



DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

CANONICITY

In 2014 Newsweek published an article entitled, “The Bible: So Misunderstood It’s a Sin,” written by *New York Times* bestselling author and senior writer at Newsweek Kurt Eichenwald. The article was an excoriating denial of the reliability of the Bible. At one point in the article Eichenwald provocatively said,

No television preacher has ever read the Bible. Neither has any evangelical politician. Neither has the pope. Neither have I. And neither have you. At best, we’ve all read a bad translation—a translation of translations of translations of hand-copied copies of copies of copies, and on and on, hundreds of times.

No one has ever read the ACTUAL Bible. Quite a statement! One wonders how Eichenwald would know we have never read the actual Bible for to say so implies he would have to know the actual Bible in order to affirm that we don’t have it and no one has read it. But I digress. We will analyze and critique in more detail later. Mr. Eichenwald went on to give one historical example after another to prove the unreliability of both the transmission & translation of the Bible,

Christianity was in chaos in its early days, with some sects declaring the others heretics. And then, in the early 300s, Emperor Constantine of Rome declared he had become follower of Jesus, ended his empire’s persecution of Christians and set out to reconcile the disputes among the sects. Constantine was a brutal sociopath who...changed the course of Christian history, ultimately influencing which books made it into the New Testament....

By the fifth century, the political and theological councils voted on which of the many Gospels in circulation were to make up the New Testament. With the power of Rome behind them, the practitioners of this proclaimed orthodoxy wiped out other sects and tried to destroy every copy of their Gospels and other writings.

And recall that they were already working from a fundamentally flawed document. Errors and revisions by copyists had been written in by the fifth century, and several books of the New Testament, including some attributed to Paul, are now considered forgeries perpetrated by famous figures in Christianity to bolster their theological arguments. It is small wonder, then, that there are so many contradictions in the New Testament. Some of those contradictions are trivial, but some create huge problems for evangelicals insisting they are living by the word of God.¹

There is a lot here to process at one time. It can be jolting to first hearers who know nothing of textual criticism or church history. While there are considerable problems with Eichenwald’s argument let’s first broaden his inditement a little further by considering other notable writers and thinkers of influence who have said similar things.

Eichenwald’s words are similar in tone and substance to Dan Brown’s fictional work *The Davinci Code* (2003) and its subsequent movie adaptations (2006). The entire premise of the Davinci series is about discrediting Christianity, or for the author “unveiling the truth” about Christianity. Brown, who could be classified as agnostic, and who is one of Americas top selling fictional writers today, goes throughout his series proclaiming various “hidden truths” about Christianity — truths that have been supposedly covered up by the corruption of a power-hungry Catholic Church. Such “truths” encompass things as the political corruption behind the Bibles translation and transmission to affirming that Jesus had a secret lover in Mary Magdalene.

¹ <https://www.newsweek.com/2015/01/02/ihats-not-what-bible-says-294018.html>

In one section of Brown's book, the British historian Sir Leigh Teabing "enlightens" one of the story's main characters, Sophie Neveu, about several key matters at the heart of Christianity. One of the subjects he broaches is the Bible's reliability,

"The Bible is a product of man, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book...More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few are chosen for inclusion - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John among them... the Bible, as we know it today, was collected by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great.... Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned.... Anyone who chose the forbidden gospels over Constantine's version was deemed a heretic."²

Although fictional it cannot be understated the impact *The Davinci Code's* assumptions, as given above, have become in our postmodern world. The words of fictitious characters can and have become the new psychologies and philosophies of future generations.

The ideas imbedded in the Newsweek articles and fictional books and movies all have a seedbed in more scholarly material. By way of example consider the writings of Bart D. Ehrman, one of today's most popular N.T. scholars and avowed skeptics. In his book *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford, 2003), he wrote,

Virtually all forms of modern Christianity, whether they acknowledge it or not, go back to one form of Christianity that emerged as victorious from the conflicts of the second and third centuries. This one form of Christianity decided what was the "correct" Christian perspective; it decided who could exercise authority over Christian belief and practice; and it determined what forms of Christianity would be marginalized, set aside, destroyed. It also decided which books to canonize into Scripture and which books to set aside as "heretical," teaching false ideas.

And then, as a coup de grace, this victorious party rewrote the history of the controversy, making it appear that there had not been much of a conflict at all, claiming that its own views had always been those of the majority of Christians at all times, back to the time of Jesus and his apostles, that its perspective, in effect, had always been "orthodox" (i.e., the "right belief") and that its opponents in the conflict, with their other scriptural texts, had always represented small splinter groups invested in deceiving people into "heresy."³

As was said before, there is much to process. A Christian that has never heard these things before could be startled. Likewise, for skeptics this rhetoric is usually an unquestioned affirmation of how the Bible came to be.

But is it all true? The short answer is "No." But before we begin addressing why it is "no" I want to address why this is important in our study of the DOCTRINE OF REVELATION.

² Dan Brown, *The Davinci Code*, pg. 230-231

³ Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*, pg. 4

1. WHY DOES CANONICITY MATTER?

There are tons of ways people can be skeptical and critique Christianity. They can attack Christianity's ethical teachings, its historical reality, its scientific viability, its logical clarity, or its hermeneutical certainty. This process can go on ad infinitum. But canonicity is a different issue from all of these. It's not arguing that the Bible is flawed or unhistorical or unethical, it is saying we don't even have the Bible itself — it is arguing that we do not even have the actual words of those who penned our holy writ. As Michael Kruger, professor of new Testament and academic dean at Reformed Theological Seminary, has written in his book *Canon Revisited: Establishing the origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (2012),

[T]here can be no New Testament theology if there is no such thing as a New Testament in the first place. Thus the questions about the canon can take on more foundational significance than other types of questions. It is one thing for a person to question the meaning of a given passage... or to question whether a particular passage is historically or factually accurate, but it is quite another to question whether that passage belongs in the Bible in the first place. The question of the canon, therefore, is at the very center of how biblical authority is established.... [T]he canon issue could become the single threat that unravels the entire garment of the Christian faith.⁴

You see, what Eichenwald, Brown, Ehrman, and others like them have an incredulity against the reliability of the preservation, transmission, and translation of the Bible itself. It is a challenging to the heart is the reliability of Christianity's foundational sources, the SCRIPTURES.

There are important questions we as Christians need to be asking and reflecting on when it comes to our sacred texts. For I can tell you if you do not wrestle with these issues your children surely will and when they go to college they will be faced with a myriad of challenges to their faith from a myriad of skeptical sources.

Some questions in conjunction with canonicity that surface are things such as, "Why do we have only 66 books (39 OT and 27 NT)?" or "Why not 88 or 22 or 10? Why are only those books considered "God's Words"? These are questions perhaps Christians ask.

In fact, within differing branches of Christianity there are differing lists of books in their Bibles. For example, Protestants have 66 books but the two other large branches of Christianity, Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox, have 66 books + something called the Apocrypha. In Ethiopian churches their canon includes 81 books altogether. Also, there are a myriad of extra-Gospels that exist about Jesus — such as the Gospel of Peter, Thomas, and Mary. Why aren't these included in our Protestant Bibles?

Even more it has been argued that the Bible is just a dated politically enforced book. Some say that our Bibles are just a collection of random dusty old parchments from Bronze Age priests and Medieval monks, that aren't any different than, say, the Hindu Sutras, Analects of Confucius, or Muhammad's Quran. Historically useful? Yes. Ethically and normatively useful? Not on your life. It is argued that our collection of texts, our 66 books, is just a collection of writings from one group of people who overthrew other groups and enforced their sacred texts on all, then it can't be a "God thing" — instead it's a deeply flawed "human thing." On such a view the Bible would just be an example of the adage "the winners write the history books."

All these questions need to be answered. They must be met with clarity, compassion, and theological faithfulness.

The fact is that if any of this is true, if we do not know the limits of the books of the Bible, or those limits were artificially made, then we must ask how can we know biblical/theological truth at all? How can we even be sure that what we are reading is in fact, without question, the words of God? How can we even do theology as a discipline?

Canonicity is, therefore, a crucial topic to consider. For from this study flows the entire project of theology as a discipline.

⁴ Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, pg. 16

2. DEFINITION OF CANON

To begin with we need clarity of definition. The word “canon” is a Christian word that comes from the Greek word **kanon** which is probably borrowed from the Hebrew word **qaneh** meaning “**measuring rod**” or “**rule**” or “**standard of measurement**.” The word was later adapted to mean “**a rule of faith**” or a “**catalogue or list**.” So, in a generally defined way a **canon is a collection of authoritative writings**. So, *when we speak about the CANON OF SCRIPTURE what we are doing is addressing concerns over the literary limits and divine nature of the Bible*. We are wrestling with what books pass the test for being inspired by God and which do not.⁵

Such a topic gets us into other topics, such as questions about the Bible’s transmission and translation across history. For example: How do we know the books we have are in fact the full extent of God’s revelation to us? How do we know there aren’t some sacred inspired writings floating around that we aren’t aware of? How do we know that the books we do in fact have are the right books? These are big questions that need answers! These are all questions of canonization.

In a more formal or technical sense, let me flesh out the definition of canon:

“Canon can be defined in three ways: **exclusive** (canon as reception), **functional** (canon as use), and **ontological** (canon as divinely given)... If one looks at canon from the perspective of corporate reception, then canon is most naturally defined as the books received and recognized by the consensus of the church (exclusive). If one looks at the canon from the perspective of divine qualities, then canon is most naturally defined as those books that are used as authoritative revelation by a community (functional). And if one looks at the canon from the perspective of apostolic origins, then the canon is most naturally defined as those books given by God as the redemptive-historical deposit (ontological)... Biblically speaking, there is no need to choose between these definitions (and their corresponding dates) because each of them captures a true attribute of canon and also implies the other two.”⁶

So, when we say “canon” we are saying there is a body of texts that are exclusive, functional, and ontological in nature. Put another way:

- a. **A canon has a limited framework.** If God has specially inspired an inerrant set of revelatory writings (inspiration and inerrancy) then it follows that there is a body of texts that are categorically set apart from all other texts around them. If everything is God’s Word, then nothing is God’s Word, right? God doesn’t specially reveal Himself in every book ever made, otherwise that would lead to absurdities and universalism. Therefore, when we say there is a canon, we mean there is a limited number of books classified as God’s inspired inerrant words. (exclusive)
- b. **A canon has authoritative use.** If there is a limited collection of sacred writings, then those writings must be collectively understood, respected, accepted, and used by people of a believing community in a consistent and systematic way. (functional)
- c. **A canon has distinct authorial characteristics.** When we say, “The Bible is GOD’S WORD,” we are affirming there is something distinct internally – some self-authenticating pointers – that make these writings different than other writings. And thus, these distinctions carry with them an authenticating power of command within them. (ontological)

So, canon is not merely a list of books that are accepted. A canon therefore is must more a functional process. **Canon exists as a recognized functionally used set of divinely authentic writings by the collective church.**

That all said, we want to look at how the Biblical canon came about. To do this will require historical and literary overviews of the Old Testament and New Testaments respectfully. To that let us turn.

