

# ARE THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCUMENTS CREDIBLE?

Canonicity

How The New Testament Documents  
Become Recognized As Authoritative

by Chuck Gianotti

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## Canonicity

### 1. INTRODUCTION

**Psalm 11:3** “If the foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do?”  
(see Matt. 7:24-27)

#### A. Context

1) This is the study of how the New Testament (NT<sup>1</sup>) Scriptures came to be identified as authoritative for Christian life and doctrine. Properly speaking, we are investigating the canonicity of the NT or how the various separate writings came to be collected into an authoritative whole, the Canon. This is part of the overall study of “Bibliology,” which is the understanding of how the thoughts in God’s mind have been communicated to our minds and hearts through His word, the Bible.

2) Canonicity is one of the six sub-topics of Bibliology:

- REVELATION:  
God’s mind → mind of original writers
- INSPIRATION:  
Orig. writers’ minds → original text
- CANONIZATION:  
Original text → post-apostolic believers’ acceptance
- TRANSMISSION:  
Accepted texts → manuscript copies (MSS)
- TRANSLATION:  
MSS copies → contemporary language
- ILLUMINATION:  
Contemp. language → our minds/hearts

#### B. An overview of this study

##### 1) What do we have to work with?

- a) What we DO NOT have:
  - (1) Original witnesses (they have all died), pictures, video footage
  - (2) Original documents of the NT, an original ancillary documents (those written by the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Christians).
- b) What we DO have:
  - (1) *Copies* of the original documents or the writings of those who knew the authors
  - (2) Writings of early Christian writers and historians

##### 2) What is the process for determining how the NT came into being and how can we know that what we have is historically accurate?

- a) What did those who knew the original authors of the NT books say about their writings.
- b) How did the earliest post-apostolic Christians determine which documents were authoritative?
- c) How do we account for the universal acceptance at an early date of the NT?
- d) “What the Apostles wrote, and what they authorized, can be known in no other way, then by the testimonies of those who lived at the same time with them, and the tradition of those who succeeded them.”<sup>2</sup>

##### 3) The “Canon” of Scripture.

- a) The collection of those writings which were accepted as authentic and authoritative by the early church is called the “Canon” of Scripture.
- b) “This word [Canon] is derived from a Hebrew and Greek word denoting a reed or cane. Hence it means something straight or something to keep straight; and hence also a rule or something ruled or measured. It came to be applied to the Scriptures, to denote that they contained the authoritative rule of faith and practice, the standard of doctrine and duty.”<sup>3</sup>
- c) “Canonization” is NOT the process of making a book to be Scripture by human decision. God is the one who determines or causes a writing to be authoritative (i.e. to be scripture). Canonization, rather, is the process in which the early believers identified the books that had divine authority, that is, the writings which were given by God to be authoritative for Christian life and doctrine. The church did not create the canon, God did. The church simply identified it.
- d) Therefore, the Church is not authoritative over the canon of the NT, but rather the NT is authoritative over the church.

<sup>1</sup> The New Testament and Old Testament will be referred to as “NT” and “OT” for brevity’s sake.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of The New Testament* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Easton’s Bible Dictionary

**C. The importance of this study**

**1) External (the historical evidence about the NT's importance)**

- a) The NT has been venerated for nearly 2000 years
- b) The Bible (OT and NT) has been considered the most influential book of all time.
- c) The Bible (OT and NT) is the authoritative Scripture for the largest religion in history.
- d) As of 1995, those affiliated with Christianity composed approximately 32.8% of all earth's inhabitants.<sup>4</sup>

**2) Internal – The Bible's claims about itself.**

- a) Claims of Jesus' biblically recorded words. Jesus claims that the quality of a person's life absolutely depends on whether he or she follows His teachings or not:

*Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. (Mt 7:24-27)*

*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. (Mt 24:35)*

- b) The Bible claims to be God's inerrant communication to us:

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (2 Ti 3:16-17)*

*... no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21)*

*For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Mt 5:18)*

- c) The Bible warns about serious consequences for tampering with it:

*I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. (Re 22:18-19)*

*If the foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do? (Ps 11:3)*

**3) If the Bible is not true, then it is the cruelest hoax of all time!**

**D. Assaults on the integrity of the Christian Bible are prevalent today:**

- 1) Current attacks against the integrity of the Bible:

a) Anti-conservative bias.

Criticism is directed to those who hold a conservative view of the Bible, because similar views are common to fundamentalist extremes (as seen in radical, militant "Christian" sects and Muslim extremists).

b) Post-modern rejection of rationalism.

Post-modern thinking undercuts rational discussion of objective truth. Thus, the notion that the Bible can be seen in its historical frame work as addressing truth and corresponding to reality is dismissed. Truth is no longer moored to objective reality or rational thought, so it doesn't matter whether the Bible is historically based. What matters is whether or not you believe, the object of your faith is irrelevant. In effect, to use medical terminology, it is the belief in the remedy that brings life, independently of whether that remedy is a placebo or not.

c) Popular conspiracy theories.

These claim the present canon was the result of political motivations and gender issues culminating in the 4<sup>th</sup> century at the Council of Nicaea. One example is the popular novel *The Da Vinci Code* is the most recent attack on the veracity of the Bible. That book has been on the New York Times best seller list for over 2 years (at the time of this writing).

- 2) Attacks against the Bible and its truths are not new. Some examples:

a) Early church struggles (1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century)

- (1) Many spurious texts began to be circulated claiming apostolic authority.
- (2) The Gnostic movement rose as the greatest challenge to accepted texts in 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries.

b) Reformation period (16<sup>th</sup> century)

<sup>4</sup> Operation World, (Operation Mobilization Publishing), p. 23. Note, only a small percentage of these would be considered evangelical, but their association with the Bible speaks for the Bible's influence.

The reformers (Martin Luther, John Calvin, etc.) renewed the struggle over the Apocrypha, challenging the authority of the Roman church to determine the canon.

c) German “higher criticism” (19<sup>th</sup> century)

The beginning of “modern” scholarship challenged the long held acceptance of the authority of the received Bible. Higher criticism taught that most of the NT was of later origin than the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and that those writings reflected the bias of the later faith community reading back into the “legends” and “myths” supposedly perpetuated by earlier Christians.

**E. The teachings of Jesus were conveyed by the apostles.**

1) The 12 disciples were purportedly<sup>5</sup> given authority on behalf of Lord:

- a) According to the historical documents that we have, Jesus appointed some of his followers to be his official representatives of what he taught and what his life was all about. They were to convey the teachings of Jesus to others.

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:26)*

*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (John 16:12-13)*

*But you [i.e. the Apostles] ... will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8)*

- b) The 11 disciples (minus Judas) understood the import of Jesus instructions on this, as they determined that it was necessary to add in a replacement apostles to bring the number of official witnesses to 12. Peter spoke what they all knew to be the case:

*So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection. (Ac 1:21-23)*

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<sup>5</sup> We use the word “purportedly” here because at this point we have not established that these writings recorded historical fact. That will come later, but it is important to note that the historical records we have do present this teaching. This is the same understanding that the early church had, as we shall see below.

2) The apostle Paul was purportedly given authority on behalf of Christ:

*And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. (2 Peter 3:15-16). Clearly, Peter puts Paul’s writings on the same level as “Scriptures.”*

Paul understood his authority came directly from Christ, when he defends his apostleship to the Galatians:

*Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead. (Gal 1:1)<sup>6</sup>*

- 3) We will see later writings that this apostolic authority carried great weight to subsequent generations of Christians in determining which writings were authoritative.<sup>7</sup>

**F. Truth claims in the Bible about its own historicity**

- 1) The Apostle John claims to be an eye witness of things that he records about Jesus.

*Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me ... whoever has seen Me has seen the Father”. (John 14:6, 9)*

*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship*

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<sup>6</sup> Paul was not considered one of the original 12, for he did not qualify as having been a witness from the time of the baptism of Christ. None-the-less, God conveyed on Paul an authority to bring the message of the gospel to the Gentiles, and his resulting writings carry that authority. In is interesting that in Paul’s voluminous writings, he did not attempt a biography of Christ as did the four gospel writers.

<sup>7</sup> We use the term “authoritative” because this was what was important to the early church. The apostolic writings weren’t necessarily seen as “Scripture” per se. It is not that the early believers did not think they were, but the concept they were more concerned about early on was the issue of what was the authoritative teaching about Christian truth and life. The ideas of these writings being inspired Scripture developed in time.

*is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (1 John 1:1-4)*

- 2) Peter writes as an eye witness and appeals to first hand revelation.

*For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. (2 Peter 1:16-18, see 1:10-12)*

- 3) Writings of Luke (Gospel of Luke and Acts) claim to be accurate historical records of the facts. Luke shows remarkable historical acuity, having done careful research and interviews with eye-witnesses.

*Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4, see Acts 1:1-3)*

The eminent scholar Sir William Ramsay after years of archeological research in Asia Minor concluded: "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense...in short, this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."<sup>8</sup>

- 4) The Apostle Paul appealed to historical events and to the testimony of eyewitnesses that could be verified by his contemporaries.

*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.*

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<sup>8</sup> Sir William Ramsey, quoted in Bruce, p. 91-92. Ramsey devoted many years to archaeology of Asia Minor. When he first set out, he was "firmly convinced of the truth ... that Acts was a late production of the middle of the second century AD, and was only gradually compelled to a complete reversal of his views by the inescapable evidence of the facts uncovered in the course of his research." Bruce goes on to say that research into historical and geographical backgrounds of the NT has continued on since the time of Ramsey, "but our respect for Luke's reliability continues to grow as our knowledge of this field increases."

*Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Co 15:3-8)*

- 5) The writer of Hebrews appealed to eye-witness accounts of the life and teachings of Christ.

*... It [the teaching of salvation] was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (Heb 2:3-4)*

- 6) NT Scholar F. F. Bruce concludes: "Some writers may toy with the fancy of a 'Christ-myth,' but they do not do so on the ground of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not the historians who propagate the 'Christ-myth' theories."<sup>9</sup>

#### **G. There is a PROBLEM**

- 1) Jesus did not personally pen any of the Scriptures. The NT Scriptures were written by his followers.
- 2) Some of the apostles and a few individuals closely associated with the apostles put their testimony of the life of Christ into writing.
- 3) However, after these individuals died, other writings began to appear which were purported to be apostolic in origin, but were not. The "received" teachings from the apostles began to be challenged by groups that taught things different from the teaching that had been "handed down" from the apostles.
- 4) The generations of Christians following the apostles were then faced with deciding which writings had apostolic authority and which didn't. They didn't have the apostles around to personally verify what was true and what was not. For a while, there were some believers still alive who personally knew some of the apostles, so the "memory" of apostolic teaching (also called "apostolic tradition") was still fresh and alive. But in time these apostolic acquaintances also died.
- 5) The need for delineating between that which was authoritative for Christian life and teaching versus that which was not became important. The question of "authenticity" and "apostolic authority" were closely intertwined. If a writing could be demonstrated to be authentically

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<sup>9</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable* (InterVarsity Press, 1981), p. 123.

apostolic in origin, then it was authoritative. That is the issue of “canonicity”.

## H. The problem was anticipated

- 1) The Apostles in their writings (or at least in the copies of their writings we have today) were apparently concerned about the potential corruption of their teachings

The apostle Peter writes: *But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.* (2 Peter 2:1-3)

The apostle Paul warned the leaders of the church at Ephesus: *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.* (Acts 20:28-30)

- 2) The writers themselves made provisions for their teachings to be faithfully preserved and circulated. For example, Paul wrote:

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* (John 20:30-31)

*What you [i.e. Timothy] have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.* (2 Timothy 2:2)

*And when this letter has been read among you [i.e. believers in Colosse], have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.* (Colossians 4:16)

- 3) Our challenge today is to discover how the early generations of believers kept the teachings of Christ alive after the Apostles all died.

## 2. THE HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS WE HAVE TO WORK WITH

### A. The historical process

- 1) The NT did not suddenly appear as a single composite collection in one volume.
  - a) The various writings of the NT were composed at different times by different authors.
  - b) Two of the apostles and two others who were closely associated with the apostles wrote biographies (gospels) about the life of Christ.
  - c) Some apostles penned letters to communities of new believers about living the Christian life.
  - d) The apostolic writings apparently circulated independently while they writers were still alive.
  - e) The apostles did not collect their writings together into a definitive, “authorized” anthology,
- 2) Subsequent believers saw a need to identify the “authoritative” texts for their use in teaching, worship and doctrinal controversies.
  - a) Other writings with different teachings began to surface claiming to be written by an apostle.
  - b) Some of these new writings differed from what the Apostles taught, causing confusion and even introducing doctrinal aberrations.
- 3) The study of the canon is simply the study of how the early church came to accept the 27 books of what we now call the NT as authoritative and inspired by God, over against the writings that were rejected as non-authoritative and non-apostolic.

### B. We do not have the original NT autographs

- 1) The original writings (autographs) were penned using primitive materials such as parchments and leather, all which were subject to deterioration with handling and climate conditions.
- 2) Possibly God knew that we would have had a tendency to worship those original documents as religious relics, so he prevented them from being preserved.

### C. We have thousands of copies and quotes from the NT writings

- 1) Manuscript Copies (MSS)
  - a) The early church was prolific in copying the NT books
    - (1) These copies are called “manuscripts” or MSS

- (2) There are literally thousands of hand-written *copies* extant<sup>10</sup> today that date from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century through the 16<sup>th</sup> century (before the Guttenberg Press was invented).
- b) The earliest fragment (partial copy) dates to around AD 130. Called P<sup>52</sup> from the John Rylands collection in Manchester, England, it contains a small portion of the Gospel of John.
- 2) Lectionaries – manuals used for worship and teaching which contain quotes and allusions to the NT.
- 3) Ancient Translations of the NT Scriptures– Syriac, Latin, Coptic, etc.
- 4) Quotes from the Apostolic writings are found in the early church writings and commentaries.
  - a) “Apostolic Fathers”<sup>11</sup> – These were Christian writers immediately following the apostles, some of whom personally knew the apostles.
  - b) “Church Fathers” – These were the next generations of Christian writers generally divided into three groups, depending on when they wrote in relation to the Council of Nicaea:
- 5) While we don’t have the original autographs of the Apostolic Fathers, the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. historian Eusebius preserved copies of their writings that would have been otherwise lost to antiquity.

### 3. CANONICITY BEGAN WITH THE APOSTLES

#### A. The authority of the Apostles

##### 1) Overview

- a) The early Church writings indicate that great authority was accorded the apostles, because they knew Christ personally and relayed his actual teachings.
- b) Their interpretation of the OT was held in high regard: NT scholar F.F. Bruce states, “Those whose apostleship was recognized by fellow-Christians were acknowledged to be Christ’s agents, speaking by his authority. Their interpretation of the OT writings was therefore, in practice, as binding as those writings themselves.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The term “extant” means that an actual manuscript exists today and is currently stored in a museum, library or monastery somewhere in the world.

<sup>11</sup> The term “fathers” here does not refer to the Roman Catholic sense of title for priests. It is merely a historical convention similar that that used of the “fathers of the American Constitution”. It refers to “one who originates or founds something, a leading man. (American Heritage Dictionary)

<sup>12</sup> Bruce, p. 119-20.

- c) The apostles also provided additional teaching on spiritual truth, which came to be held as authoritative as the OT writings.

#### 2) Oral tradition - sayings of Jesus as quoted in the Apostolic Fathers

- a) There were “sayings” of Jesus that cropped up in various post-apostolic writings without any attribution to one of the four gospels. However, these references give evidence that there were teachings attributed to Jesus which were being passed along and were considered authoritative.
- b) Papias, a disciple of the apostle John, placed high importance on the teachings of the Apostles. Writing in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century:
 

*For I did not, like the multitude, take pleasure in those who spoke much, but in those who taught the truth; nor in those who related strange commandments, but in those who rehearsed the commandments given by the Lord to faith, and proceeding from truth itself. If, then, any one who had attended on the elders came, I asked minutely after their sayings, — what Andrew or Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the Lord’s disciples: which things Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, say. For I imagined that what was to be got from books was not so profitable to me as what came from the living and abiding voice. Papias. Oracles, 1*

#### 3) References to the “fourfold gospel” surface early in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

- a) The earliest records shows references to four gospels.
- b) The four writings were not referred to as four gospels, but as one gospel “according” to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John respectively.
- c) The debate was not so much how many gospels accounts there were, but trying to determine why there were *four* accounts.
- d) Clement of Rome (AD 96) quotes the words of Jesus (Sermon on the Mount) as being on the prophetic level. For example:
 

*The Holy Spirit saith, “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, neither let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in the Lord, in diligently seeking Him, and doing judgment and righteousness” [quote from Jer 9:23], being especially mindful of the words of the Lord Jesus which He spake, teaching us meekness and long-suffering. For thus He spoke: “Be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; forgive, that it may be forgiven to you; as ye do, so shall it be done unto you; as ye judge, so shall ye be judged; as ye are kind, so shall*

*kindness be shown to you; with what measure ye mete, with the same it shall be measured to you.*<sup>13</sup>

- e) In the second letter of Clement to the Corinthians (2<sup>nd</sup> century), the writer also quotes sayings of Jesus frequently with the following attached: “as Scripture says.”<sup>14</sup>
- f) The Letter of Barnabas (AD 100-130) quotes sayings of Jesus with “as it is written”.
- g) Polycarp (AD 110-120) uses “it is said in these Scriptures...” to introduce Jesus’ sayings.

#### 4) Account of the Gospel by Matthew

- a) The authorship of the Gospel of Matthew was *never* questioned as evidenced by the early church writings. The earliest references to this gospel account assume its authority and authorship.
- b) Papias writes that “Matthew put together the oracles [of the Lord] in the Hebrew language...” (Oracles, 6).<sup>15</sup>
- c) The date of writing was probably AD 50-55.

#### 5) Account of the Gospel by Mark

- a) The early church believed that Mark (John Mark of Acts) recorded the teachings of Peter concerning the life and teachings of Jesus.
- b) Papias (writing ca. AD 130-140), understood this to be the case: :  
*Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote down accurately all that he remembered, whether the sayings or the doings of the Lord, but not in order—for he had neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but followed Peter later on, as I said. Peter was accustomed to teach as occasion required, but not as though he were making a compilation of the dominical oracles. So Mark made no mistake in writing down certain things as he called them to mind; for he paid attention to one thing: to omit none of the things he had heard and to make no false statements in any of them.*<sup>16</sup>
- c) Clement of Alexandria (writing in later part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) wrote that Mark was sought by the followers of Peter to write down what Peter had said.
- d) Irenaeus (writing ca. AD 178) held that Mark recorded Peter’s teachings: “After their departure [i.e. Peter and Paul], Mark, the

<sup>13</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Clement to Corinthians 13

<sup>14</sup> Most scholars now agree that the writing titled “The 2<sup>nd</sup> letter of Clement to the Corinthians” was probably not written by Clement of Rome.

