.

The Gnostics were introducing secret "Gospels," attempting to advance them as authoritative Scripture. One of the earliest writers to respond to the Gnostics was Irenaeus. His writings assume the authority of the books of the New Testament in common use during the second century, although his citations are from only 23 of the 27 New Testament books.

Gnosticism is a system of false teachings that existed during the early centuries of Christianity. Its name came from the Greek word for knowledge, *gnosis*. The Gnostics believed that knowledge was the way to salvation. Our knowledge of Gnosticism comes from several sources. First, there are the Gnostic texts, which are known as the New Testament Apocrypha. These texts are not recognized as Scripture because they contain teachings, which differ from those in the Bible. Then, there are the refutations of the Gnostics by the early church fathers. Some of the more important ones are Irenaeus, Against Heresies; Hippolytus, Refutations of All Heresies; Epiphanius, Panarion; and Tertullian, Against Marcion.

Montanism is a second-century prophetic movement that emphasized the imminent return of Christ and imposed a strict morality on the faithful as they waited and prepared for the end of the world. The designation *Montanism* arises from the leader of the movement, Montanus, who together with several women served as prophet to the group. Although its leaders did not intend their prophecies to undermine scriptural authority, the movement was nonetheless considered heretical by the emerging church authority. The church father Tertullian eventually joined the Montanists.[74]

Montanus claimed that the age of revelation continued in his own day, and that he himself was the Paraclete described in John's Gospel. With his two prophetesses Prisca and Maximilla, he led a religion marked by ecstatic outbursts, speaking in tongues, and prophetic utterances. He established a new community in Phrygia, where his disciples awaited the coming of the new Jerusalem. The movement spread abroad rapidly and won some Church leaders such as Tertullian. Montanism caused the Church to determine the limits of divine authority. The prominence of apostolic writings for the rule of faith became evident.[75]

Another major force in the formation of the canon is the use of certain writings in the early church. This is mentioned by Eusebius in drawing up his list of acknowledged books. He appealed nearly always to the traditional usage of these writings in the churches from an early time or even to their use by certain Christian writers such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Origen.

In his work "Holy Writings, Sacred Text: The Canon of Early Christianity," John Barton has found that when one counts the number of times the New Testament and other books are actually cited by the Fathers in proportion to each

[74] Grenz, S., Guretzki, D., & Nordling, C. F. (1999). In *Pocket dictionary of theological terms*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
[75] Raquel, S. T. (2012). New Testament Canon. In (J. D. Barry & L. Wentz, Eds.)*The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

book's length, he discovered that there are three clear groups: (1) New Testament books that are quoted frequently such as the four gospels and the major Pauline letters. (2) Books quoted less frequently, namely the rest of the New Testament. (3) Books quoted hardly at all, namely those that were excluded from the canon. Therefore, what Barton brought out is that there is a sharp demarcation in actual frequency of usage between the New Testament books and all other claimants. Thus, actual usage was establishing the canon.

Another major influence in the formation of the canon is that of prominent Christian thinkers such as Athanasius. Of course, the persecution of the church compelled the church to determine which writings were inspired by God and which were not. The persecution under Diocletian is an example of this since the Emperor ordered the confiscation and destruction of Christian books (303-305 A.D.).

Even the technology of book production had some bearing on the canonical formation of the NT. Early codices were not capacious, normally running to a maximum of about two hundred leaves, and most were much smaller. Christian Scriptures could not be collected and provided together in one volume, and early codices usually contained only one or two documents or a discrete collection. Not until the fourth century was it possible to manufacture codices that could contain many writings, and even then it was rare that whole Bibles (pandects) were produced. In their absence, the importance of lists or catalogs of Christian Scriptures is obvious. Still, any effort to produce a whole Bible or even a whole NT raised the practical issue of what should be included in it. All of these considerations belong, with varying importance, to the formation of the NT canon, but none of them had the fundamental and decisive consequence that followed from traditional use.[76]