⁵ Milne, Bruce. *Know the Truth*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009) pg. 47

⁶ Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012) pg. 117-118

3. THE CANONIZATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

As far as can be understood there was never any formal process of canonization of the Hebrew Bible. There was never an ecumenical council of Jewish rabbis gathering to announce the literary limits of the Hebrew Bible. The process just happened over time gradually and organically.

In a nutshell, the *canonization of the HEBREW BIBLE was a gradual and intentional process occurring within the unfolding historical covenantal relationship between God and His people.*⁷ This is a loaded statement that needs to be parsed out.

The canonization process was **gradual** because it took place over a period of more than 1,200 years within the Jewish nation.

The canonization process was **intentional** because it was always within a structured prophetic authoritative frame. In other words, prophets of olden days spoke, wrote, and acted with divine authority and that authority was deliberately catalogued into sacred writings for future generations to learn and understand.

The canonization process was **covenantal** because it was never detached from the relational dimension between God and His people. This means to say that those books written in ancient times and considering “spiritual” or “divine” were never randomly selected but were part of the greater theological story of God’s workings among His people. If a writing did not possess this divine covenantal dimension, then it would not be accepted.

Now rather than go any further into the process of canonization, let us first consider what we mean when we speak of “The Old Testament.”

A. THE LITERARY LAYOUT & HISTORICAL LAYOUT OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

If you open up a Protestant Christian Bible and flip to the table of contents you will see a listing of Old Testaments 39 books. These 39 books are broken up into four distinct sections: THE PENTATEUCH, HISTORY, POETRY, and PROPHETS. Consider the chart below:

| PENTATEUCH | HISTORY | POETRY | PROPHETS |
|-------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Genesis | Joshua | Job | Isaiah |
| Exodus | Judges | Psalms | Jeremiah |
| Leviticus | Ruth | Proverbs | Lamentations |
| Numbers | 1 Samuel | Ecclesiastes | Ezekiel |
| Deuteronomy | 2 Samuel | Song of Solomon | Daniel |
| | 1 Kings | | Hosea |
| | 2 Kings | | Joel |
| | 1 Chronicles | | Amos |
| | 2 Chronicles | | Obadiah |
| | Ezra | | Jonah |
| | Nehemiah | | Micah |
| | Esther | | Nahum |
| | | | Habakkuk |
| | | | Zephaniah |
| | | | Haggai |
| | | | Zechariah |
| | | | Malachi |

This breakdown of the 39 Books is a Christian invention that did not come into existence until after the days of Jesus and the Apostles (1st Century A.D.).

⁷ Consider reading these articles on the Old Testament Canon: <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/old-testament-canon/>; https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/rev-henry/10_ot-canon_young.pdf; <https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/52/52-1/JETS%2052-1%2047-77%20Dempster.pdf>; <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/canon-old-testament>

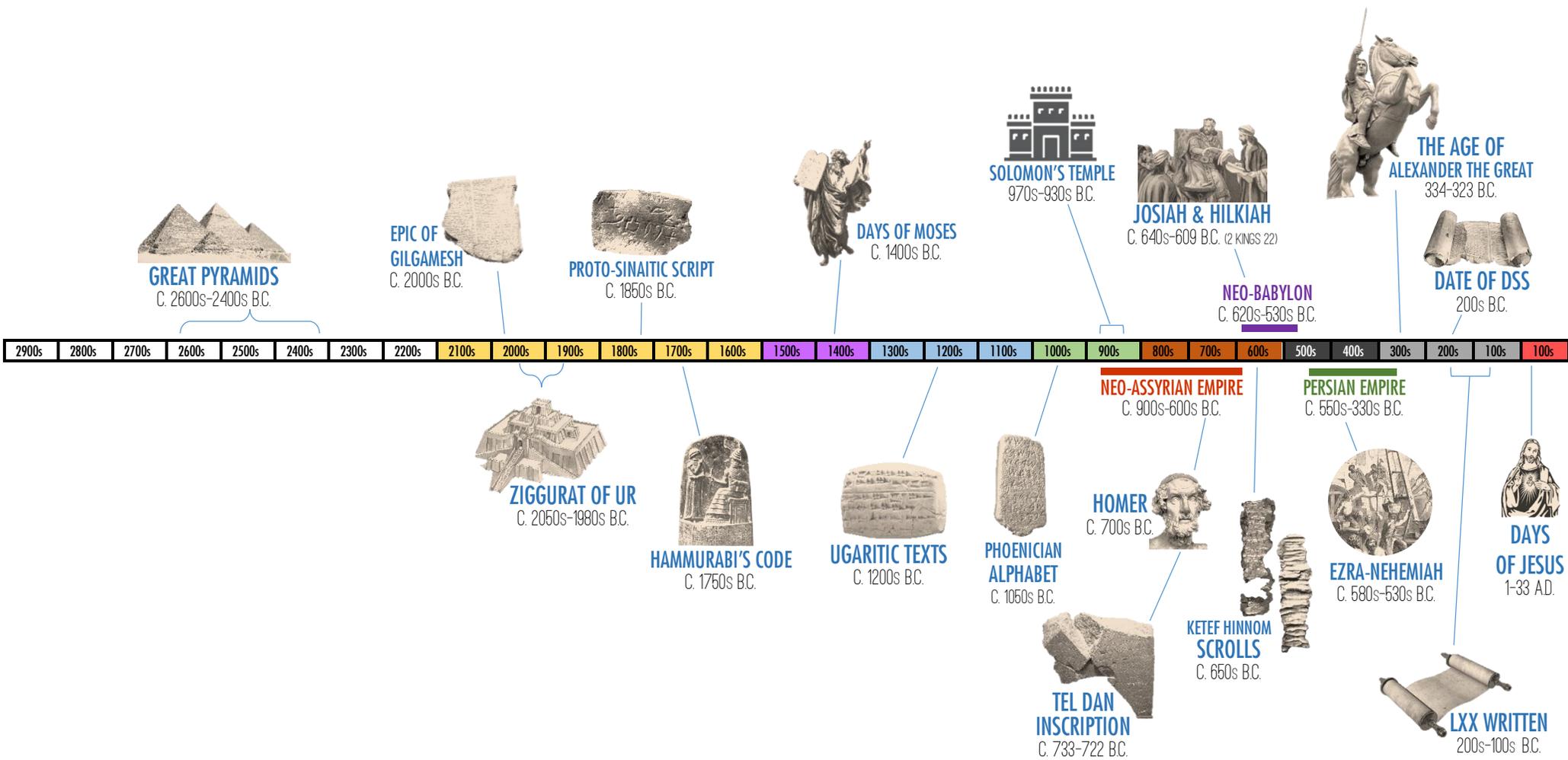
In ancient Jewish tradition these 39 books were all on separate scrolls and were conceived of as a unified collection of sacred writings known as the TANAKH. Tanakh is literally an old acronym comprised of the first letters of this three-part division of Hebrew scriptures (consider the chart below with more detail):

- **TORAH** – The Law. This encompassed the Pentateuch which is the first five books of the Hebrew and Christian Bible. These books are the foundational sacred writings attributed to Moses, thus sometimes called “The Books of Moses.”
- **NEVI’IM** – The Prophets. “Nevi’im” literally translated as “spokesperson.” A collection of books with two sub-divisions: Former Prophet and Latter Prophets.
- **KETUVIM** – The Writings. In Greek they are called the ‘Hagiographa’ or ‘writings.’

| TORAH | NEVI’IM | | KETUVIM |
|---|---|--|---|
| Bereshit / Genesis Shemot / Exodus VaYikra / Leviticus BaMidbar / Numbers Devarim / Deuteronomy | FORMER PROPHETS Yehoshua / Joshua Shoftim / Judges Shmuel A and B / 1—2 Samuel Melachim A and B / 1—2 Kings Yishiyah / Isaiah Yermiyah / Jeremiah Yechezchial / Ezekiel Daniyel / Daniel | LATTER PROPHETS Hoshea / Hosea Yoel / Joel Amos / Amos Ovadiyah / Obadiah Yonah / Jonah Michah / Micah Nachum / Nahum Habakuk / Habakkuk Tzefaniyah / Zephaniah Haggi / Haggai Zechariyah / Zechariah Malachi / Malachi | Tehilim / Psalms Mishlei / Proverbs Eyov / Job Shir HaShirim / Song of Songs Ruth / Ruth Eichah / Lamentations Keholet / Ecclesiastes Esther / Esther Ezra / Ezra Nechemiyah / Nehemiah Divrei Yamim A and B / 1—2 Chronicles |

The first two sections of the Hebrew Bible, TORAH and NEVI’IM, provide a chronological overview of the nation of Israel from the Creation of the Universe to the rise of the Persian Empire (550s B.C.). The last section, the KETUVIM, which is the collection of poetic and wisdom literature, is the part of the Old Testament that teaches precepts and guiding principles.

All the books within this three-part division were developed over time, across the vast historical periods of Israel’s history. To better understand this process, I believe it would behoove us to consider an historical overview of the history of Israel so we can begin to understand where each of the books and divisions of the Hebrew Bible are placed and what was the context around them. Consider the timeline below.