<sup>15</sup> We have no manuscript evidence, though, that Matthew was originally written in Hebrew, for our earliest copies are in Greek.

<sup>16</sup> Papias, as quoted in Eusebius, *Hist. Ecc.* 3.39.14

disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter”.<sup>17</sup>

- e) Because of his association with Peter, Mark’s writings were considered authoritative.
- f) Date of writing probably AD 57-59 (or as late as 70)

#### 6) Account of the Gospel by Luke

- a) Luke, was a frequent companion of Paul on his missionary journeys (Acts 13-28) and was with him up to his Roman imprisonment. His gospel account of the life of Christ, while reflecting careful research in interviewing many witnesses and carefully checking out many sources (Luke 1:1-4), was probably influenced greatly by the teachings of Paul.
- b) What did Paul know of the earthly life of Christ? He had access to Peter and James and the rest of the apostles and had spent some time with them at various junctures in his ministry (Acts 11:30, Galatians 1:18-19, 2:9-11). It was probable that during one of these times he had filled in for him some of the details about Jesus’ teaching. See for, example, in 1 Cor 7:10 where he refers to a command from the Lord about marriage and divorce. While Paul did not receive the gospel message from the other apostles (Galatians 1-2), it is unlikely that he would not appreciate some of the details of Jesus’ life and teaching conveyed by the other apostles.
- c) Paul alluded to the authority of the Gospel of Luke when in 1 Tim 5:18 he linked a quote from Luke 10:7 with an OT quote (Deut. 25:4) and called them both Scripture:  
*For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.” (1 Ti 5:18)*  
*You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain. (Deut. 25:4)*  
*And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. (Luke 10:7)*
- d) Irenaeus (about AD 178) understood Luke to be the follower of Paul who relayed the gospel Paul preached. “Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him.”<sup>18</sup>
- e) Since Luke was written before Acts (see Acts 1:1-2), and since Acts was written prior to the death of Paul, the Gospel of Luke must have an early date of composition, which speaks for its authenticity.

<sup>17</sup> Irenaeus, “Against Heresies”, 3.1.1

<sup>18</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 5.8.2-4.

f) Probably date of writing AD 60-61.

### 7) Account of the Gospel by John

- a) While the gospel according to John was originally accepted as authentic, it later became controversial because the Gnostics used it to support their positions.
- b) The earliest fragment P<sup>52</sup> is dated ca AD 130, from the Rylands collection, John 18 (see Appendix 1). This is the earliest extant manuscript evidence of the NT writings we have today.
- c) Irenaeus writing AD 182-188, says: “John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.”<sup>19</sup>
- d) Tatian produced the Diatessaron, a harmony of the four gospels (shortly after AD 165), presupposing prior existence of four gospels.
- e) Probable date of writing AD 90-100.

### 8) The so-called “Q” document

- a) There is a theory popular today that there was a precursor document that Matthew, Mark and Luke borrowed from in writing their gospels, which reflects material that is common to all three gospels.
- b) This theory falls due to the complete lack of manuscript evidence of a document as “Q”. “If such a document existed and were thought of so highly by Matthew and Luke that they quoted extensively from it, why did not the church also regard it highly and preserve it?”<sup>20</sup>

### B. Writer of Acts

- 1) Clearly Acts was written by the same author as the Gospel of Luke.
- 2) Clement of Alexandria (2<sup>nd</sup> century) held that Acts was written by Luke.
- 3) Irenaeus wrote that Luke authored the “Acts of the Apostles” (*Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 3:13.13*)
- 4) Therefore, the book of Acts was considered authoritative by virtue of Luke’s association with the apostle Paul.

### C. The authority of Paul’s writings

- 1) The dates of Paul’s writings are fairly well attested: between AD 48-67.
- 2) Internal evidence: Paul claims authority directly from God

*Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead* (Gal 1:1)

<sup>19</sup> Irenaeus, “Against Heresies”, 3.1.1

<sup>20</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

*For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.* (Gal 1:11-12, see also Gal 1:15-17, 2:7-9)

### 3) Apostolic affirmation:

a) Peter taught that Paul’s writings were on the level of Scripture

*... Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.* (2 Peter 3:15-16 emphasis added)

b) Note also that Peter seems to recognized a collection of Paul’s letters.

### 4) Later testimony about Paul’s authority

- a) In AD 96 Clement of Rome had access to some of Paul’s letters.<sup>21</sup>
- b) From the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Paul’s letters (minus the pastorals of 1&2 Timothy and Titus) circulated as a collection, not as single letters.
- c) We don’t for sure who compiled them together or where, though. Some suggest Luke.
- d) We don’t know when the pastorals (1 & 2 Tim, Titus) were later included in the earlier collection of Paul’s writings, but that happened at least by the time of Muratorian canon (later 2<sup>nd</sup> century).
- e) F.F. Bruce eminent NT historian states: “There are relatively few variant readings in the textual tradition of Paul’s letters...”<sup>22</sup>. Apparently, a single codex<sup>23</sup> into which they originally were compiled became the master-copy from which others were copied.
- f) Oldest surviving fragment of Paul’s writings dates from AD 200 (Chester Beatty manuscript P<sup>46</sup>, see Appendix 1) NOTE: This fragment included Hebrews, under the assumption that Paul was its author).

<sup>21</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, 47:1

<sup>22</sup> Bruce, 130.

<sup>23</sup> The term *codex* refers to the “new” method of transmitting written works, by binding parchments leafs together into books similar to modern book binding fashion. This replaced the older scroll method as being more efficient and compact. Historian feel this facilitate the more rapid compilation of the authoritative texts into collections, because of the relative ease of storage and transportation of codices as opposed to scrolls.

#### D. The General Epistles by James, Peter, John, Jude.

- 1) These “general” epistles took longer to be accepted by the church as authoritative.
- 2) Because of the relative late date of writing (except for James), these epistles did not get the wide circulation as early as the four Gospels and Paul’s letters.
- 3) Keep in mind, Paul’s *later* writings weren’t as readily accepted either, probably for the same reason.
- 4) Peter and John were Apostles, so their writings came to be considered authoritative.
- 5) James the author, was not the apostle James who was martyred in Acts 12, but the half-brother of Jesus. `Because of his prominent position in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15), his letter was considered authoritative.
- 6) The book of Jude was questioned for awhile because of author’s reference to a “book of Enoch” (Jude 1:14). But, Jude refers to himself as the brother of James, and therefore was the half-brother of Jesus—and on this weight the book was eventually accepted.

#### E. Epistle to the Hebrews

- 1) Interestingly, Clement of Alexandria (ca. AD 2<sup>nd</sup> century) felt that Paul wrote Hebrews. Some have suggested that Paul wrote anonymously in Hebrew (because he was the apostle to the Gentiles), and Luke translated it into Greek. The authorship has been debated from the early times until our present time.
- 2) This book was debated back and forth for sometime, and was particularly troublesome because of the lack of consensus about its authority. But, it too came to be accepted at authoritative.

#### 4. CIRCULATION OF APOSTOLIC WRITINGS

- A. Copies of Mark (written probably at Rome) became available through travelers to the authors of Matthew and Luke, as early as the 70’s and 80’s.
- B. Paul’s letters circulated almost immediately. In Col 4:16, for example, he requested his letter be sent to the Laodiceans and vice versa. Paul wrote a single letter to multiple churches in the Galatian region (Gal 1:2), which of course must have been circulated in it’s original autograph or in copy form.
- C. Forgeries of Paul also arose. He warns, “not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come” (2 Thess 2:2).
- D. 1 2 Peter refers to the letters of Paul (3:15-16 “... in all his [Paul’s] epistles”). Implies at least three letters of Paul’s were in circulation.

- E. 1 Peter was written to Christians in a wide geographic area, and evidently had to be circulated to a wide readership.

#### 5. APOSTOLIC FATHERS

##### A. Introduction

- 1) Span AD 95-150
- 2) “Apostolic Fathers” refers to writers who followed after the time of the apostles but who had personal knowledge of the apostles.
- 3) These writings seldom made direct quotations from NT writings, but made many allusions to or borrowed phrases from NT writings. There was clearly a knowledge of the apostolic writings.

##### B. Clement of Rome – Letter to the Corinthians

- 1) Written AD 95-96<sup>24</sup>
- 2) Clement was a prominent leader in the church in Rome.
- 3) Written to address younger leaders in Corinth who rose up against the elders of the church, calling them (younger leaders) to repentance.
- 4) This is probably the Clement referred to in Phil 4:3
- 5) Quotes extensively from OT
- 6) Loosely quotes from the Lord (Gosp. of Matthew or Gosp. of Luke). But, not certain if quoting from memory or from which gospel, or if quoting from written texts or from oral tradition.
- 7) Clement specifically refers to letters written by Paul. The Corinthian letters were referred to in ch. 47. He alludes to Romans, Galatians, Philippians, Ephesians.
- 8) Clement is well acquainted with the epistle to the Hebrews.