Carson and Moo write "Christians early adopted the codex (i.e., books bound more or less as ours are, glued or sewn down one edge) over the scroll. As a result they could put many New Testament books together-and, despite some exceptions, there is early and widespread attestation of our twenty-seven New Testament documents being bound together in various configurations."[77]

Geisler and Nix write "From the human point of view there were several stimuli for the collection and final canonization of inspired books. Books were prophetic One of the initial reasons for collecting and preserving the inspired books was that they were prophetic. That is, since they were written by an apostle or prophet of God, they must be valuable, and if valuable, they should be preserved. This reasoning is apparent in apostolic times, by the collection and circulation of Paul's epistles (cf. 2 Peter 3:15–16; Col. 4:16). The post-apostolic period continued to

[76] Gamble, H. (2000). Canonical Formation of the New Testament. In (C. A. Evans & S. E. Porter, Eds.)*Dictionary of New Testament background: a compendium of contemporary biblical scholarship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
[77] Carson, D.A. and Moo, Douglas J., *An Introduction to the New Testament-Second Edition*; page 734; copyright 1992, 2005; Zondervan

reflect this high regard for the apostolic writings of the New Testament by their voluminous and authoritative quotations from those inspired books. Demands of early church. Closely connected with the foregoing reason for preserving the inspired books were the theological and ethical demands of the early church. That is, in order to know which books should be read in the churches (cf. 1 Thess. 5:27 and 1 Tim. 4:13) and which books could be definitely applied to the theological and practical problems of the Christian church (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16–17), it became necessary to have a complete collection of the books that could provide the authoritative norm for faith and practice. Heretical stimulus On the negative side there was the heretical stimulus. At least as early as a.d. 140 the heretical Marcion accepted only limited sections of the full New Testament canon. Marcion's heretical canon, consisting of only Luke's gospel and ten of Paul's epistles, pointed up clearly the need to collect a complete canon of New Testament Scriptures. Missionary stimulus On the positive side, there was the missionary stimulus. Christianity had spread rapidly to other countries, and there was the need to translate the Bible into those other languages (see chaps. 27–29). As early as the first half of the second century the Bible was translated into Syriac and Old Latin. But because the missionaries could not translate a Bible that did not exist, attention was necessarily drawn to the question of which books really belonged to the authoritative Christian canon. Persecutions and politics The final phase of full and general recognition of the whole canon of New Testament writings also involved a negative and political stimulus. The Diocletian persecutions of about a.d. 302/303–5 provided forceful motivation for the church to sort, sift, and settle on the New Testament Scriptures. For certainly the books they would risk their lives to preserve must have been considered sacred to them. The great persecution of Diocletian and Maximian (302/3–313) befell Christians all across the Roman Empire. An eyewitness account to the outbreak of persecution in Nicomedia, the capitol of the Roman province of Bythinia (in Asia Minor) has been preserved. Lactantius (c. 240–c. 320), a native of North Africa, was officially summoned to Nicomedia to teach rhetoric during the reign of Diocletian (284–305). He was converted to Christianity and he lost his position there when persecution broke out in February 302."[78]

Four Great Church Councils and the New Testament Canon

There were four great church councils that addressed the issue of canonicity: (1) The Council of Laodecia (336 A.D.): Recognized and accepted all books of the New Testament except Revelation. (2) The Council of Damascus (382 A.D.):

[78] Geisler, N. L., & Nix, W. E. (1986). *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Rev. and expanded., pp. 276–278). Chicago: Moody Press.

Recognized and accepted all books of the New Testament including Revelation. (3) The Council of Carthage (397 A.D.): Recognized and accepted all books of the New Testament including Revelation. (4) The Council of Hippo (419 A.D.): Recognized and accepted all books of the New Testament including Revelation.