HISTORICAL ERAS:



<https://www.getquestions.org/Bible-timeline.html>; <https://timeline.biblehistory.com/home>; <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/timeline-of-ancient-israelite-religion-2000-539-bce>; <https://watchjrusalem.co.il/578-the-biblical-prophets-archaeological-evidence>

B. THE FORMATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

We must be honest at this point and admit what we do know and what we don't know. We do know from scriptural and extra-biblical texts that there were collections of sacred writings being preserved by ancient Israelites. What we do not know is the exact process. The Old Testament is a very different animal compared to the New Testament. It is a collection of 39 (*Christian number*) books spanning nearly 1,500 years. That said there are some gleanings we get from scriptural references found in the Bible.

As has already been stated the canonization of the Hebrew Bible was an intentional, organic, and gradual process. What is interesting is the insights we get of this process within the Hebrew texts themselves. Even if, for the sake of argument, we set aside the divine inspiration of the Hebrew texts we still have very ancient manuscripts that give us insights into the beliefs and history of the Israelite people. Therefore, if we want to understand their beliefs, we need to understand their writings and that means looking into the Old Testament books themselves.

- i. **ORAL TRANSMISSION:** It appears that the earliest methods of transmitting teachings was oral. **Deuteronomy 4:9** even alludes to this. There is evidence to suggest that transmission was oral. That said there is also evidence that the ancient Hebrew people were some of the most literate in the Near East.⁸ It is even suggested that oral transmission and an oral-centered culture can exist simultaneously with a written transmission culture.⁹ We don't know how long the process of oral transmission was and we don't know when written transmission began to supersede it.

Nehemiah 8:5-7 seems to be the earliest reference to an oral paraphrase of Scripture.¹⁰

- ii. **SCRIPTURAL INDICATIONS OF CANON FORMATION:** We get highlights of the process of canonization – how books were written and considered authoritatively sacred – from within the biblical texts themselves. Consider this stream of scriptural data:¹¹

- **CERTAIN TEXTS WERE HIGHLY REVERED AS DIVINELY AUTHORITATIVE:**

Exodus 17:14-16; 24:3-4, 7; Joshua 8:35; Joshua 23:6; 1 Kings 2:3; 1 Chronicles 22:13; 2 Chronicles 23:18

- **CERTAIN TEXTS WERE SET APART & PRESERVED AS SACRED:**

Exodus 25:16, 21; Deuteronomy 10:2-5; Deuteronomy 31:24-26; 1 Kings 8:9; Hebrews 9:4; 1 Samuel 10:25; 2 Kings 22-23

Joshua erected stones as a witness a holy sanctuary near oak tree by the sanctuary of the LORD (Joshua 24:25-26)

Samuel wrote a law about kingship and it was placed before Yahweh (a kind of sanctuary) (1 Samuel 10:25)

- **CERTAIN TEXTS WERE READ PUBLICLY & REVERED AS SACRED:**

Deuteronomy 31:9-11; Joshua 8:35

- **CERTAIN PROPHETIC ORACLES WERE WRITTEN & PRESERVED:**

2 Chronicles 21:12; Isaiah 30:8; Jeremiah 25:13, 29:1, 30:2, 36:1-32, 51:60-64; Ezekiel 43:11; Daniel 7:1; Habakkuk 2:2

⁸ Check out this article, "More People Were Literate in Ancient Judah Than We Knew" <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/78416/more-people-were-literate-ancient-judah-we-knew> which is based off of this <https://www.pnas.org/content/113/17/4664> scholarly research published in 2016; also consider <http://evangelicalfocus.com/blogs/3227/Was-literacy-widespread-in-Ancient-Israel> which lists some of the most important archeological evidence for early literacy in ancient Israel

⁹ Highly recommend you read the chapter "The Written Canon: Were Early Christians Averse to Written Documents?" by Michael Kruger in his book *The Question of Canon*, pg. 79-118; also consider reading John Walton's book *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013) which extensively addresses orality and textuality cultures in the Ancient Near Eastern cultures

¹⁰ Neil Lightfoot, *How We Got the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), pg. 142-143

¹¹ Information in this section is a composite of various sources: Norman Geisler & William Nix, *From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1974) pg. 80-81

- **CERTAIN HISTORIES BY PROPHETS WERE WRITTEN & PRESERVED:**
1 Chronicles 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29, 12:15, 13:22, 20:34, 26:22, 32:32, 33:18-19

There are examples in scripture of a collection of writings being recognized and having divine authority and then being preserved.

- ²⁴ When Moses had finished writing the words of this law in a book to the very end, ²⁵ Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, ²⁶ "Take this Book of the Law and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against you. ²⁷ For I know how rebellious and stubborn you are. Behold, even today while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the Lord. How much more after my death!
Deuteronomy 31:24-26 (ESV)
- ²⁵ So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem. ²⁶ And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. ⁷ And Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God."
Joshua 24:25-27 (ESV)
- ²⁴ And Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see him whom the Lord has chosen? There is none like him among all the people." And all the people shouted, "Long live the king!" ²⁵ Then Samuel told the people the rights and duties of the kingship, and he wrote them in a book and laid it up before the Lord. Then Samuel sent all the people away, each one to his home.
1 Samuel 10:24-25 (ESV)
- ⁸ And Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. ⁹ And Shaphan the secretary came to the king, and reported to the king, "Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house and have delivered it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the Lord." ¹⁰ Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it before the king. ¹¹ When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes.
2 Kings 22:8-11 (ESV)
2 Kings 23:3
- In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans— ² in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. . . . ¹¹ All Israel has transgressed your law [God] and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him. . . . ¹³ As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth.
Daniel 9:1-13 (ESV)

iii. **SCRIPTURAL INDICATIONS OF CANON CONSCIOUSNESS:** We get highlights into the process of gradual continual additive canonization within the Bible itself. That is, there was a body of books in existence considered to be “God’s Word” and then additional books were added to this collection as time went on. So, there was a “canon consciousness” going on—an awareness of the progressive additive nature of God’s revelation to the people of Israel through prophets during Israel’s history.

- **CERTAIN PROPHETIC TEXTS REBUKE & CONDEMN DISOBEDIENCE OF PREVIOUS TEXTS:** Many of the Old Testament commands and prophetic statements assume that the readers are aware of previous commandments and prophetic statements found in other books. 2 Chronicles 24:19, 36:15-16; Ezra 9:11; Nehemiah 9:26, 30, 32; Jeremiah 7:25-26, 25:4, 29:19, 35:15, 44:4; Ezekiel 38:17; Daniel 9:6, 10; Hosea 6:5, 12:10; Zechariah 1:4-6, 7:7 and 12, 8:9
 - Elijah slew Baal worshippers makes no sense outside of idolatry decrees (1 Kings 18:40 and Exodus 22:19)
 - Nathan challenged royalty based on the command to not kill (2 Samuel 12:1-12)
 - Hosea condemns Israel based on Israel not obeying the Ten Words
 - Amos rebukes Judah for violating the Torah statutes of Yahweh (Amos 2:4-5) and Israel for violating the same (Amos 2:8)
 - Isaiah and Micah rebuke Judah for failing to obey Sinai Law (Isaiah 5:1-21) and Micah 6:1-8

- **CERTAIN BIBLICAL BOOKS REFERENCE OTHER BIBLICAL BOOKS:** Many Old Testament books cite, quote, or allude to other Old Testament books. We will not list all the scriptural data about this, but consider some of the following:
 - The Book of Kings cite the life of David as it was told in the Book of Samuel (1 Kings 3:14; 5-7; 8:16; 9:5)
 - Chronicles reviews the entire history of Israel from Genesis to Kings and includes a genealogical link only found in the Book of Ruth (1 Chronicles 2:12-13)
 - A psalm of David, Psalm 18, is recorded as the word of the Lord in 2 Samuel 22
 - The author of 1 Chronicles tells us that when David first assigned Asaph and his relatives the responsibility of giving thanks to the Lord, they sang a medley of praise (1 Chron 16:7-36). They sang Psalms 105 (vs. 1-15), Psalms 96, and Psalms 106 (vs 1, 47,48). It is obvious that, since the Psalms were being used in worship, they were being circulated and collected.
 - 2 Chronicles refers to the book of Psalms (29:30); Isaiah (32:32); Lamentations (35:25), and Kings (20:34; 35:26-27).
 - References to Solomon’s proverbs and songs are made in 1 Kings 4:32
 - Ezekiel mentions both Job and Daniel as righteous ones in Ezekiel 14:14 and 20
 - Copies of the Proverbs were made by men of Hezekiah (Prov 25:1).
 - The elders in Jeremiah’s day quote Micah (Jer 26:16-20).
 - God used Job as an illustration of a righteous man to Israel in the time of Ezekiel (Eze 14:14,20).
 - Daniel finds the answer to the length of the Babylonian captivity in the “books”, obviously a collection of Scripture that included Jeremiah (Dan 9:1-2; Jer 25:11,12).

What is interesting about these passages is the organic collective acceptance of the believing community of Israelites towards the sacred words of Moses and others. These people believed that when Moses or Joshua wrote what they wrote those writings were set aside and classified as sacred or divine words. They were placed in the ark of the covenant or preserved in the temple or something of that nature. This reveals that from the beginning there was a ‘canon consciousness’ among the Jewish people—this awareness of a set of writings as specially sacredly inspired.

The fact that Old Testament books are cited by other Old Testament books, and quoted as scripture, matters greatly in understanding the process of canonization. It means that the Old Testament was not formulated by a singular council of rabbis selecting chosen books but was rather a process of *progressive additive acceptance* of books by the believing Jewish communities over time.

So, as Jeremiah or David or Solomon wrote their writings, those writings would have been accepted as “scripture” or “God’s Word” by the broader believing community, and then catalogued, and then disseminated among them.

So, there was no singular event of ALL the Old Testament being voted on to be “God’s Word” but rather as a book was written it was accepted and preserved and added to the collection of already accepted books.

Now, you may ask, “How would the people of God know the words were from God? How would they know these books were divinely inspired”? Perhaps the prophet or the psalmist went into a dark back room somewhere and then came out with a completed writing and said, “This is what God has given me, obey it!” Why accept such a method?

Well, the scriptures allude to this very concern. To that let us turn.