##### C. Ignatius of Antioch – Seven Letters

- 1) 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> “bishop”<sup>25</sup> of Antioch in Syria<sup>26</sup>. Written about AD 110
- 2) Ignatius wrote seven letters enroute to Rome for his martyrdom.
- 3) His primary authority was the apostolic preaching about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (either written or oral tradition).
- 4) Speaks on a variety of subjects: “As for me, the archives (i.e. authoritative writings) are Jesus Christ; the unadulterated archives are his cross and his death and his resurrection, and the faith which is through him—In these I wish to be justified through your prayers.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Some date Clement’s letter as early as 69 AD

<sup>25</sup> Very early in the history of the church, the concept of “bishop” or “elder” migrated from a plurality to a singular, hierarchical position of ecclesiastical authority.

<sup>26</sup> Early on in the post-apostolic era, the office of bishop presiding over one or more churches began to rise in prominence, contrary to NT teaching and practice.

<sup>27</sup> *Epistle of Ignatius, To the Philadelphians, 8.*

- 5) Knew of Paul's letters (1 Cor, Eph, Romans, Gal. Phil. Col. 1 Thess.), Matthew, John, Luke (?).

#### D. The Didache

- 1) Author unknown.
- 2) Written 1<sup>st</sup> half of second century.
- 3) This is a short manual of moral instruction & church practice
- 4) Refers to itinerant apostles & prophets, but their authority is declining at the time of writing, subject more and more to precautions that all teaching must rest "ultimately on the authority of the traditional teaching deriving from the Lord."<sup>28</sup>
- 5) Quotes twice from OT
- 6) Refers to words of Jesus from Gospel of Matthew
- 7) Possibly acquainted with Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the Corinthians based on some similarities of words, phrases and structure.

#### E. Papias of Hierapolis – "Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord"

- 1) Lived from AD 70 to about 140 (or 163?)
- 2) Writer: Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia. The church there was established by Epaphras, a co-missionary of Paul's (Col 4:12-13).
- 3) Apparently he had heard the apostle John preach and was a friend of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. F.F. Bruce states that Papias was a disciple of apostle John.<sup>29</sup>
- 4) Only fragmentary copies of his writing exist today
- 5) He was the first of the apostolic fathers to take an interest in the specific early Christian writings.
- 6) He was eager to learn as much as he could from the living tradition, transmitted by the apostles:

If ever anyone came who had been a follower of the presbyters I inquired into the words of the presbyters, what Andrew or Peter or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples had said, and what Aristion and the presbyter John the Lord's disciples, were saying. For I did not think that information from books would help me so much as the utterances of the living and surviving voice.<sup>30</sup>

- 7) He apparently knew the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8)
- 8) "The presbyter used to say this: Mark, having become Peter's interpreter (or spokesman or secretary) wrote down accurately all that he remembered [of Peter's preaching] without, however, recording in order

<sup>28</sup> This quotation is taken from Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* III. xxix. 15), as quoted in Metzger, 51

<sup>29</sup> Bruce, 156

<sup>30</sup> Metzger, 52

the things said or done by the Lord ... For he was careful of one thing—to omit nothing of what he had heard or to falsify anything in them."<sup>31</sup>

- 9) Papias apparently also knew of Gospel of John, 1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation. No specific references to Paul's writings.

#### F. The Epistle of Barnabas

- 1) We don't know anything about the author. Some later church fathers thought this was the Barnabas associated with Paul, but the writing refers to the fall of Jerusalem (AD 70) as having already taken place.
- 2) Possibly written about AD 130.
- 3) Very much a theological tract: concerned to prove that the death of Christ on the cross is a sacrifice that fulfills a plan set forth in the OT. Radically anti-Jewish.
- 4) Quotes frequently from OT, fairly accurately.
- 5) Writer was a scholarly author who had read widely, quotes frequently from variety of books.
- 6) Acquainted with Gospel of Matthew, possibly echoes of 1 & 2 Timothy

#### G. Polycarp of Smyrna

- 1) Bishop of Smyrna. Sometime AD 110 to 135
- 2) Closely related to the writings of Ignatius (the first of two letters)
- 3) Only about a dozen references to OT.
- 4) Wide acquaintance of the NT, especially Matthew and Luke, but also Romans, 1 Cor. Gal. Eph, Phil. 2 Thess, 1 & 2 Tim, Hebrews, 1 John, 1 Peter (This is the most for any of the apostolic fathers).

#### H. Shepherd of Hermas

- 1) Author: Probably not the Hermas of Romans 16:14.
- 2) Date: end of 1<sup>st</sup> century or beginning of 2<sup>nd</sup> century (but could be as late as mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century).
- 3) One of the most popular books in the early Church, and for a long time was considered inspired. It was widely copied.
- 4) A religious allegory featuring a rugged figure dressed like a shepherd as Hermas' guide. Similar literary genre as "Pilgrim's Progress" by John Bunyan (AD 1678).
- 5) Very few if any quotations from any literature, let alone OT or NT. Possibly makes some allusions to Matthew, Ephesians and James.

#### I. The "So-Called" Second Epistle of Clement

- 1) Scholars now feel this was not written by the same author as 1 Clement.
- 2) This is clearly a transcript of an early Christian sermon
- 3) Date: Generally AD 120 to 170.
- 4) Purpose is to inculcate personal holiness

<sup>31</sup> Metzger, 55

- 5) Quotes from OT. Acquainted with Matthew and Luke, 1 Cor, Eph. May have known Hebrews, James and 1 Peter.
- 6) Of the 11 times he cites the words of Jesus, only 6 are found in the canonical Gospels.

## 6. INFLUENCES BEARING ON DEVELOPMENT OF THE CANON

### A. Apostolic roots

- 1) Early transmission of apostolic teaching
  - a) Natural desire. There was a natural desire to preserve the Apostolic teaching, because of the great respect for the apostles that came about.
  - b) Oral traditions. This term was used in the post-apostolic writings to refer to the teachings that were circulated by word of mouth. Fortunate was the person who had had personal access to the apostles for first hand accounts or who had memories of first hand exposure to an apostle's teachings. Many relied on the "sayings" of Christ circulating by word of mouth.
  - c) Written documents. As the apostles began to write their gospels (biographies of Jesus Christ) and their epistles (letters addressing specific situations), copies were made and circulated.
- 2) Widespread use of Apostolic writings
  - a) Very early in the historical record, we see evidence of widespread use of the apostolic writings.
  - b) The passing of the apostles led to even wider use of their writings.
  - c) This was particularly true early on for the four gospels and the writings of Paul.

### B. Spread of false teaching

#### 1) "Judaizers" (legalism) during Apostolic times

- a) While much of the apostolic writings provided positive teaching about Jesus Christ and Christian living, there was a significant amount that was expressly written to oppose or correct false teachings that rose up against the authority of the apostles. For example, the book of Galatians was occasioned by "legalizers" (sometimes called "Judaizers") who wanted obedience to the Law of Moses required for Christians, that circumcision was necessary for salvation.
- b) Paul saw this as a huge threat to the gospel of grace and wrote passionately to the Galatians:

*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven*

*should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (Gal 1:6-9)*

- c) The apostles predicted that false teachers would continue to rise up:
 

*I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Acts 20:29-30)*
- d) Some writings began to surface claiming to be written by different ones of the apostles, which taught different doctrine than the teachings of the apostles.
 

*... [we ask you] not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us... (2 Thess 2:2)*
- e) False teachers and cult leaders wrote and fostered their own "scriptures" to counter that which was handed down from the apostles (whether orally or in writing). Some false teachers justified their "new" writings based on comments made in the Gospel of John:
 

*Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30-31 see also 21:25).*
- f) Over time need arose for identifying genuinely apostolic writings.

#### 2) Gnostics (2<sup>nd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries)

- a) Introduction
  - (1) The evidence of Gnosticism, until recently, was known through the writings of the Church Fathers as they combated this aberrant doctrine. But, in 1945 at Nag Hammadi in Egypt, a collection of manuscripts was found which dated back to about AD 400. This discovery corroborated much of what we have known through the Church Fathers, verifying their assessment of what the Gnostics believed. In fact, little was added by the Nag Hammadi discovery to our understanding of this movement that was not already know, despite the sensationalism of Gnostic sympathizers today.
  - (2) Gnosticism's beginning was gradual and flourished alongside of Christianity for three centuries. One of the more well-known proponents of was Valentinus who broke away from the church and established a school to spread his doctrine (AD 140-165).

- (3) This false teaching was considered the greatest threat to the church of the early centuries.

b) Basic tenets of Gnosticism

- (1) There were many varieties and shades of Gnosticism, but a few core concepts.
- (2) People are souls temporarily imprisoned in physical bodies. The only escape is through a special *gnosis*, or knowledge about their origin and their destiny. The goal is to return to the realm of the Highest Ideal.
- (3) The creator God of the Bible was not the ultimate God of all the universe. The absolute and ultimate God of all is perfectly pure and holy. He (or It) is absolute wisdom and truth. From this ultimate God emanated a series of beings (or eons) out of whom flowed other emanations. The farther an emanation was from the ultimate God, the less holy, pure and wise it was—and the more physical and material it became. At some point, one of these emanations, called the Demiurge, became the creator God of the OT. As Gnostics believed, the original, ultimate God was too good, too holy and too pure to create a physical universe (see Appendix 2 for graphic illustration of basic Gnostic beliefs).
- (4) The goal therefore for humans is to seek *gnosis* or special knowledge to transcend this physical (unholy) existence and ultimately arrive back at union with the ultimate Truth.
- (5) The Gnostics developed their own set of writings that mixed this neo-platonic belief with Christian concepts and words. However, they did hold to the writings of John, because of his use of concepts like light, life, knowledge and, especially the “Logos” of chapter one. These words and concepts lent themselves to being expropriated by the Gnostics and used to support their teachings.

c) Implications

- (1) Gnostic teaching involved serious implications concerning the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Either Christ was not fully divine and identified with the ultimate God because as a physical being he could not be holy. Or else, Christ was not really a physical man, being too holy for inhabiting a material/physical body—he was simply a phantom, just appearing to be a man.
- (2) Clearly, Scripture taught Jesus was both divine *and* physical, God *and* human. As a result, Gnostic “scripture” arose to support their aberrations. Likewise, there was a rejection by the Gnostics of those portions of the accepted apostolic writings that affirmed Jesus’ incarnation.