The Close of the New Testament

In the church, the canonical formation of the New Testament occurred with the creation of closed lists of authoritative writings. These catalogs began to be drawn up only in the fourth and fifth centuries.

The frequent appearance of catalogs of scriptural books during the fourth century, and their absence before that time, indicates that the question of the precise limits of Scripture, and hence the notion of a canon, arose in this period, just as the variations in the terminology, categories and contents of these various catalogs show that the situation was still somewhat indeterminate and that some points were resolved only at a late date. The recognition of Revelation in the East and of Hebrews in the West was finally negotiated in this period, and hesitations about some of the General Epistles (Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John) were overcome. But the four Gospels, the letters of Paul and Acts are staple items of all such lists, and this indicates that they had become so firmly established in use and esteem from an early time that no question could arise about their place. Hence by the end of the fourth century there was a very broad, if not absolute, unanimity within the Christian community about the substance and shape of its canon of authoritative Scripture. This is remarkable insofar as there was never any official, ecumenically binding action of the ancient church that formalized this canon.[79]

Carson and Moo write "It must be admitted that this more or less traditional approach to the canon is in danger of giving a false impression, namely that the church took inordinately long to recognize the *authority* of the documents that constitute the New Testament. This is entirely false. Discussion of the canon is discussion of a *closed* list of authoritative books. The books themselves were necessarily circulating much earlier, most of them recognized as authoritative throughout the church, and all of them recognized in large swaths of the church."[80]

The earliest list of New Testament books which contain only twenty-seven appeared in 367 A.D. in a letter of Athanasius, who was the bishop of Alexandria. The order of this list of books was the following: (1) The Gospels, (2) Acts (3) General Epistles (4) Pauline Epistles (5) Revelation.

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[79] Gamble, H. (2000). Canonical Formation of the New Testament. In (C. A. Evans & S. E. Porter, Eds.)*Dictionary of New Testament background: a compendium of contemporary biblical scholarship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

[80] Carson, D.A. and Moo, Douglas J., *An Introduction to the New Testament-Second Edition*; page 734; copyright 1992, 2005; Zondervan

Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in Cyprus (c. A.D. 315–403), provided a catalog of Christian writings in his antiheretical treatise *Haereses* (or *Panarion*) 76.5. Here he stipulates the four Gospels, Acts, fourteen letters of Paul, James, 1 Peter, 1 John, Jude and Revelation. While omitting 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, this list is remarkable because it includes Revelation, which was unusual in Eastern lists, and because it lists among Christian books the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach, and thus it reckons twenty-six writings as canonical.[81]

The apostle Peter in 2 Peter 3:16 spoke of Paul writing "in all his letters" and by the second century, the letters of Ignatius were being collected. Evidence of exclusive collections being made in the second century is seen in the writings of Justin Martyr who argues for only the four canonical Gospels. There are serious discussions in the second century about authorship and authority of various letters.

In A.D. 230, Origen (A.D. 185-254) stated that all Christians acknowledged as Scripture the four Gospels, Acts, and the thirteen epistles of Paul, I Peter, I John, and Revelation. He added that the following were disputed by some people: Hebrews, II Peter, II John, III John, James, Jude, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Didache, and the Gospel according to the Hebrews. In other words, all the churches by this time were in agreement about most of the books, but a few doubted some of the epistles that were not as well known. Others were inclined to include a few books that eventually did not secure a permanent place among the canonical books.

By A.D. 300, all the New Testament books we presently use were generally accepted in the churches, although in a few places, James, II Peter, II and III John, Jude, Hebrews, and Revelation were not in use. Doubts about these books faded during the next fifty years, so that by A.D. 367, Athanasius listed all the 27 books as canonical in his Easter Letter, which also recommended certain other books for private reading only, such as the Shepherd of Hermas and the Didache.

Athanasius was an early church apologist, theologian and bishop of Alexandria. His greatest contribution to Christian theology was his uncompromising stance against the popular Arian teaching of his day.