- iv. **SCRIPTURAL DATA ON BOOKS BEING AUTHENTICATED AS DIVINE:** There is actual scriptural data that enlightens us into how ancient Jewish peoples would have come to authenticate that a word or a text was “from God” or not. To understand this, let us start by considering Moses.

Moses was considered the greatest prophet in all the Old Testament. He questioned God on why anyone would accept that he was actually a legitimate prophet from God. The story goes like this:

Then Moses answered, “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you.’”² The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A staff.”³ And he said, “Throw it on the ground.” So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it.⁴ But the LORD said to Moses, “Put out your hand and catch it by the tail”—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand—⁵ “that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”

Exodus 4:1-5 (ESV)

And if that was not enough, then God would even perform successive miraculous works through His prophets to get His people to believe:

⁸ “If they will not believe you,” God said, “or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. ⁹ If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.”

Exodus 4:8-9 (ESV)

Later on, in the Book of Deuteronomy we get a litmus test in regard to prophecy and dreams:

“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, ² and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ ³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you,

to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.⁴ You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him.

Deuteronomy 13:1-4 (ESV)

And again later,

²¹ And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?' — ²² when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.

Deuteronomy 18:21-22 (ESV)

From this scriptural data we can get a sense of a loose form of criteria within the Jewish community of what could be considered sacred "God-breathed" authoritative writing.¹² Such writings:

- Had to be from an accepted authoritative figure from the Lord
- Had to be authenticated through miracles & prophetic fulfillments from that authoritative figure
- Had to be theologically consistent within the context of other books

When God worked through the prophets to affirm prophecy and perform miracles, He had purpose for doing so: to show His power and authority to His people *and* to confirm His word being writing by the pens of the prophets who were His direct and indirect instruments of inspiration.¹³

Throughout the Bible the purpose of supernatural occurrences is given as a twofold sign: "By this you will know that I am the Lord" (Exodus 7:17; 9:29-20; 10:1-2) and that these are "my people" (Exodus 3:10; 5:1; 6:7; 11:7).¹⁴ And the author of Hebrew's says:

³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Hebrews 2:3-4 (ESV)

So, as the prophets wrote by divine inspiration, their writings were read and circulated by oral and written tradition by the Israelite communities; and they were revered and respected as being Words of God because of the miracles and prophecies accomplished by their authors. Those writings were then collected and preserved as "holy writings/scripture" for successive generations of Israelites. These holy writings became the foundations for civil, ethical, social, cultural and political organization in Jewish society for hundreds of years.

But the question becomes, "What is the extent of this collection of writings?" In other words, do we know or can we know the actually literary limits of the Old Testament books? Are the 39 books we presently have the same and only books written and catalogued by these Jewish prophets of old? To answer this question requires us to look into the extent of the Hebrew Bible. As has been so apply stated,

¹² Consider reading this article from Blue Letter Bible: https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/stewart_don/faq/right-books-in-old-testament/question9-criteria-recognize-old-testament.cfm

¹³ Geisler, Norman. *Backer Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999) pg. 480

¹⁴ Geisler, Norman. *Ibid.* pg. 481

“The books that were later placed into the Old Testament canon were of a self-authenticating nature and did not derive their authority from a person or an ecclesiastical decree. This point is crucial: the books did not receive their authority because they were placed into the canon; rather, they were recognized by the nation of Israel as having divine authority and were therefore included in the canon.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), pg. 101

- C. **THE FINALIZATION OF THE HEBREW CANON:** A big question that surfaces regarding the canon of the Hebrew Bible is when it was finished. There is much debate in scholarly circles upon this question. Without getting too bogged down into the weightiness of the debates, let me just affirm that there are two major scholarly camps who argue over when the Hebrew Bible was finished. Those two camps we shall call: minimalists and maximalists.¹⁶

Minimalist scholars argue that the canon of the Old Testament wasn't completed until one to two hundred years after Jesus. They argue that the three-fold division of the Old Testament – Law, Prophets, and Writings – wasn't fixed and finalized until somewhere around the 100s-200s A.D.

Maximalist scholars however argue that the canon of the Hebrew Bible was already fixed and finalized by the days of Jesus, somewhere around the 100s-200s B.C.

I would contend that the maximalist arguments are stronger. To affirm this let us look at some textual and historical evidence to strengthen this claim:

- i. **NEW TESTAMENT WITNESS TO AN EARLY FINALIZED CANON:** There is actual scriptural data that enlightens us into how ancient Jewish peoples would have come to authenticate that a word or a text was "from God" or not. To understand this, let us start by considering Moses.

In the New Testament¹⁷ the word "Scriptures" gives us the understanding that in Jesus' day and the days of the 1st Century Church there was a body of texts considered to be "sacred" or "divine" or worth being revered and set apart. On a few occasions Jesus spoke of the Scriptures.

In the Gospel of Matthew, in His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said,

**¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ 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.
Matthew 5:17-18 (ESV)**

Later in Matthew Jesus speaks about the greatest commandment saying,

**³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.
Matthew 22:38-40 (ESV)**

In the Gospel of Luke, when the resurrected Jesus meets disciples on the road to Emmaus it is said He,

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Luke 24:7 (ESV)

Later, in the same chapter of Luke, Jesus speaks to His disciples saying,

¹⁶ For more scholarly detail on this subject consider reading Stephen Dempster's article "Canon's on the Right and Canon's on the Left: Finding a Resolution in the Canon Debate" <https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/52/52-1/JETS%2052-1%2047-77%20Dempster.pdf> as well as his chapter "Torah, Torah, Torah: The Emergence of the Tripartite Canon" in Craig Evans and Emanuel Tov, *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bakers Books, 2008), pg. 87-128

¹⁷ Consider reading this article to start understanding the Old Testament in light of the New Testament: https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/stewart_don/faq/right-books-in-old-testament/question18-new-testament-old-testament.cfm

⁴⁴ "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,
Luke 24:44-45 (ESV)

Back in chapter 11 of Luke Jesus said to the lawyers and Pharisees,

⁴⁹ Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' ⁵⁰ so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary.
Luke 11: 49-51 (ESV)

In the Gospel of John Jesus says to the Pharisees,

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,
John 5:39 (ESV)

Later in the same gospel He affirmed,

Scripture cannot be broken
John 10:35 (ESV)

In the Book of Acts Luke writes of the Scriptures saying,

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures.
Acts 18:24 (ESV)

Also, the in the Apostle Paul's epistles he speaks of sacred writings that he knew of as well as his audience. In Romans he said,

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.
Romans 15:4 (ESV)

In 2 Corinthians he said of the Judaizers,

¹² Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, ¹³ not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. ¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.
2 Corinthians 3:12-14 (ESV)

And when he wrote to Timothy, encouraging him in his ministry, Paul said,

continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:14-17 (ESV)

Also, the author of Hebrews mentions God speaking prophetically long ago when he wrote,

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

Hebrews 1:1-2 (ESV)

What is the point of all this data? The point is that by the days of Jesus and the Apostles there is good indication that the three fold division of the Hebrew Bible was already in place!

- ii. **JEWISH RABBANIC WITNESS TO AN EARLY FINALIZED CANON:** There is actual scriptural data that enlightens us into how ancient Jewish peoples would have come to authenticate that a word or a text was “from God” or not. To understand this, let us start by considering Moses.

Jewish rabbinical tradition before and after Jesus affirms that Jews believed that the prophetic voice of Old Testament prophets had ceased.¹⁸ For example in the Babylonian Talmud (which is a collection of rabbinic teachings on the Hebrew Bible or TANAKH written between)¹⁹, several of the rabbis affirms that the “prophetic voice” or “Holy Spirit” or “Shekinah” of God had ceased with the prophets. As one rabbi affirmed,

Since the death of the last prophets, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, the Holy Spirit [of prophetic inspiration] departed from Israel; yet they were still able to avail themselves of the bath kol (T.B. Sanh. 11a; Tos. SoXah 13:2; baraita in T.B. Yoma 9b; T.B. SoXah 48b, and T.B. Sanh. 11a).²⁰

The phrase “bath kol” is literally translated as “daughter of a voice” which connotes something that was not as reliable as the voice of the prophets themselves. In other words, while the words of the rabbis are to be revered and listened to it does not hold the same “weight” or “voice” as the prophets. Consider another rabbi who said in the Talmud,

“Until then [the coming of Alexander the Great who destroyed the Persian Empire] the prophets prophesied through the Holy Spirit. From then on, ‘incline thine ear and hear the words of the wise.’” (Seder Olam Rabbah 30, quoting Prov. 22:17)

And another said,

¹⁸ Paul D. Wegner, Terry L. Wilder, and Darrell L. Bock chapter “Do We Have the Right Canon?” in *In Defense of the Bible: A Comprehensive Apologetic for the Authority of Scripture*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman), ed. Steven B. Cowan and Terry L. Wilder, pg. 395-396; Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*, (Wipf and Stock: London), pg. 370-371

¹⁹ Little video on understanding the Torah, Mishnah, & Tanakh in Jewish religious tradition: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTiQb_3FGSE

²⁰ As cited by Paul D. Wegner et.al.

Rab Samuel bar Inia said, in the name of Rab Aha: . . . "The Second Temple lacked five things which the First Temple possessed, namely, the fire, the ark, the Urim and Thummim, the oil of anointing and the Holy Spirit [of Prophecy]." (T.P. Taanith 2:1; T.P. Makkoth 2.4-8; T. B. Yoma 21b)

And still another,

Rabbi Abdimi of Haifa said, "Since the day when the Temple was destroyed, prophecy has been taken from the prophets and given to the wise." (T.B. Baba Bathra 12a)

Okay what is the point of quoting all these ancient rabbi texts? The point is that these rabbinical passages indicate that according to very early Jewish tradition it was understood that the "voice of God" had ceased following the time of Malachi (about 400 B.C.). Because this was the case it was understood that ANY additional writings coming down the pipeline of theology or ceremony were NOT to be classified as nor added to the sacred Scriptures.