- (3) Incipient (or early hints of) Gnosticism can be detected in Paul’s letter to the Colossians with his polemic against those who claim special insight apart from Jesus Christ.

d) Church’s response

- (1) The Church began to question the Gospel of John because of the use Gnostics made of it, but eventually, that gospel was fully embraced like the other three (just as earlier).
- (2) As “orthodox” Christianity gained in prominence, the writings of the Gnostics were destroyed as false doctrine.

**3) Marcionites**

a) Introduction

- (1) Marcion was born AD 100 and became a wealthy Christian ship-owner.
- (2) He wrote only one work, which has been lost. What we know about him is gleaned from what was written against him.
- (3) Others wrote with Marcion’s influence and this movement became large (though not as large as the Gnostics). Marcion himself was probably influenced by early Gnostic thought.
- (4) He was the first (that we know of) to publish a fixed collection of books that he considered authoritative (later part of 2<sup>nd</sup> century).<sup>32</sup> This has been called the “Marcion Canon”
- (5) Marcion’s canon excluded the OT and anything that in his view implied law. He included Luke, 10 of Paul’s letters (not the pastorals). He made changes to these writings, and justified them as corrections to apostolic error or copyist interpolations. All his changes can be easily explained on the basis of his beliefs.

b) His teachings

- (1) He rejected the OT and considered the OT God as inferior to the God of goodness. He directly challenged apostolic teaching because he thought that the 12 apostles misunderstood Jesus, wrongly believing Him to be the Messiah of the Jews.
- (2) He was devoted passionately to Paul, believing him to be the only apostle to faithfully preserve the teaching of Jesus in its purity.
- (3) He also held Luke’s gospel to be authoritative (possibly because of Luke’s association with Paul). But, in his view, the other apostles corrupted the teachings of Jesus with legalism. Even in Luke’s gospel, Marcion purged things which were inconsistent with his (Marcion’s) understanding of truth. He removed Luke’s references to OT, which smacked of legalism (to Marcion) and

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<sup>32</sup> Bruce, 134

references to the John Baptist because of his pivot role between the old and new covenants. He removed the birth of Christ which was connected clearly to OT genealogy. Jesus, he felt, just appeared supernaturally.

- (4) He even removed those parts of Paul's writings which he judged were in error (for example Gal 3:16-4:6 because of its reference to Abraham).
- (5) Marcion taught celibacy, so membership in his "new" church was maintained only by conversions.

c) Implications:

- (1) The apostolic witness of the 12 original apostles was nullified by Marcion's teachings
- (2) There was a total failure to see Christ as the fulfillment of God's movement of salvation through the OT.
- (3) He failed to see the "right hand of fellowship" about which Paul himself spoke concerning his relationship to the other apostles (Galatians 2:9).

d) The church's response

- (1) "It was in opposition to Marcion's criticism that the Church first became fully conscious of its inheritance of apostolic writings. As Grant aptly puts it, 'Marcion forced more orthodox Christians to examine their own presuppositions and to state more clearly what they already believed.'"<sup>33</sup>
- (2) The church came to reject Marcion's teaching as being out of step with the "received" apostolic writings and oral traditions.

**4) Montanists**

a) Introduction

- (1) Movement dates from second half of 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Name comes from the founder, Montanus.
- (2) It was a kind of 2<sup>nd</sup> century charismatic movement and quickly spread through church, marked by ecstatic outbursts and tongues.

b) What they believed

- (1) Montanus taught that he was *the* inspired instrument of a new outpouring of the Spirit.
- (2) Two women were associated with him, prophetesses named Prisca and Maximilla, who left their husbands to follow Montanus.
- (3) They expected the soon end of the world.
- (4) They developed ascetic traits and rigors in the face of a growing worldliness of the church. Some considered this a reaction to the

clerical aristocracy that had arisen in the church, which had become more and more institutionalized.

- (5) Women were accepted into leadership.
- (6) Adherents of Montanism gathered their own writings like a sacred documents, many of which were apocalyptic.

c) The church's response

- (1) The church rejected these new writings.
- (2) The book Revelation became suspect because the Montanists relied on it. But eventually the faithful accepted it as authoritative.

**C. Persecution by Romans against Christians**

- 1) In the early days of Christianity, the Roman government saw this new movement as subversive and a threat to Roman culture and thinking. With increasing persecution, the government attempted to stamp out the writings that were evidently fueling the Christian movement.
- 2) When governing authorities pressured Christians to surrender their writings, it became a matter of conscience as to which writings the Christians were willing to die for. Those books considered authoritatively were guarded well, but lesser books not having the same authority were more readily surrendered. So, for example, the Gospel of Thomas was more likely to be relinquished in the face of persecution than, say, the Gospel of Matthew.
- 3) Ironically, this ensured that those books which the Christians were sure about were more likely to have survived the persecutions than lesser books. In effect, persecution brought a natural selection process to weed out non-authoritative books.
- 4) This carried on through to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. At times the punishment for resisting such imperial efforts included imprisonment, torture, and, in some cases, death.

**D. Book Making Practices**

1) Scrolls:

- a) Before the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, almost all writing was done on scrolls made from the papyrus plant.
- b) Scrolls were practically limited to about 35 feet in length (about the length needed for Gospel of Luke or book of Acts).
- c) Collecting and transporting scrolls was done by box or container and was cumbersome.

2) Codex or "leaf-book"

- a) By the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the codex or leaf-book began to come into prominence.

<sup>33</sup> Metzger, 99

- b) Several books could be assembled in one volume, enhancing the mobility of the writings. And it enhanced the associations of various writings together.
- c) By the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the writings of Paul were circulated as a group, probably facilitated by the more convenient form of the codex.

## 7. DEVELOPMENT OF THE CANON

Bruce Metzger summarizes: “Although the fringes of the emerging canon remained unsettled for generations, a high degree of unanimity concerning the greater part of the NT was attained among the very diverse and scattered congregations of believers not only throughout the Mediterranean world but also over an area extending from Britain to Mesopotamia. By the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth century, the great majority of the twenty-seven books that still later came to be widely regarded as the canonical NT were almost universally acknowledged to be authoritative.”<sup>34</sup>

### A. Overview

- 1) General pattern of acceptance.
  - a) The four Gospels by the end of Apostolic period were regarded as a closed collection and accepted throughout the whole Church.<sup>35</sup>
  - b) Paul’s writing, Acts and Revelation were accepted as authoritative by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century.
  - c) The rest were not recognized by all at first: Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1,2 & 3 John and Jude.
  - d) There were a few other writings that were equally debated, as to their authority, for example, the Shepherd of Hermas.
- 2) There was no ecclesiastical headquarters to tell churches which writings were authoritative.
  - a) The churches of the early post-apostolic times were not associated in a denominational sense with a headquarters or central governing body. There simply was no one person, church or theological center that had authority to proclaim the definitive statement on the canon.
  - b) As a result, each local church had to determine for itself what writings were to be considered authentic.
- 3) Geographical tendencies
  - a) In time, certain geographical areas came to have some uniform perspectives that differed from geographical other areas.

<sup>34</sup> Metzger, 76.

<sup>35</sup> Bock, xvi

- b) This eventually became most apparent in the variations between churches in the west (Europe) and churches in the east (Egypt, Turkey, Syria, etc.)
- 4) Recitation in church services
    - a) Since all copies of apostolic writings were copied by hand (the printing press had not yet been invented for another more than a millennium!), there were relatively few manuscript copies, so church services were composed heavily of public reading from the OT Scriptures and the authoritative apostolic writings.
    - b) Eventually, through cross influence, regional gatherings of church leaders and writings of influential individuals, a clear canon of accepted writings began to be recognized.

### B. Criteria used by the churches for inclusion of a writing into the canon

- 1) The critical needed for identifying the canon began during the time of the Church Fathers, those who had no direct acquaintance with the apostles.
- 2) Three criteria for including a writing as authoritative came to be accepted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and were never again challenged.<sup>36</sup>
  - a) Apostolic authority – was it written by an apostle or an associate? If the early church believed that a writing was apostolic, then it was authoritative. We in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are too late to verify this independently of the early church writings. Our question today is, “Did the early Church believe a particular writing was apostolic?”
  - b) Acceptance by the churches  
Did a particular writing find general and broad acceptance among the churches during the time the canon was being recognized. This assumed that a book which enjoyed a wide acceptance over a long period of time was more likely to be considered authoritative than one accepted in limited region or for a limited time span.<sup>37</sup>
  - c) Affirmed Spiritual Validation  
Does it conform to what had been accepted as normative by the Church. Does it witness to Christ? Does it conform to what was called the *rule of faith*. This *rule of faith* was a summary of the tenets held in common by the churches of apostolic foundation: it is closely related to what is called ‘apostolic tradition.’ ”<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Metzger, 254

<sup>37</sup> Paul set a precedent of looking at times to the generally held beliefs or practices of the churches - see 1 Cor 1:16.