Importance has traditionally been attached to the canon list set forth by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, in his Thirty-ninth Festal (Easter) Letter, issued in 367. Seeking to regularize Egyptian usages and forestall heretical ones, he provided a list of those writings "handed on by tradition and believed to be divine," and his list is the first to name as exclusively authoritative precisely the twenty-seven books that belong to our NT. Athanasius mentions other books that, though not to be read in church, might yet be used by catechumens, namely, the *Didache*

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c. circa, about (with dates); column

[81] Gamble, H. (2000). Canonical Formation of the New Testament. In (C. A. Evans & S. E. Porter, Eds.)*Dictionary of New Testament background: a compendium of contemporary biblical scholarship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

and the *Shepherd*, two works that were widely popular in the earlier period. Athanasius's list appears not to have been fully decisive even for Egypt (Brakke), let alone for other regions, and it should be regarded not as the final result but only as an anticipation of the final shape of a still-developing canon.[82]

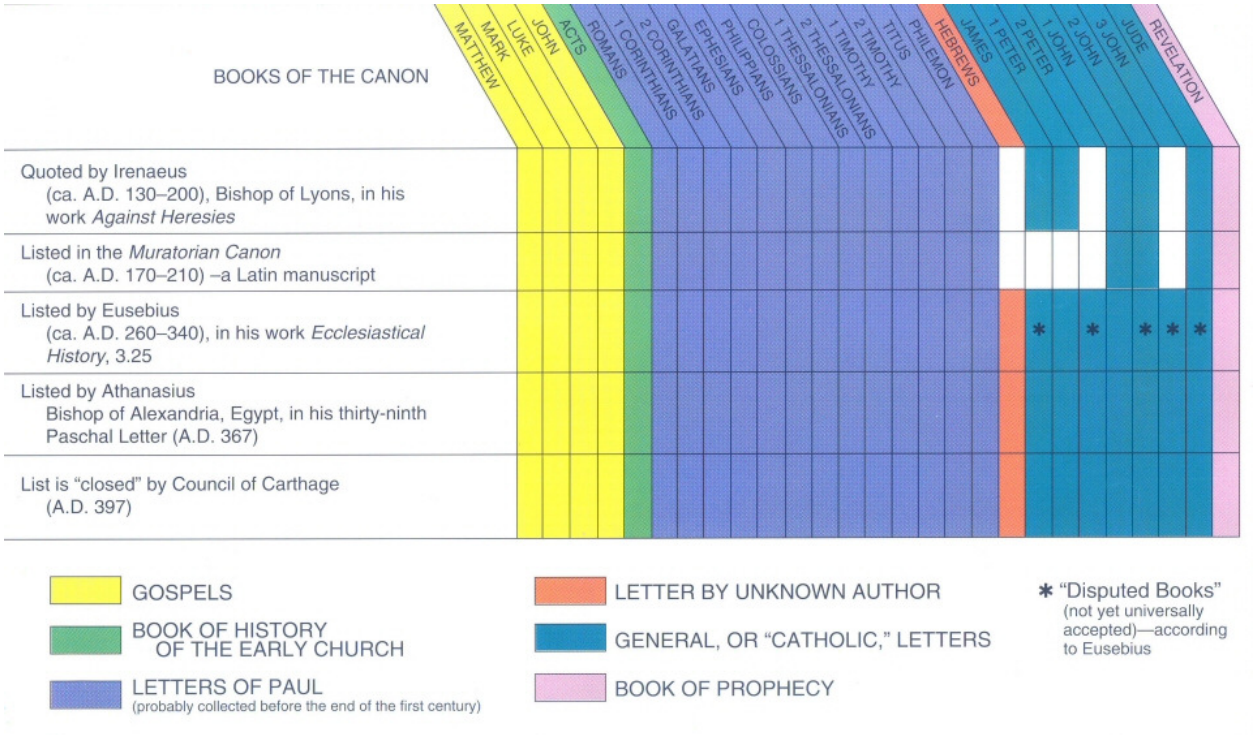
As far as canonicity is concerned, one of the greatest things ever to be discovered was the Muratorian Fragment. This was found in the Ambrosian Library, Milan, in 1740 by a librarian named Muratori. This document showed that cataloguing of the New Testament had been done as early as the second century. The Muratorian Canon which has been dated from the second to the fourth century provides a canonical list which distinguishes between books that are appropriate to be read in the worship service and those that should be read only in one's private devotional time.