The Babylonian Talmud, which was compiled over a period from about the third to the sixth centuries, provides a thorough list of the books of Scripture and their order, although not in the same order as our modern Hebrew Old Testament. As the books of the Pentateuch were not in question, they are not mentioned in this passage:

Our Rabbis taught: The order of the Prophets is, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve Minor Prophets. Let us examine this. Hosea came first, as it is written, God spake first to Hosea. But did God speak first to Hosea? Were there not many prophets between Moses and Hosea?

R. Joxanan, however, has explained that [what it means is that] he was the first of the four prophets who prophesied at that period, namely, Hosea, Isaiah, Amos and Micah. Should not then Hosea come first? Since his prophecy is written along with those of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, and Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi came at the end of the prophets, he is reckoned with them. But why should he not be written separately and placed first? — Since his book is so small, it might be lost [if copied separately]. Let us see again. Isaiah was prior to Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Then why should not Isaiah be placed first? — Because the Book of Kings ends with a record of destruction and Jeremiah speaks throughout of destruction and Ezekiel commences with destruction and ends with consolation and Isaiah is full of consolation; therefore we put the destruction next to destruction and consolation next to consolation.

The order of the Hagiographa is Ruth, the Book of Psalms, Job, Prophets, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel and the Scroll of Esther, Ezra and Chronicles. Now on the view that Job lived in the days of Moses, should not the book of Job come first? — We do not begin with a record of suffering. But Ruth also is a record of suffering? — It is a suffering with a sequel [of happiness], as R. Joxanan said: Why was her name called Ruth? — Because there issued from her David who replenished the Holy One, blessed be He, with hymns and praises. (T.B. Baba Bathra 14b)²¹

The problem of how we came by 39 books known as Old Testament "Scripture" is a purely historical investigation. The question involved is, not who wrote the several books, but who made them into a collection, not their origin or contents, but their history

J.A. Sanders asserts, "It was because of the cataclysmic event of the destruction of the First Temple that what we now know was the Law and the Prophets first came to be collected and galvanized into the shape they now have."²²

²¹ Talmud as quoted in cited by Paul D. Wegner et.al., pg. 396-397

²² As quoted by Paul D. Wegner, ibid, pg. 105

- iii. **JOSEPHUS' WITNESS TO AN EARLY FINALIZED CANON:** Josephus (37-100 A.D.) in his writing *Contra Apionem* (1:8) Josephus states that the number of the books which the Jews receive is 22, and these he distinguishes from other books. Josephus enumerates five books of Moses, thirteen prophetic books, and finally, four books of hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life. In his book *Against Apion*, written around 95 A.D., Josephus defends the Jews by arguing that they possessed an antiquity unmatched by the Greeks:²³

“...it follows that we [the Jews] do not possess myriads of inconsistent books, conflicting with each other: Our books, those which are justly accredited, are but twenty-two, and contain the record of all time. Of these, first are the books of Moses, comprising the laws and traditional history from the birth of man down to the death of the lawgiver. This period falls only a little short of three thousand years. From the death of Moses until Artaxerxes, who succeeded Xerxes as king of Persia, the prophets [following] Moses wrote the history of the events of their own times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life. From Artaxerxes to our own time the complete history has been written, but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier record, because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets.”

Josephus goes on to state how highly the Jews esteemed their Scriptures:

“We have given practical proof of our reverence for our own Scriptures. For, although such long ages have now passed, no one has ventured either to add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable; and it is an instinct with every Jew, from the day of his birth, to regard them as the decrees of God, to abide by them, and, if need be, cheerfully to die for them.”

Based upon these excerpts we can draw the following conclusions: (1) The division of the Jewish scriptures are similar to how Jesus and the Apostles quote it – in a three part manner (Law, Prophets, Writings); (2) The time frame Josephus gives of the “complete history” goes from Moses (who wrote the first 5 books of the Bible) to Artaxerxes, the Persian King who lived in the times of Malachi (who wrote the last book of the Old Testament!); and (3) From Genesis to Malachi, those Scriptures are sacred, God given, and no one can add to, take away or alter them – in short the Old Testament canon is closed!²⁴

So, the OT canon was completed through a gradual process over a 1,000 year period and was finalized by the days of Jesus. Again, we can affirm this by the fact that Jesus, the Apostles, Philo and Josephus all quote this way.

In his writing *Contra Apionem* (1:8) Josephus states that the number of the books which the Jews receive is 22, and these he distinguishes from other books. Josephus enumerates five books of Moses, thirteen prophetic books, and finally, four books of hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life.

- iv. **PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA'S WITNESS TO AN EARLY CLOSED CANON:** Philo (c. 20 B.C.-50 A.D.) Of importance also is the witness found in the *De vita contemplativa* of Philo (around 40 A.D.) wherein reference is made to a threefold division. Of importance also is the witness found in the *De vita contemplativa* of Philo (around 40 A.D.) wherein reference is made to a threefold division. We may note particularly the Prologue to *Ecclesiasticus* (after 117 B.C.) in which three times mention is made of the Law and the Prophets (or prophecies) and “the others which follow after them,” (the masculine τῶν προφήτων refers to the authors) or “the other paternal books” and “the remainder of the books.”

²³ Information in this paragraph and subsequent Josephus quotes come from: Lightfoot, *ibid.* pg. 154-155

²⁴ Information in this paragraph comes from: Lightfoot, *ibid.* pg. 155-156

- v. **THE MACCABEES WITNESS TO AN EARLY CLOSED CANON:** The Maccabees (c. 160s B.C.) Faithful Jewish opposition had been an undercurrent all along, but Antiochus' overt act of desecration brought it to the surface, and the result was the Maccabean Revolt. Mattathias, a Jewish priest, led the organized resistance along with his five sons: John Gaddi, Simon Thassi, Eleazar Avaran, Jonathan Apphus, and Judas Maccabeus (*Maccabeus* comes from the Hebrew word for "hammer"). Mattathias started the rebellion by preventing a Jew from sacrificing to a pagan god and then killing an officer of the king. Mattathias escaped with his family to the hills where he was joined by many other faithful Jews. From there, they conducted guerilla warfare against the Seleucids, but much of their wrath was also directed against fellow Jews who had embraced Greek culture (Hellenized Jews). The rebels tore down pagan altars, circumcised boys, and forced Hellenized Jews to become "outlaws" with no rights or legal protection. Upon Mattathias' death in 166 BC, his son Judas Maccabeus took command of the rebellion. Judas saw himself as a leader like Moses, Joshua, and Gideon. In 2 Maccabees speaks about the issue of the canonization of the Hebrew scriptures,

One finds in the records that the prophet Jeremiah ordered those who were being deported to take some of the fire, as has been mentioned, ² and that the prophet, after giving them the law, instructed those who were being deported not to forget the commandments of the Lord, or to be led astray in their thoughts on seeing the gold and silver statues and their adornment. ³ And with other similar words he exhorted them that the law should not depart from their hearts.

⁴ It was also in the same document that the prophet, having received an oracle, ordered that the tent and the ark should follow with him, and that he went out to the mountain where Moses had gone up and had seen the inheritance of God.

...

⁹ It was also made clear that being possessed of wisdom Solomon offered sacrifice for the dedication and completion of the temple. ¹⁰ Just as Moses prayed to the Lord, and fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifices, so also Solomon prayed, and the fire came down and consumed the whole burnt offerings. ¹¹ And Moses said, "They were consumed because the sin offering had not been eaten." ¹² Likewise Solomon also kept the eight days.

¹³ The same things are reported in the records and in the memoirs of Nehemiah, and also that he founded a library and collected the books about the kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and letters of kings about votive offerings. ¹⁴ In the same way Judas also collected all the books that had been lost on account of the war that had come upon us, and they are in our possession. ¹⁵ So if you have need of them, send people to get them for you.

2 Maccabees 2:1-4 and 9-15 (NRSV)

The "war" mention in the next above is about the Maccabean Revolt (167-160 B.C.) in which the Jewish family Maccabees led a rebellion against the Seleucid Empire to liberate Israel. The text mentions Solomon, Moses, Nehemiah, and David, which, taken together, signify a substantial amount of writings being collected and preserved. But notice the writings are already seen as sacred, set apart, worthy to be preserved.

Even before the Maccabees we can push it back even further.

- vi. **BEN SIRACH'S WITNESS TO AN EARLY CLOSED CANON:** Ben Sira (c. 190s-170s B.C.) Ben Sira, also known as Yeshua Ben Sirach, was a Hellenistic Jewish scribe, sage, and allegorist from Seleucid-controlled Jerusalem of the Second Temple period. He is the author of a the "Book of Ecclesiasticus". He was a philosophical observer of life who lived in Jerusalem and was well versed in the Hebrew Scriptures and traditions. The original *Book of Ecclesiasticus* was written in Hebrew, and a Greek translation was produced by the author's grandson about 132 BC. In the Greek edition's prologue, the writer identifies the accepted Hebrew canon as being composed of "the Law and the prophets, and the others who

followed after.” The common title of the book comes from the fact that it was used in ancient synagogue services, and it even had popular use in early church meetings. The Book of Ecclesiasticus was included in the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament written around 250 BC. The contents of Ecclesiasticus are much like the other Hebrew wisdom books. Advice on a wide variety of topics in no particular order, and poems extolling wisdom and the Lord as the source of wisdom comprise most of the book. The point is that around the 190s-170s the “three fold” division of Hebrew Scripture was in place and known.

So, we are roughly at 200 years before Jesus there is extra-biblical evidence of the Hebraic canon. But there is more! We need to consider the biblical books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 & 2 Chronicles.

While the ancient Hebrew’s may not have had a formal council-like canonization process is ultimately inconsequential. What matters is the “concept” of canonicity existed far before the official list was there.

- vii. **EZRA & NEHEMIAH’S WITNESS TO AN EARLY CLOSED CANON:** So, we are roughly at 200 years before Jesus there is extra-biblical evidence of the Hebraic canon. But there is more! We need to consider the biblical books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 & 2 Chronicles. There is some compelling evidence within the content of these books in recent scholarly studies that suggest that the Old Testament may in fact have been completed by the time of Ezra and Nehemiah’s times, which would be when Chronicles was written.