<sup>38</sup> Bruce, 150

- 3) The canon has been considered to be closed since the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The church today is too far removed in time from the original sources to make any significant contribution to the process.

### C. Some highlights in the East among the Church Fathers

- 1) Syria
  - a) “For our part, brethren, we receive both Peter and the other apostles as Christ; but as men of experience we reject the writings falsely inscribed with their names, since we know that such were not handed down to us.” (Quoted in Eusebius from Serapion’s letter AD 200).<sup>39</sup>
  - b) “The Law and the Prophets and the Gospel from which you read every day before the people, and the Epistles of Paul which Simon Cephas sent us from the city of Rome, and the Acts of the Twelve Apostles which John the son of Zebedee sent us from Ephesus—from theses writings you shall read in the Churches of the Messiah, and besides them nothing else shall you read.” (quoted in Eusebius from *Doctrine of Addai*, ca. AD 400)
- 2) Greece
  - a) Dionysius (third quarter of 2<sup>nd</sup> century) referred frequently to Paul’s writings and shows evidence of knowing Revelation.
  - b) Athenagoras (AD 177) was the first to elaborate a philosophical defense of the trinity. Quotes Paul, Matthew, Mark and John.
- 3) Egypt
  - a) Paneaenus (AD 180-192) “Since the Lord, being the apostle of the Almighty, was sent to the Hebrews, Paul, having been sent to the Gentiles, through modesty did not inscribe himself as an apostle of the Hebrews, both because of respect for the Lord and because he wrote to the Hebrews also out of his abundance, being a preacher and apostle for the gentiles.” (quoted in Eusebius)<sup>40</sup>
  - b) Clement of Alexandria (around AD 211) cites all NT books except Philemon, James, 2 Peter and 2 & 3 John. The ones he cites he considers authoritative Scripture.
  - c) Origen (wrote early to mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century). Probably Born AD 185 into a Christian home. A true Bible scholar. Commented on nearly all the

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<sup>39</sup> Most of what we know of the writings of the earliest Christians comes to us through the preservation by Eusebius who had the foresight to record their writings in his voluminous history of the church. Eusebius’ works date from the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>40</sup> Metzger 129.

NT books. He refers to “New Testament” as “divine Scriptures.” Clearly states the four gospels are the only ones undisputed. Thinks Hebrews was written by Paul, but admits that its authorship is uncertain. Suggests the possibility that it was written under the influence of Paul by someone in Rome, perhaps Luke or Clement of Rome. Quotes from Hebrews more than 200 times. Questions James 2 Peter and 2&3 John.

### D. Some highlights in the West among the Church Fathers

- 1) Christianity originated in the east, but moved west to Rome and beyond.
- 2) Justin Martyr
  - a) Converted AD 130. Founded a Christian school in Rome. Wrote many books.
  - b) He wrote this description of a worship service: “The memoirs of apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, for as long as time permits. Then the reading stops and the leader instructs by word of mouth, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all stand up together and pray.”<sup>41</sup>
  - c) Quotes from all 4 Gospels, and alludes to other writings or oral traditions about the life of Christ.
- 3) Irenaeus
  - a) Became Bishop in Lyons AD 178. Died AD 202??
  - b) Influenced in his youth by Polycarp who had known the apostle John and some others who had seen the Lord. He was linked with a broad spectrum of churches in diverse areas.
  - c) Makes full use of the accepted writings (what we would come to call NT writings) in opposition to Gnosticism.
  - d) “Irenaeus set himself to examine such claims and to establish the content of the genuine apostolic tradition. This tradition was maintained in living power, he argued, in those churches which were founded by apostles and in which there had been a regular succession of bishops or elders since their foundation; it was summed up in those churches’ rule of faith or baptismal creed.”<sup>42</sup>
  - e) In confronting false teachings, Irenaeus argued that the burden of proof lay with those who asserted that the doctrine had been changed since the original message (as reflected in the apostolic churches). Irenaeus claimed that the “rule of faith” was consistent through out the churches as a whole.
  - f) He refers to Paul’s letters, Acts, 1 John, 1 Peter, Revelation—all as Scripture. But he also includes Shepherd of Hermas as Scripture. He

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<sup>41</sup> Metzger, 145.

<sup>42</sup> Bruce, 171-72

- quotes 2 John and James. He acknowledged the standard 22 books of what we call the NT (minus Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 3 John and Jude).
- g) Irenaeus was the first to clearly define a collection of apostolic books that were to be regarded as equal in significance to the OT. The four-fold gospel was widely accepted. He implied that inspiration took place at the word level in choosing one word over another.
- h) During this time the Scriptures began circulating in Latin, the common language. At the same time, the OT was translated from the Septuagint (see below) in the Roman province of Africa in the later half of 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Later, Jerome produced a complete new translation from the Hebrew OT into Latin.<sup>43</sup>
- 4) Hippolytus of Rome.
- a) Born AD 170. Died 235. Rivalled the Bishop of Rome because of a disagreement over an issue of church discipline.
- b) He was the last of the *Greek* writing figures in Rome. Considered the greatest scholar of his age in the west.<sup>44</sup> He was part of a dissident group against the Roman church establishment.
- c) Accepted four Gospels as Scripture, 13 letters of Paul, Acts, 1 Peter, 1 & 2 John, and Revelation (22 books). Quoted frequently from Hebrews, but didn't accept it as Scripture.
- d) First Christian writer to reflect a knowledge of 2 Peter and alludes to James and Jude.
- e) He puts the known NT books on same level of authority as OT Scripture. Refers to "the prophets, the Lord, and the apostles" as Scripture.
- 5) Tertullian (AD 196-212)
- a) He was the first of the Church Fathers to write primarily in Latin. Converted AD 195 in Rome. Wrote against Marcion and Valentinus
- b) By his time, a good part of the NT writings were in circulation among churches of North Africa in Latin translation.
- c) Joined the Montanus sect in Africa (Carthage) about AD 206.
- d) Tertullian was the first to use the phrase "testament" to refer to the OT and the NT, as we have come to know them. In so doing, he put the NT books on equal standing with the OT books.<sup>45</sup>
- e) Cites Barnabas as author of Hebrews "a man sufficiently accredited by God, as being one whom Paul had stationed next to himself"<sup>46</sup>
- f) Cites all the NT writings except 2 Peter, James and 2 & 3 John.

<sup>43</sup> Bruce, 83

<sup>44</sup> Bruce, 178

<sup>45</sup> Bruce, 182

<sup>46</sup> Metzger, 159

- g) Early on spoke favorably of Shepherd of Hermas, but later declared it to be apocryphal.
- 6) Cyprian
- a) Converted 246. Died AD 258. Bishop of Carthage (Egypt). One of about 250 bishops in North Africa!
- b) Quotes from four Gospels, Paul's Epistles, 1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation. But does not quote from Philemon, Hebrews, James 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John
- c) Speaks of Hebrews as being authored by Barnabas, but did not consider it Scripture.
- 7) Clement of Alexandria
- a) He lived in the last quarter of 2<sup>nd</sup> century in Alexandria before moving to Asian Minor from the persecution in AD 202. (This was a different individual than the Clement of Rome).
- b) Found much good in pagan culture (in contrast with Tertullian). He felt that everything that is good is for Christ.
- c) At this time, the Christian faith was already planted in India.<sup>47</sup> The church in Egypt had been strongly influenced by Gnosticism.
- d) Speaks of the OT and the NT, but has nothing to say about the limits of the NT.<sup>48</sup>
- e) The law, the prophets and the gospels formed a united authority.
- f) Clement was strongly "traditional", but might be more aptly called a Christian "humanist", having widely read among pagan philosophers, especially Plato.
- 8) Origen
- a) Lived AD 185-254
- b) He saw as undisputed the four gospels, Acts, Pauline epistles (13), 1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation,
- c) He saw as disputed:
- (1) Hebrews (Origen himself thought it was authentic and written by Paul, but he was not absolutely sure. He recognized some churches didn't accept it).
- (2) 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, James, Jude. (Origen is earliest writer to mention 2 Peter.)
- (3) He felt book of James was written by Lord's brother (Matt. 13:55)
- d) Treated Didache, Letter of Barnabas, Hermas as authoritative
- 9) Jerome (AD 414)

<sup>47</sup> Bruce, 186

<sup>48</sup> Bruce, 188

- a) Translated the Hebrew OT into Latin, bypassing the Greek Septuagint (see below), creating quite a stir over this because up until then all translations had been from the Greek Septuagint..
- b) He wrote that both Hebrews and Revelation were received by the Church as authoritative.
- c) About the same time, Augustine wrote that some books were accepted on weightier evidence than others.<sup>49</sup>

### E. Two significant lists of the books of the NT

By end of 2<sup>nd</sup> century, lists began to be drawn up identifying the authoritative books. Two significant ones are:

- 1) The Muratorian Canon
  - a) Latter part of 2<sup>nd</sup> century. One of the more comprehensive lists.
  - b) Includes Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke & John, Acts, Paul's epistles, Jude, 1 & 2 John
  - c) Wisdom Written By Friends of Solomon (no one knows why this book was included).
  - d) Apocalypse of John (Book of Revelation)
  - e) Apocalypse of Peter (though the author of the Muratorian Canon admits this is highly disputed)
  - f) Shepherd of Hermas (author says it is not on same level as other books on list).
  - g) The author of this canon speaks of two criteria
    - (1) Authors were eyewitness or ear-witnesses of the Lord.
    - (2) Books were widely read in worship services
- 2) Eusebius' Canon
  - a) Written toward the end of 4<sup>th</sup> century.
  - b) Eusebius was a highly meticulous historian, particularly about all things Christian.
  - c) Included the four Gospels, Acts, Paul's epistles, 1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation
  - d) Refers to James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John as disputed.
  - e) All other writings are put in the list of spurious or "illegitimate"
  - f) No mention of Hebrew. Probably because he believed Paul wrote Hebrews (though he recognized that there were other view points), and therefore included as one of Paul's Epistles.