Donner writes "The only Scriptures for the apostolic and early post-apostolic church consisted of the Old Testament. Apostolic writings were obviously known, but did not have the peculiar 'scriptural' authority of the Old Testament writings. They existed side by side with an oral tradition which was at least as, if not more, important for the church. Only gradually did the church become aware of the need to have some agreed list of books—a gradual awareness in which the appearance of Marcion's canon may have played a greater or lesser role. By the end of the second century the question of the canon was vigorously debated. (The Muratorian Canon, which is usually assigned to this period is shown as evidence of this debate.) By this time there was no longer any question about the bulk of the New Testament: the four gospels, Acts, the epistles of Paul and some of the Catholic epistles. Doubts about the seven 'disputed books' (Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation) continued until the fourth century and even after in some regions. This is, of course, no more than a broad outline of the conclusions that are usually obtained with regard to the New Testament canon. There is considerable variation in the details of the argument in the various authors."[83]

B.B. Warfield writes "The Canon of the New Testament was completed when the last authoritative book was given to any church by the apostles, and that was when John wrote the Apocalypse, about A.D. 98. Whether the church of Ephesus, however, had a completed Canon when it received the Apocalypse, or not, would depend on whether there was any epistle, say that of Jude, which had not yet reached it with authenticating proof of its apostolicity. There is room for historical investigation here. Certainly the whole Canon was not universally received by the churches till somewhat later. The Latin church of the second and third centuries did not quite know what to do with the Epistle to the Hebrews. The Syrian

[82] Gamble, H. (2000). Canonical Formation of the New Testament. In (C. A. Evans & S. E. Porter, Eds.)*Dictionary of New Testament background: a compendium of contemporary biblical scholarship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
[83] Some Thoughts on the History of the New Testament Canon, Theo Donner, Themelios 7.3 (April 1982; pages 23-27.

churches for some centuries may have lacked the lesser of the Catholic Epistles and Revelation. But from the time of Irenæus down, the church at large had the whole Canon as we now possess it. And though a section of the church may not yet have been satisfied of the apostolicity of a certain book or of certain books; and though afterwards doubts may have arisen in sections of the church as to the apostolicity of certain books (as e. g. of Revelation): yet in no case was it more than a respectable minority of the church which was slow in receiving, or which came afterward to doubt, the credentials of any of the books that then as now constituted the Canon of the New Testament accepted by the church at large. And in every case the principle on which a book was accepted, or doubts against it laid aside, was the historical tradition of apostolicity."[84]



Birdsall writes "The fourth century saw the fixation of the Canon within the limits to which we are accustomed, both in the W and E sectors of Christendom. In the E the definitive point is the Thirty-ninth Paschal Letter of Athanasius in AD 367. Here we find for the first time a NT of exact bounds as known to us. A clear line is drawn between works in the Canon which are described as the sole sources of religious instruction, and others which it is permitted to read, namely, the

[84] Warfield, B. B. (2008). *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration* (Vol. 1, pp. 454–455). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.
W West, western
E East, eastern; Elohist
E East, eastern; Elohist

Didache and the *Shepherd*. Heretical apocrypha are said to be intentional forgeries for the purposes of deceit. In the W the Canon was fixed by conciliar decision at Carthage in 397, when a like list to that of Athanasius was agreed upon. About the same period a number of Latin authors showed interest in the bounds of the NT Canon: Priscillian in Spain, Rufinus of Aquileia in Gaul, Augustine in N Africa (whose views contributed to the decisions at Carthage), Innocent I, bishop of Rome, and the author of the pseudo-Gelasian Decree. All hold the same views."[85]