Ezra and Nehemiah (c. 500s B.C.): Let’s consider the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The content of these books gives us good clues to a general framework of canonicity of Old Testament writings. Ezra and Nehemiah were written in or around or close after the Babylonian Captivity of Israel. Israel was destroyed by Babylon and dispersed into slavery following the conquest of the southern kingdom of Judah around 598-587 B.C. (*almost 600 years before Jesus*). However, in 586 B.C. King Cyrus the Great of Babylon ended the Jews captivity and permitted them to return to their homelands. Somewhere around this time and after Ezra and Nehemiah lived and prophesied, perhaps around the 530s B.C.

Why the history lesson? Because the content of these books gives us insight into the collection of writings at the time that were already classified as “sacred scripture.” Some liberal historians claim that the canonization of the Old Testament, in fact the very writing of the Old Testament, didn’t even happen until the Babylonian Captivity. So all of the things about David, Moses, and Abraham were fanciful mythologies made up by rabbis to give the desperate Jewish captors a sense of identity outside of their homeland. But this theory falls apart when considering the internal evidence of the historical books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, a man learned in matters of the commandments of the LORD and his statutes for Israel

²⁵“And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God that is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God. And those who do not know them, you shall teach. ²⁶Whoever will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on him, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of his goods or for imprisonment.”

Ezra 7:25-26 (ESV)

And consider Nehemiah,

And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. ² So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. ³ And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. ⁴ And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. ⁶ And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. ⁸ They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly,^(b) and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

Nehemiah 8:1-8 (ESV)

The Law is here regarded not as something new but as something very old, so old in fact that it was believed to have been revealed by God through Moses. And herein lay its authority and effectiveness. The people did not say "We now pronounce these writings to be authoritative." They said rather, "These writings received their authority centuries ago when God made them known to Moses. For that reason, we must obey them." Also read Nehemiah 9 and 10. They clearly give a sense that there is a body of writings already understood to be set apart and sacred.

Before moving on I would also like to briefly just mention the significance of the book of Chronicles 1 and 2. These books were written roughly around the same time or shortly thereafter from Ezra and Nehemiah. Studies have been done²⁵ indicating that whoever the author of Chronicles was, which many scholars believe to have been Ezra, they were aware of a body of Hebraic writings that were canonical. That body of writings is the same as Christians Old Testament today. How did such studies find this? By cataloguing and cross-references various quotations and allusions of Old Testament books found within the Chronicles. In short, every Old Testament book, from Genesis to 2 Kings is included within Chronicles in an authoritative sense. If this is true, then it would mean there is good evidence textually to affirm the Hebrew canon was finalized perhaps as early as 500-400 B.C. Again, there is still debate on such points!

²⁵ Around 2001 Zipporah Talshir, professor of Bible, Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at Ben Gurion University of the Negev released an extensive study on Chronicles and concluded that the author of the book (both 1 and 2) was consciously aware that a Hebraic biblical canon existed in their time. Her study indicates that the Chronicler was aware of the Torah in its final shape, and the historical outline in broad lines from Genesis to the exile in 2 Kings – which would essentially be the full breadth of the Old Testament timeline. How does she do this? She catalogues a substantial number of quotations and allusions from the other Old Testament writings found within Chronicles (i.e. look at 2 Chronicles 15 specifically). Specifically, this included quotes or allusions to the Torah (1st five books of the OT) as well as Jeremiah, Isaiah, Hosea, Zechariah, and the Psalms. Her own conclusion is that "the focus of discussion should no longer be on the history of the canon—a discussion that had run its course for lack of new evidence—but rather for search on the 'closing phenomena' in the texts themselves." <https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/52/52-1/JETS%2052-1%2047-77%20Dempster.pdf>

D. BUT HOW ACCURATE IS THE TRANSMISSION OF THE HEBRAIC TEXTS?²⁶

Historians for decades practice the reconstruction of historical texts using a method known as textual criticism. This is a meticulous process of rebuilding the original words of ancient texts where no originals exist. It is a kind of forensic science of recreating the pieces to get the complete picture of an event that happened in the past – the advantage here is there is an actual text to work with. This is not like the “telephone game” we have multiple written texts to work with over the course of more than 2,000 years.

How does this process work? To simplify it there are three things textual critics do to “get back” to the original writing.

- (1) **Number of copies:** you have to look at the number of copies available. The more manuscripts available the better you can see how the text is “evolving” over time.
- (2) **Time Gap:** you have to look at the distance between those copies from each other and the original. The greater the distance between the original writing and the first copies of that writing, the greater chances of possible corruption and error.
- (3) **Discrepancies:** You have to look at the variations and similarities between those copies. The more differences between copies the less sure you can be of the original text.

Our Bible is a very old book, but it is not the oldest book in the world. The earliest known writings can be found on clay tablets in Mesopotamia and Egypt, back to roughly 3,000 B.C.! Even before this time, we have ancient text in the form of hieroglyphics, which exist on various archaic monuments, temples and tombs. The first known alphabet was developed by some Semitic-persons (around 1750 B.C.) between Egypt and Mesopotamia, in the area of Syria-Palestine.

Back in 2005 archeologists uncovered the oldest Hebrew alphabet inscription to date! It was dated to around 1,000 B.C. – roughly 3,000 years ago and 1,000 years earlier than the Dead Sea Scrolls!²⁷

There are roughly 10,000 manuscripts of the Old Testament.²⁸ The dates between the original writings and the first copies cannot be put into an easily defined date because they were written and completed at different time periods over the course of 1,500 years. The New Testament was written within a span of 50 years. Now this might cause some to question whether we actually have the words given by God to Moses, David, or Isaiah.

However, we can look into the process of transmission of how the Hebrews passed down their texts from generation to generation to help us better see just how utterly uniquely preserved the Old Testament really is.

Firstly, it is important to realize that several biblical passages indicate that from an early period parts of Scripture were held in honor and were considered authoritative, being preserved for future generations (**Exodus 17:14-16; Exodus 24:3-4, 7**). The stone tablets of Moses were stored in the ark of the covenant (**Exodus 25:16, 21; Hebrews 9:4**) and the Book of the Law was kept next to the ark (**Deuteronomy 31:24-26**). The people were also commanded to not add to or delete anything from what had been given (**Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:13**).

While they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord given through Moses.
2 Chronicles 34:14 (ESV)

²⁶ I recommend considering a few resources to understand this point more fully: Paul Wegner’s chapter *Has the Old Testament Text Been Hopelessly Corrupted?* in *In Defense of the Bible: A Comprehensive Apologetic for the Authority of Scripture*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman), ed. Steven B Cowan and Terry L. Wilder. Also look at these online sources: <https://www.josh.org/faithful-transmit-old-testament/> and <https://credomag.com/2015/03/how-did-we-get-the-old-testament-paul-d-wegner/>

²⁷ Information comes from: http://www.theindian.com/newsportal/india-news/oldest-hebrew-script-found-in-israel_100113392.html and <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Archaeology/hebrewalphabet.html>

²⁸ <http://www.davidsinclairmc.com/christianarticles/AN%20OVERVIEW%20OF%20THE%20BIBLE%20-%20Version%2011.pdf#page=15>

It is interesting that biblical scholars have been able to date the Chronicles to around the 539-333 B.C., during what is known as the Persian period.²⁹ Why is this significant? Because Moses lived around the 1400s B.C. meaning that for close to 800 years the original writing of Moses was preserved to the days of Hilkiah the priest. Now there would have been copies of Moses' original circulating around as well, and in fact the biblical text says this,

And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests.
Deuteronomy 17:18 (ESV)

When a king of Israel sat upon the throne they were to have a copy of the original writings of Moses' divinely given words, and the words of the prophets, were copied down so they could read and memorize it. By the end of the 300s B.C. the canon of the Old Testament had been finalized.³⁰

Now when the original scrolls started showing signs of wear priests and scribes took it upon themselves to meticulously rewrite them on new parchments. Over the course of roughly 2,000 years Hebrew scribal traditions would meticulously copy down the biblical texts to preserve them for future generations.

These scribal traditions had the primary job of preserving the sacred writings (commonly called "repetition") but they also will slightly modify or update the scriptural texts in order for future generations to understand them (commonly called "resignification").³¹ The four major scribal groups that existed were as follows:

- The first major scribal group were called the Sopherim (500 B.C. — 100 A.D.) "scribes" or "ones who count" who copied and preserved the Hebrew scriptures that they could determine.³²
- Shortly after the sopherim scribal tradition came the zugoth "pairs" tradition were entrusted with this responsibility in the second and first centuries B.C.³³ The next group of scribes were known as the tannaim "repeaters from 100 A.D. to roughly 300 A.D." because they would repeat words as they copied their texts for greater accuracy.³⁴ It was under the Tannaim tradition that the Mishnah (a collection of authoritative exegetical commentaries on the oral tradition of Jewish law that forms the first part of the larger collection of writings called the Talmud).³⁵
- Then there were the Talmudists.
- Then we get to the Masoretes meaning "traditions" during the (500-1000 A.D.).³⁶ The Masoretic Text is the standard text of the Old Testament.

In order to standardize the biblical text the Masoretes developed the Masora, which is a collection of critical and explanatory notes on the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, which added vowel signs in order to establish a fixed meaning to each group of consonants (for example, in a particular context dg would only refer to dig, not dog or dug).³⁷ You see

²⁹ Bill T. Arnold & H.G.M. Williamson, *Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 167

³⁰ Understanding Scripture, pg. 103

³¹ Paul Wegner, *ibid*, pg. 123-124

³² Understanding Scripture, pg. 104

³³ Holden & Geisler, pg. 21

³⁴ Understanding Scripture, pg. 105

³⁵ Wegner, *ibid*, pg. 124

³⁶ Holden & Geisler, pg. 21

³⁷ Holden * Geisler, pg. 22

originally there were no vowels in ancient Hebrew before the Masoretes. This was a system known as “pointing” which showed little dots above and around the consonants to indicate proper vowel sounds.

The Masoretes were very strict in how they did their work. If a scribe made an error while copying a manuscript, even the slight stroke of a pen, they were immediately destroyed. When even accurate manuscripts began to deteriorate to the point that the words were faded beyond 100% recognition the manuscripts were destroyed.³⁸

Consider the strict Masoretic code.