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<sup>49</sup> Bruce, p. 93. "[Jerome] and Origen stand alone among early church fathers for their expertise as biblical scholars; of the two, Jerome exercised the greater and more long-lasting influence." See Bruce, 94 for interesting description of the discussions between Jerome and Augustine about translating the OT from Hebrew versus translating from the Greek LXX.

- g) At the request of Emperor Constantine (ca. AD 330), Eusebius prepared 50 copies of the Christian Scripture for use in the imperial city (Constantinople). All indications point to the belief that these copies included the 27 writings we now accept as the NT.<sup>50</sup>

**F. Summary:** While the fringes of the canon were disputed until the fourth century, there was a high degree of unity about the majority of the NT canon (22 books) within the first two centuries over the whole Christian world. Full acceptance came by the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

## 8. THE APOCRYPHA

### A. Introduction

- 1) Between 250 BC and 150 BC the Hebrew OT was translated into Greek, the common language of the known world at that time. The resultant work was called the Septuagint, also called the LXX. The LXX included extra writings beyond the 39 accepted by the Jews. These extra writings, called the Apocrypha, were not part of the Hebrew OT by the Jews, and were never accepted by the Jews as authoritative or inspired.
- 2) Legend has it that the LXX was the work of 72 elders (6 from each tribe) brought to Alexandria (Egypt) for the purpose of translating the Hebrew scriptures into Greek. The legend goes on to say that these scholars completed the translation of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the OT) in 72 days and produced 72 identical versions from separate cells in isolation from each other. Later the legend expanded to apply it to all of the Hebrew OT. The reality is that we know very little about how the LXX came into being, much less the Apocrypha.<sup>51</sup>
- 3) The term "apocrypha" means "writings or statements of dubious authenticity" (Webster).
- 4) These extra books were never accepted on par with the rest of the OT by the early church. Nor were they considered part of the NT.
- 5) Of interest, praying for the dead, a common Roman Catholic practice, is found in the Apocrypha, in 2 Maccabees 12:45f, but is nowhere found in the 27 books of the NT.

### B. Writings in the LXX Apocrypha

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<sup>50</sup> Bruce "The Canon of Scripture", 203-04. Bruce feels the 50 copies produced by Eusebius were based on the text type that became the ancestor to the so-called "Majority Text" which would explain the MT's popularity (also called the Byzantine Text)

<sup>51</sup> The astute reader will recognize what all have noticed -- that though the legend speaks of "72", the term "LXX" is the Latin number 70. Such is the stuff of legends!

- 1) Esdras (covers ‘history’ corresponding to that of 2 Chron 35:1 to Neh 8:13. Sometimes referred to as two separate books)
- 2) Tobit and Judith
- 3) Additions to Daniel: Prayer of Azariah, Song of the Three Holy Children, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon
- 4) Additions to Esther (ch 10:4-16:24)
- 5) Prayer of Manasseh, Epistle of Jeremiah, Book of Baruch
- 6) Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom of Solomon, 1 & 2 Maccabees, Psalm 151

### C. A Brief History of the Apocrypha

#### 1) Early Church

- a) The LXX was the OT version in common use by the early church.
- b) As Latin became more common, the LXX was translated into that language.
- c) Jerome in his 4<sup>th</sup> century translation (i.e. Vulgate) went back to the original Hebrew, rather than the Greek LXX. He held that translating directly from the Hebrew would be more accurate than and superior to translating from a Greek translation of the Hebrew original.
- d) Though he included the apocryphal books in his translation, he distinguished between them and the authoritative books of the Hebrew OT. However, he did consider those apocryphal books profitable for their ethical lessons.
- e) Augustine (AD 354-430), a contemporary of Jerome’s, on the other hand felt the Greek LXX should be given as much if not more authority than the Hebrew books. And he saw the Apocrypha as authoritative because of their seeming wide spread use.<sup>52</sup>
- f) In AD 397, a regional council in the city of Carthage pronounced a list of canonical books and included the Apocrypha.<sup>53</sup> But, this was not common to the broader church body.

#### 2) Reformers

- a) Luther (in the 1500’s) rejected the Apocrypha, following Jerome. He did, however, put the Apocrypha into an appendix at the end of the OT. He rejected them as uninspired on the basis of the testimony of the Gospel – what did not line up with Christ was to be rejected.
- b) The rest of the reformers, by and large, also rejected the Apocrypha as not being authoritative.
- c) Up to this time, the Apocrypha was treated distinctly from the NT. But, in AD 1545-46, in response to the reformers agitations, the

Roman Catholic Council of Trent set aside Jerome’s and others’ distinction and accepted the Apocrypha as authoritative.

#### 3) KJV and onward

- a) The KJV Bible of 1611 included the Apocrypha as an appendix. But in AD 1626, copies of the KJV/AV<sup>54</sup> Bible began to be published without the Apocrypha.
- b) In 1644, the Church of England ordered that the Apocrypha should not be read in church services. The Westminster Confession proclaimed that the Apocrypha was not part of the canon.
- c) With the rise of Bible societies (ca. 1804) the KJV Bible was printed largely without the Apocrypha. Other Bibles (Jerusalem Bible and New American Bible of 1970) included it.

#### 4) Today

- a) F.F. Bruce points out that, “There is general agreement among Roman Catholic scholars today ... to call them [the Apocrypha] ‘deuterocanonical’ ... Jerome’s distinction is thus maintained in practice...”<sup>55</sup>
- b) Protestants as a whole have rejected the Apocrypha as being not-authoritative for those books were not part of the Hebrew Bible.

### 9. OTHER NON-CANONICAL WRITINGS

**A. Introduction:** In addition to the Apocrypha, there were other books of “dubious origins” which at times were presented as authoritative. Some were purportedly gospels while others were histories, epistles, apocalypses.

#### B. Gospels

- 1) Two kinds:
  - a) Those designed to *supplement* the four Gospels
    - (1) These were produced in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries
    - (2) The early believers were very curious about two areas of Jesus life, of which little if anything was mentioned in the Gospels (the accepted gospels only record one incident: Luke 2:41-51)
      - Books depicting Jesus’ early life (infancy and childhood)
      - Books purporting to report on events between Jesus death and resurrection
  - b) Those designed to *supplant* the four Gospels.

<sup>54</sup> The abbreviation AV stands for “The Authorized Version” and is interchangeable with KJV (King James Version).

<sup>55</sup> Bruce, 105. The term “deuterocanonical” means second or lesser canon and is meant to distinguish the apocrypha from that which is “canonical”.

<sup>52</sup> Bruce, 96

<sup>53</sup> Bruce, 97.

These were written by false sects to shore up their theological view points (see below).

2) Some examples

- a) Fragments of Unknown Gospel (AD 110-30)
  - (1) Includes incidents not recorded in the Gospels.
  - (2) Only fragments have survived the years.
  - (3) "...the historical value of which was of slender proportions at best"<sup>56</sup>
- b) Gospel of the Hebrews (mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century)
  - (1) Was used somewhat in the early church until the 4<sup>th</sup> century
  - (2) Only fragments come down to us today, most was lost.
  - (3) Differed considerably from four Gospels in substance, character.
  - (4) Written in a Semitic language, not Greek.
- c) Gospel of the Egyptians (dated to after AD 150)
  - (1) Accepted as canonical in Egypt, only few fragments preserved
  - (2) Promoted doctrines like rejection of marriage and gender egalitarianism.
- d) Gospel of Peter (dated to the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century)
  - (1) Origen (and later Eusebius) casually refers to it, that's why we know of its existence.
  - (2) One small fragment that is believed to be this writing was discovered in 1886.
- 3) Others
  - a) Protoevangelium of James, Infancy Story of Thomas, Arabic Infancy Gospel, Armenian Gospel of the Infancy, History of Joseph the Carpenter, Gospel of the Birth of Mary.
  - b) Gospel of Nicodemus, Gospel of Bartholomew (refers to Jesus' visit to Hades).
- 4) None of these "gospels" established themselves.

**C. Acts**

- 1) Overview
 

"These several books of 'Acts', the contents of which have only the most meager historical basis, resemble in some respects the Graeco-Roman novels of the period, though replacing the obscenities of many of these with moralizing calculated to provide instruction in Christian piety."<sup>57</sup>
- 2) Three of the more popular

- a) Acts of Paul. A romance novel written about AD 170 by a priest in Rome. Purported to honor Paul by reporting on unpublished facts of his ministry. Though the book was popular, the author was put on trial by his peers and convicted of falsifying the facts.
- b) Acts of Peter. Written in the later half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. Quotes the *Quo Vadis* legend and the crucifixion of Peter upside down.
- c) Acts of John. Supposedly an eyewitness account of John's missionary work. Written around the close of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent.
- 3) Less popular: Acts of Andrew, Thomas, Philip, Andrew and Matthias, Bartholomew, Thaddeus, Barnabas (all written in 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries).