Homologoumena, Antilegomena, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

In the third century, Origen categorized Christian writings in order to identify for the church which books were recognized by the church as canonical and which ones were not. He established three categories: (a) *anantireta* ("unobjectionable") or *homologoumena* ("acknowledged"), which were in general use in the church, (2) *amphiballomena* ("included/contested"), which were contested, and (3) *psethde* ("false"), which included books that were rejected as falsifications and therefore the products of heretics.

Then along came Eusebius of Caesarea who in the fourth century reworked these categories formulated by Origin. He categorized Christian writings as follows: (1) *homologoumena* ("acknowledged"), (2) *antilegomena* ("disputed"): (a) *gnorima* ("acquainted with"), for those most Christians acknowledged, (b) *notha* ("illegitimate"), for those regarded as inauthentic, and (3) *apocrypha* ("hidden"), which were recognized as spurious.

Today, these categories of writings are seen by scholars today as being in four categories: (1) *Homologoumena*, books accepted by virtually everyone as canonical; (2) *Antilegomena*, books disputed by some; (3) *Pseudepigrapha*, books rejected by virtually everyone as unauthentic; and (4) *Apocrypha*, books accepted by some as canonical or semi-canonical.

The term *homologoumena* identifies those Christian writings that were undisputed during the first three centuries of church history and ultimately accepted into the New Testament canon. For Eusebius, the *homologoumena*, the writings acknowledged as Scripture by the church of his day, included the four Gospels, Acts, fourteen letters of Paul (including Hebrews), 1 Peter, 1 John and perhaps Revelation.

The term *antilegomena* was used to identify those writings whose inspiration and canonicity were disputed (ἀντιλεγόμενος, "spoken against"), as opposed to

W West, western
N North, northern
[85] Birdsall, J. N. (1996). Canon of the New Testament. In (D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman, Eds.)*New Bible dictionary*. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

those that were accepted by all (i.e., homologoumena). In the New Testament, these books were Hebrews, 2 Peter, James, Jude, 2 and 3 John, and Revelation.

The term "pseudepigrapha" was used to identify those writings which were not recognized by the church as being inspired by God and thus not included in the New Testament canon. This term is sometimes used synonymously with New Testament Apocrypha.

During the first few centuries, numerous books of a fanciful and heretical nature arose that are neither genuine nor valuable as a whole. Eusebius of Caesarea called these "totally absurd and impious." Virtually no orthodox Father, canon, or council considered these books to be canonical and, so far as the church is concerned, they are primarily of historical value, indicating the heretical teaching of gnostic, docetic, and ascetic groups, as well as the exaggerated fancy of religious lore in the early church. At best, these books were revered by some of the cults and referred to by some of the orthodox Fathers, but they were never considered canonical by the mainstream of Christianity.[86]

The following writings fell under the category "pseudepigrapha": (1) The Gospel of Thomas (early second century) (2) The Gospel of the Ebionites (second century) (3) The Gospel of Peter (second century). (4) Protevangelium of James (late second century). (5) The Gospel of the Hebrews (second century). (5) The Gospel of the Egyptians (second century). (6) The Gospel of the Nazaraeans (early second century). (7) The Gospel of Philip (second century). (7) The Book of Thomas the Athlete (8) The Gospel According to Mathias (9) The Gospel of Judas (late second century). (10) Epistle of an Apostle (Epistula Apostolorum) (second century). (11) The Apocryphon of John (second century). (12) The Gospel of Truth (second century).

In relation to the New Testament canon, the term "Apocrypha" was used to identify those books which were not recognized by the church as canonical and like the Pseudepigrapha, were used by the heretics and were sometimes quoted by orthodox writers.