1. Only parchments from clean animals were allowed; these were to be joined together with thread from clean animals.
2. Each written column of the scroll was to have no fewer than forty-eight lines and no more than sixty lines whose breadth must consist of thirty letters.
3. The page was first to be lined, from which the letters were to be suspended.
4. No word or letter was to be written from memory.
5. The scribe must wash himself entirely and be in full Jewish dress before beginning to copy the scroll.
6. He could not write the name *Yahweh* with a newly dipped brush, nor take notice of anyone, even a king, while writing this sacred name.³⁹

The attention of the detail and meticulous nature of the Masoretes copying format is remarkable. They went to great lengths to copy in a systematic, even mathematical way, so as to make sure they did not taint the Holy Scriptures. Every biblical book contained a “colophon” (that is, a scribe’s notation of the details of his work, usually attached at the end of his manuscript) and a count of the total number of consonants (letters).⁴⁰ They would even count and list the number of chapters, verses, individual words, and individual letters to ensure they were accurate. For example, the Final Masora affirms that in the complete Torah there contains 5,845 verses, 79,856 words, and 400,945 letters.⁴¹ If any full copy of Torah did not correspond to the exact number on this, then the whole thing was thrown out.

Now all this scribal tradition of translation through the ages is important because it clearly shows that we have an unbroken chain of transmission from the days of Moses (1400s B.C.), through the days of Hilkiah the priest, to the first century A.D. to the Masoretes of the 500s to 1,000 A.D. That is an insane chain of textual transmission for a set of writings. But how accurate is that transmission?

Well it must be noted that the oldest full copies of the entire Hebrew Bible we had existed from the days of the Masoretes, around 1000 A.D. That is nearly 2,500 years displaced from the days of Moses and 1,900 years separated from King David. That is until the 1940s.

In 1948 the greatest find in all ancient biblical history was uncovered at Qumran, north of the Dead Sea in Israel. There a Bedouin shepherd went into a cave trying to find his lost sheep and stumbled upon dozens of clay pots with parchment fragments in them. Over the course of the next several years archeologists surveyed several other caves in the region finding even more pots with fragments. In all there were nearly 1,000 fragmented documents recovered in 11 caves near. About 20% were from biblical books, the remaining were from other works in a variety of languages including Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin.⁴²

Now here is what is interesting. It was found that the fragments were collections of biblical books — every Old Testament book except Esther — and they were dated at roughly 200 to 93 B.C., roughly 1,000 years earlier than the closest Masoretic text (which,

³⁸ Holden & Geisler, pg. 23

³⁹ This list of requirements comes directly from Paul Wegner, *ibid*, 125

⁴⁰ Holden & Geisler, pg. 24

⁴¹ Holden & Geisler, pg. 24

⁴² Holden & Geisler, pg. 34-40

remember are dated about 1,000 A.D.). What is totally remarkable is that when scholars compared the DSS manuscripts to the Masoretic manuscripts it was found that they correlated at roughly 95%! In other words the words and translations were transmitted almost identically, as if they were photocopied. The remaining 5% of discrepancies had to do with “confusion of similar letters, homophony (substitution of similar sounding letters or words), haplography (omission of a letter or word), dittography (doubling a letter or word), metathesis (reversal in the order of two letters or words), fusion (two words being joined together as once, and fission (one word separated into two).”⁴³ Example: In the book of Isaiah chapter 40:12 the Masoretic Text used the Hebrew word mayim (“waters”) while the DSS Text used the Hebrew word me yam (“waters of the sea”).⁴⁴

The book of Isaiah is a great find. It has all sixty-six chapters within fifty-four columns of texts. In chapter 53 of Isaiah the difference between the DSS text and the Masoretic text was a single word “light.” In the DSS text the word “light” is found in Isaiah 52:11 while it is omitted in the Masoretic Text of the same verse.

On top of all this is the finding of the Ketef Hinnom Silver Scrolls (dating at about 600s B.C.) roughly 400 years BEFORE the DSS Texts. Now they are not extensive texts and are fragmentary to a large degree but they are very important. They were found in 1979 by a team of archeologists investigating tombs in the southern part of Jerusalem overlooking the Valley of Hinnom.⁴⁵ They contain portions of the book of Numbers, containing the priestly benedictions of Numbers 6:24-26 and phrases from other biblical books, including Exodus 20:6 and Deuteronomy 5:10 and 20:6. From these scrolls several important pieces of information surface. First, the passages written on the silver scrolls correspond to the DSS and the Masoretic Text with 95% accuracy or more. This shows an unbroken chain of transmission from 600 B.C. to 1,000 A.D. Over 1,600 years of 95% accuracy transmission of the Old Testament. Not including the additional 1,000 years to the present. Second, the scrolls strongly shoot down the argument that the Old Testament was developed during the Hellenistic Age (320s B.C. – 30s B.C.). This is foolishness. The scrolls show that the Old Testament was being transmitted as far back as 300 years before this! Third, the Silver Scrolls contain the oldest extant biblical passages using the name YHWH demonstrating that YHWH was not a later development as critical scholars previously believed.⁴⁶

⁴³ Understanding Scripture, pg. 107

⁴⁴ Holden & Geisler, pg. 44

⁴⁵ Holden & Geisler, pg. 46

⁴⁶ Holden & Geisler, pg. 48

E. WHAT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT APOCRYPHAL BOOKS?

The qualifications were as follows:⁴⁷

2. The content of the books in question must be in harmony with the law;
3. The books must come within the time period between Moses and Ezra;
4. The language of the original books had to be Hebrew;
5. They had to be written within the geographical boundaries of Palestine.

The Apocrypha is a collection of books that are part of the Catholic Bible's Old Testament. The word apocrypha is Greek and basically means "hidden." For Protestants these books are not equal to the original Scriptures and thus are not divinely inspired or authoritative; however the books can be regarded as helpful or insightful, having good teachings, lessons and parables. For Catholics however, these books are what they call "deuteros-canonical" that simply means the "secondary-canon." In short, Catholics believe that the original OT Books are the first canon and later there were a collection of other OT books written that were the second canon. They believe that both sets of Canon are equal in importance.⁴⁸

The Apocrypha books of the OT (there is a New Testament Apocrypha but we are concerned with the OT one) includes roughly 14 to 15 books written around 300 B.C. to 100 A.D.⁴⁹

A list of The Apocrypha books are:

- 1 Esdras
- 2 Esdras
- Tobit
- Judith
- Additions to Esther
- Wisdom of Solomon
- Ecclesiasticus
- Baruch
- Epistle of Jeremiah
- The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Children
- Story of Susanna
- Bel and the Dragon
- Prayer of Manasseh
- 1 Maccabees
- 2 Maccabees

⁴⁷ Following four points come directly from: <http://www.biblestudymaterials.net/canon.htm>

⁴⁸ Information in this paragraph comes from: Lightfoot, *ibid.* pg. 163-164

⁴⁹ Lightfoot, *ibid.* pg. 164

Why These Books Should Be Rejected For Canonization?⁵⁰

1. ***Because they do not affirm nor show the qualities of divine inspiration.*** Ironically the Apocrypha books never claim to be divinely inspired! They never say, “Thus says the Lord” or “And God spoke.”
2. ***Because they were never included in the Hebrew OT canon.*** There is not record of any of the copies of the Hebrew Bible (or the Palestinian Canon) ever including the Apocrypha books. The Apocrypha was never accepted by the Jewish communities as God given Scripture – helpful maybe but not comparable to scripture. Even Josephus, who lived during the times of some of these writings circulating, never listed them as being Scripture.
3. ***Because they were not written by one of the prophets.*** Further, most of the books are forgeries, said to have been written by authors who were dead for centuries. For example, look at these books and the dates of their compellation:

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------------|
| • Psalm 151 | 200 B.C. |
| • Ecclesiasticus | 180 B.C. |
| • Tobit | 180 B.C. |
| • The Prayer of Manasseh | 150 B.C. |
| • Judith | 150 B.C. |
| • 1 Esdras | 150 B.C. |
| • Additions to Esther | 100 B.C. |
| • Song of the Three Young Men | 100 B.C. |
| • Susanna | 50-100 B.C. |
| • Bel and the Dragon | 50-100 B.C. |
| • 1, 2 & 3 Maccabees | 50-100 B.C. |
| • 4 Maccabees | 40 A.D. |
| • The Wisdom of Solomon | 40 A.D. |
| • 2 Esdras | 100 A.D. |
| • Baruch | 100 A.D. |

As we can see, the Old Testament Apocrypha books were written during what Bible scholars call the *Intertestamental Period* (roughly 400 years between the Old Testament and New Testament) till about the end of the first century A.D. The key is that Jewish tradition affirmed that the canon of Hebrew canon spanned from the days of Moses, roughly 1,450 B.C. and had closed during the days of King Artaxerxes, or the days of Malachi in the 400s B.C. Yet the Apocrypha books are written from 200 B.C. to 100 A.D.!

Therefore, the Apocrypha books were not written by any men or women of God that were divinely inspired, prophetic or instruments through which God performed miraculous feats. Even Josephus affirmed this when he said:

From Artaxerxes to our own time the complete history has been written, but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier record, because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets.”

Flavius Josephus

4. ***Because they were never accepted by Jesus and His apostles.*** As we have already previously mentioned, the OT of Jesus’ day was equal to our OT today. Jesus never affirmed the divine inspiration or authority of any other collection of books.