**D. Epistles**

- 1) The Epistle of the Apostles (AD 180)
- 2) Third Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians.<sup>58</sup> Part of the Acts of Paul (AD 170)
- 3) Epistle to the Laodiceans. (Close of 3<sup>rd</sup> century?)
- 4) Correspondence Between Paul and Seneca (14 letters) (date?)

**E. Apocalypses**

- 1) Of Peter (AD 125-150?)
- 2) Of Paul (AD 250)

**F. Miscellaneous writings (at one time or another some of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers were accepted as authoritative).**

- 1) Didache (through the 3<sup>rd</sup> century in some churches)
- 2) Epistle of Clement (read in public worship in AD 170)
- 3) Epistle of Barnabas (considered fringe)
- 4) Shepherd of Hermas (into the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries by some)
- 5) When lists of canonical books began to solidify, these were all left off.

**10. GNOSTIC WRITINGS**

**A. Overview**

In 1945, a peasant accidentally found a sealed large earthenware jar containing more than a dozen old papyrus books. This collection has become known as the Nag Hammadi Library, so named after the location where they were found.<sup>59</sup> Archaeologists have dated these to about AD 400 (since these are obviously copies, the originals would be dated much earlier). The jar contained 56 separate writings (of which about 40 had not previously been known). Fifty two of these are identified as Gnostic

<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, a careful comparison of the book of Acts and Paul's biblical writings to the believers in Corinth, suggests that he wrote at least four letters to the Corinthian believers, of which we have his second and third letters (named 1 & 2 Corinthians).

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/nhlintro.html>

<sup>56</sup> Metzger, 169

<sup>57</sup> Metzger, 174.

writings. Only five of these were named as gospels. This collection also included a copy of Plato's *Republic*. As mentioned above, this discovery added little to our knowledge of Gnosticism which is fairly well known from the early church writings against Gnosticism.

### B. Some examples

- 1) Gospel of Thomas (ca. AD 140)
  - a) Begins: "These are the secret words which the living Jesus spoke and (which) Didymus Judas Thomas wrote down."
  - b) Contains 114 items (lines) almost all are introduced by the words "Jesus said" (some of which have a Gnostic twist).
- 2) Gospel of Philip (2<sup>nd</sup> century)
  - a) Collection of disjointed excerpts emphasizing Gnostic theology.
  - b) Alludes to Gospels of Matthew and John, I John. Reflects an acquaintance with Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians.
- 3) Exegesis of the Soul (ca. AD 200)
  - a) Promotes asceticism.
  - b) Quotes 3 times from Homer's *Odyssey* and quotes from OT and NT
- 4) Apocryphon of James (2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century)
  - a) Q/A between Jesus and his disciples
  - b) Fewer references or allusions to the NT books
- 5) Others: Treatise on Resurrection, Trimorphic Protennoia, Hypostasis of the Archon, Epistle of Peter to Philip

## 11. CONCLUSION<sup>60</sup>

This brief outline has shown that there is credible historical evidence for the integrity of the NT canon. We can be confident that the Bible we have in our hands today includes the authoritative, apostolic writings and excludes those writings which are spurious. While no historical research can bring absolute certitude in and of itself, we can be as sure of the canon as we can of any other historical event. Our brothers of the early church era, who were much closer in time to the apostles, have performed an immeasurable service in identifying and protecting the apostolic writings. By faith, we take the credibility of this history and go the next step. We do not want to be like those who had the revelation of God but rebelled:

*For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith (Heb 4:2 NIV).*

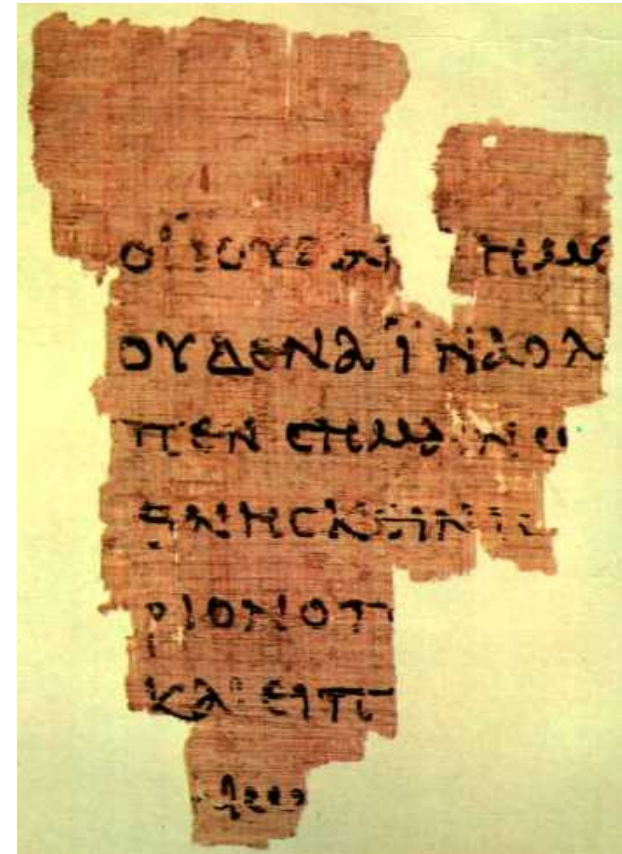
Rather, we have the word of God handed down to us so that we might read, study and live by the truths is present. But, most importantly, by faith we embrace the Word of God as the Word encourages our faith to grow: *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Ro10:17)*

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<sup>60</sup> Much of the material has been garnered from a variety of sources, not all of which has been specifically cited. The majority has come from the writings of F.F. Bruce and Bruce M. Metzger. Where possible, original sources were checked, particularly those of the Apostolic Fathers. However, for a fuller treatment, the reader is encouraged to consult the excellent resources listed in the bibliography at the end.

## APPENDIX – MANUSCRIPT SAMPLES

The Rylands Papyrus 457 (a.k.a. P<sup>52</sup>), discovered in Egypt.  
It is dated no later than AD 150.  
Presently it is located at the  
John Rylands Library in Manchester, England.



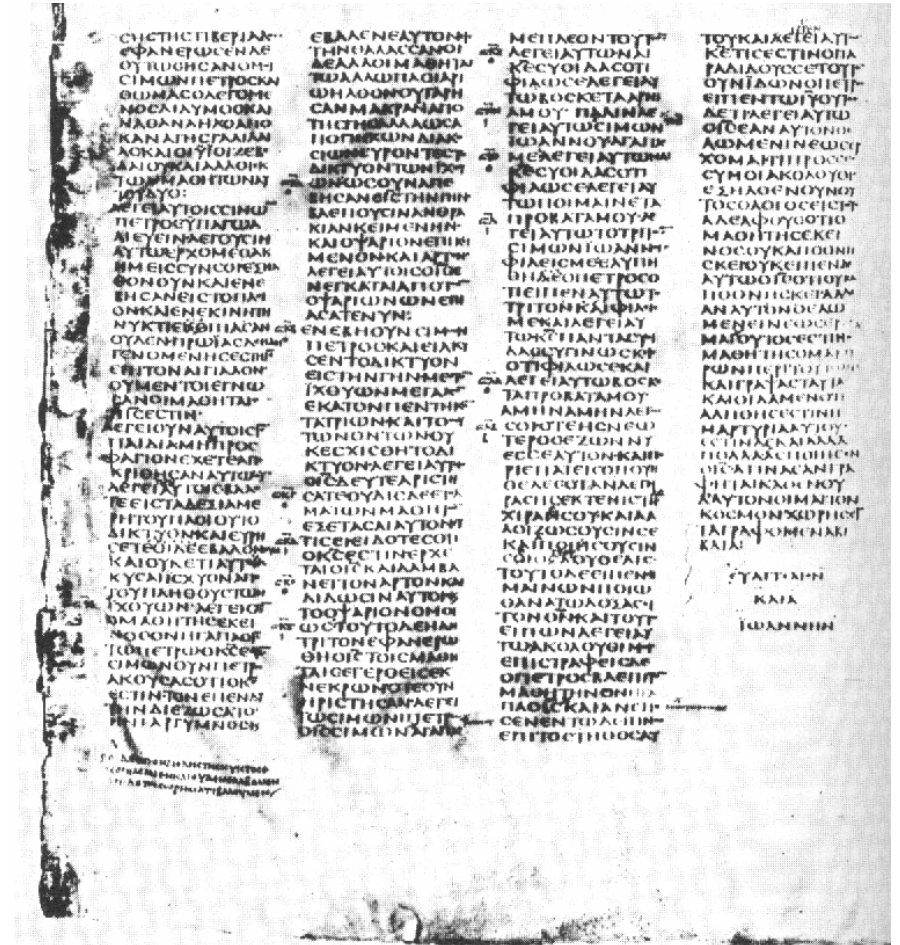
John 18:31-32, 37-38

Chester Beatty Papyrus II (3<sup>rd</sup> century)

Codex Sinaiticus (4<sup>th</sup> century)



Romans 15:29-33, 16:25-27



John 21:1-25

# APPENDIX 2 - GNOSTICISM

A tattered page from the Geneva Bible (ca. 1578)