The following writings fall under this category: (1) Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas (c. a.d. 70–79). (2) Epistle to the Corinthians (c. a.d. 96). (3) Ancient Homily, or the so-called Second Epistle of Clement (c. a.d. 120–40). (4) Shepherd of Hermas (c. a.d. 115–40). (5) Didache, or Teaching of the Twelve (c. a.d. 100–120). (6) Apocalypse of Peter (c. 150). (7) The Acts of Paul and Thecla (170). (8) Epistle to the Laodiceans (fourth century?). (9) The Gospel According to the Hebrews (a.d. 65–100). (10) Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians (c. a.d. 108). (11) The Seven Epistles of Ignatius (c. a.d. 110).

[86] Geisler, N. L., & Nix, W. E. (1986). *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Rev. and expanded., p. 301). Chicago: Moody Press.

Contemporary Approaches to the Canon

Some scholars have argued that the idea of a canon should be done away with or even entertained since they believe that there is no qualitative difference between the New Testament books and other early Christian literature. Thus, they contend that whatever sources shed light on the early Christian movement should be treated all the same way. Thus, they argue that James should not be treated any different than Clement of Rome. However, the problem with this view is that it only becomes reasonable if one rejects the notion of the canon as a closed list of authoritative books as well as the idea of Scripture. This view is much too quick to abandon the heritage of the church. It is also helped by the views of scholars who consider the canonical books as late.

There is another debate among scholars that is regarding the notion of a "canon within the canon." There are some who contend that the church should recognize that different groups had the freedom or even the obligation to define certain portions of the canon as being definitive for them. For example, Luther and Calvin emphasized the teaching of Romans and Galatians more than let say 1 Peter or Revelation. Therefore, why not recognize that certain groups had the freedom and obligation to define certain portions of the canon as Scripture for them.

Related to this, there are some who view the canon as a spiral meaning that the church should consider books such as James, and 2 Peter as the outermost elements of the canon which eventually gave way to the inner core such as the gospel of John and Romans.

However, the idea of Scripture and the canon reject all such approaches since they are all subjective rather than objective. They in fact deny that there is a canon which must be the basis for our decisions as pastors. It is true some parts of the New Testament have a bigger influence than others because they are longer and more comprehensive. These views relativize the canon and in fact deny that there is a canon which must stand as the basis for our pastoral choices.

Some like the Roman Catholic church has at times declared that the church's role in establishing the canon which has resulted in the view that the church's authority established the canon, which stands in direct contrast to traditional Protestant doctrine. Protestantism has maintained from the beginning that the church merely recognizes that which is canonical and could never establish the canon. Traditionally Protestantism has maintained that the church's role with regards to the canon is to merely recognize that only certain books demand the church's obedience and not others which results in constituting a canon or in other words a closed list of authoritative books.

Recently, there has been developed the view that the text which we have of the New Testament today is the direct result of the church's handling of its own

traditions. This would include the peculiar interpretations established by inner-biblical connections and these must be accepted as normative for the church.[87] This view is called canon criticism. Although this view expresses the effort to read the Bible as a whole and to read each of the biblical books as completed works, it does express abstract truths that can be inferred from the text as a whole but rejects numerous biblical truths which have historical referents.

Therefore, we must remember when approaching the subject of canonicity that God has indeed revealed Himself in history. He discloses Himself and in the past has disclosed Himself. He is also a God who speaks and who keeps His covenants with men. He has of course also revealed Himself perfectly through Jesus Christ. This establishes the necessity of the canon and by way of implication this canon's closure. The church did not establish the canon or in other words, it did not choose the books we now have in our English New Testament but rather she merely recognized the authority of these books and which authority comes from God Himself.

[87] Carson, D.A. and Moo, Douglas J., *An Introduction to the New Testament-Second Edition*; page 741; copyright 1992, 2005; Zondervan c. circa, about (with dates); column