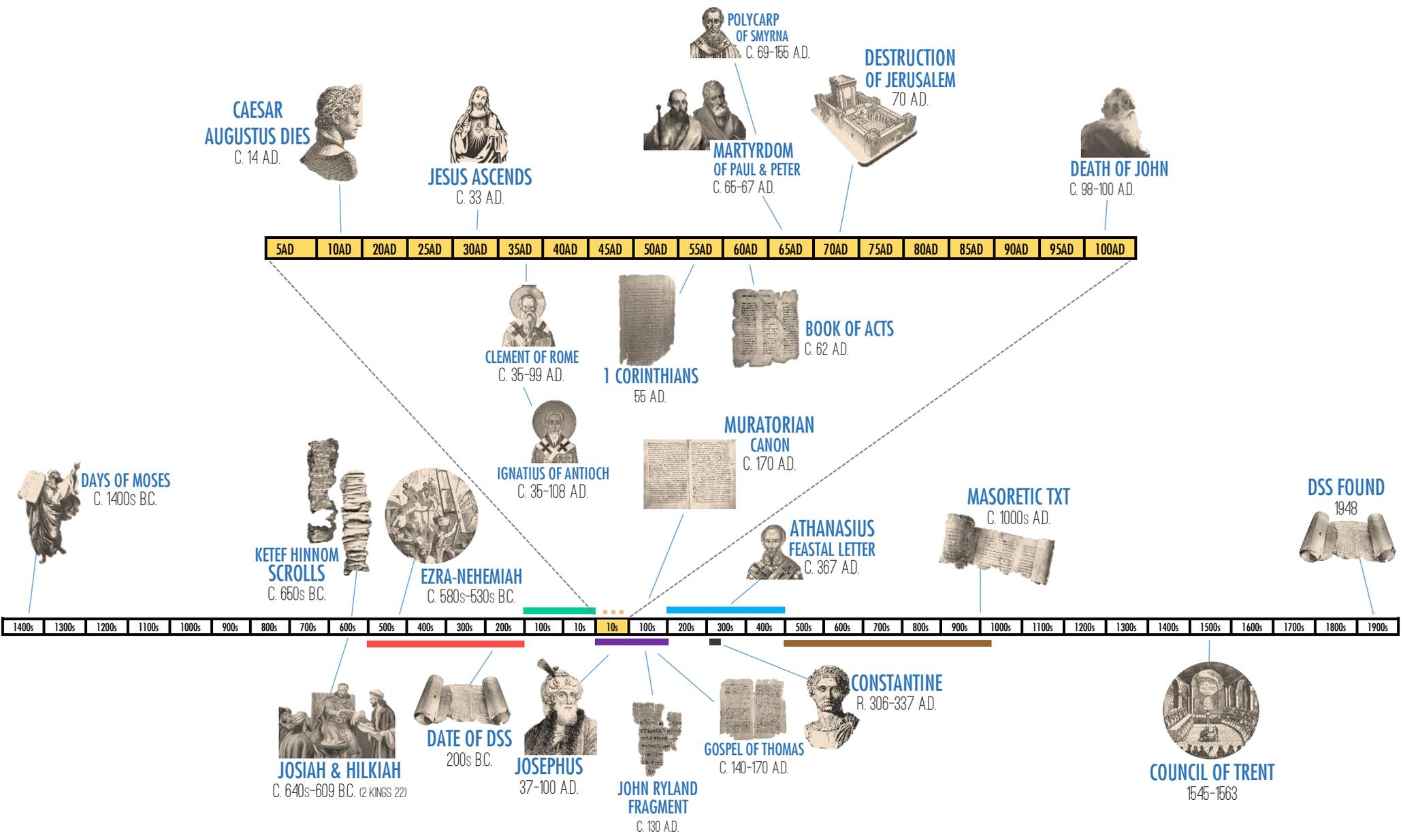
⁵⁰ Paul D. Wegner, et.al., *ibid* pg. 403-404; Craig Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe the Bible?* (Grand Rapids: BrazosPress, 2014), pg. 48-50; Craig Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe the Bible?* (Grand Rapids: BrazosPress, 2014), pg. 48

5. *Because they have un-biblical concepts and teachings.* Simply put, the Apocrypha, although a “good read” and having some truthful teachings and insight into inter-testament culture, is filled with too many legends, myths and fictional characters and events.
6. *Because they have serious flaws in them.* As we have already learned, God does not lie, He does not error — therefore His Word would not error. God would not mess up on dates or significant events and/or people of history. However, these are a few of the things we find in the Apocryphal books. Examples are the following:
- Judith- "Nebuchadnezzar, who reigned over the Assyrians from his capital, Nineveh" (1:1)
 - Tobit- He says that he was a young man when the Kingdom of Israel divided (931 B.C.) and went into captivity with his people at Nineveh in Assyria (722 B.C.) (1:3-6). He would have lived over 200 years, yet the book says that he died peacefully at the age of 112! (13:14) Also the book teaches that alms wipe out all sins (12:8-10).
 - Baruch- Plea for God to hear the prayers of Israel's dead (3:4)
 - 2 Maccabees- prayer on behalf the dead that they might be forgiven; buying atonement (12:39-45); intercession of the dead on behalf of the living (15:12-16);
 - Ecclesiasticus- helping parents, almsgiving atones for sins (3:14-15, 30), man's wickedness better than a woman's goodness (42:14)
 - "Whoso honoureth his father maketh an atonement for his sins...Water will quench a flaming fire; and alms maketh an atonement for sin" (Sirach 3:3, 30). Cf. Leviticus 17:11
 - Tobit 12:9 states that "alms doth deliver from death, and shall purge away all sin."
 - Sirach 12:4-7 advises, "Give to the godly man, and help not a sinner. Do well unto him that is lowly, but give not to the ungodly; hold back thy bread, and give it not unto him... give unto the good, and help not the sinner."
 - "Tobit claims to have been alive when Jeroboam revolted (931 B.C.) and when Assyria conquered Israel (722 B.C.). These two events were separated by over 200 years and yet the total lifespan of Tobit was 158 years (Tobit 1:3-5; 14:11)."
 - Judith mistakenly identifies Nebuchadnezzar as king of the Assyrians (1:1, 7) when in fact he was the king of Babylon (2 Kings 24:1).
 - **Baruch 6:2** "And when you are come into Babylon, you shall be there many years, and for a long time, even to seven generations: and after that I will bring you away from thence with peace." cf. Jeremiah 25:11

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/old-testament-canon/>

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/rev-henry/10_ot-canon_young.pdf

<https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/52/52-1/JETS%2052-1%2047-77%20Dempster.pdf>



SCRIBAL TRADITIONS:

- 
SOPHERIM
 600-200 B.C.
- 
ZUGOT
 200BC-1 AD.
- 
TANNAIM
 1-200 AD.
- 
TALMUDISTS
 200-500 AD.
- 
MASORETES
 500-1000 AD.
- 
WRITING OF NT BOOKS
 40s-90s AD.

4. THE CANONIZATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

How the New Testament canon came into being differs in several ways from that of the Old. For one thing, unlike Old Testament Judaism, New Testament Christianity, from its conception, was an international religion spanning multiple continents and having no singular prophetic community or ethnic group to knit it together; this in turn made the canonization process for the New much less “fluid” or straightforward than the Old.⁵¹

Further, unlike the Old Testament canon, which was a collection of 39 books written over the course of roughly one-thousand years (from 1,400 B.C.- 400 B.C.), the New Testament books were written in only a single generation, spanning from around 50-100 A.D.⁵²

The idea that the canonization of the Bible was put together by a politicized ecumenical council of religious stuff-shirts is laughable when you consider the evidence to the contrary.

If you remember the skeptical writers at the beginning of this study – Eichevald, Brown, and Ehrman – they were making an argument that the Bible was put together by the theological winners. They argued that Christianity was a hodge-podge of diverse competing theological schools all vying for supremacy and it wasn’t until Constantine in the 320s A.D. sided with one of those schools that they enforced their will on everyone else.

The only problem with this argument is its hogwash.

On historical grounds alone, the argument that the Church voted on which books were in and which books were out of the New Testament is completely fallacious. There isn’t a single iota of evidence from within the New Testament or from early Christian sources or from the manuscripts that reveals that the canonization of the Bible was a process from the beginning.

Let’s get into this by first starting with a brief historical literary overview of the New Testament.

⁵¹ Geisler, Norman and Nix, William. *From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1974). pg. 101

⁵² Lightfoot, *ibid.* pg. 24

A. THE LITERARY & HISTORICAL LAYOUT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

We want to first try and grapple with an historical overview of the time-period of the New Testament along with a listing of the New Testament books and when they were written and by whom. Consider the timeline given to you by the instructor.

There are 27 books that comprise the New Testament. By contrast there are 39 Old Testament books. The Old Testament was written over the span of a 1,000 yr period while the New Testament books were written over a period of 40ish years.

The NEW TESTAMENT is literarily broken up into the following categories:

| GOSPELS | ACTS OF THE APOSTLES | THE EPISTLES | | THE REVELATION |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|--|--|------------------------|
| MATTHEW MARK LUKE JOHN | THE BOOK OF ACTS | PAULINE Romans 1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians 1 Timothy 2 Timothy Titus Philemon | GENERAL James 1 Peter 2 Peter 1 John 2 John 3 John Jude Hebrews | THE BOOK OF REVELATION |

To give us a chronological sense of when the books began to be written, let us list them in order of their publishing:⁵³

| | |
|--------------------------|------------|
| Years of Jesus' Ministry | 26-33 A.D. |
| Galatians | 49 A.D. |
| James | 49 A.D. |
| 1 Thessalonians | 51 A.D. |
| 2 Thessalonians | 51 A.D. |
| 1 Corinthians | 54 A.D. |
| 2 Corinthians | 55 A.D. |
| Mark | 55-65 A.D. |
| Romans | 57 A.D. |
| Mathew | 60-65 A.D. |
| Luke | 60 A.D. |
| Acts | 60-63 A.D. |
| Ephesians | 60 A.D. |
| Philippians | 60 A.D. |
| Colossians | 60 A.D. |
| 1 Timothy | 60-64 A.D. |
| 2 Timothy | 60-64 A.D. |

⁵³ List of NT books and dates are compiled from referencing: Cabal, Ted. Ed. *The Apologetics Study Bible*. (Holman: Nashville, TN, 2007) and McDowell, Sean. Ed. *The Apologetics Study Bible for Students*. (Holman: Nashville, TN, 2009); <https://www.bethinking.org/bible/the-dating-of-the-new-testament/>; https://carm.org/was-new-testament-written-hundreds-years-after-christ/#footnote1_lilzezx; <https://www.timothypauljones.com/apologetics-how-do-we-know-who-wrote-the-gospels-2/>; <http://www.datingthenewtestament.com/index.htm>

| | |
|------------|------------|
| Titus | 60-64 A.D. |
| Philemon | 60 A.D. |
| Hebrews | 60-96 A.D. |
| 1 Peter | 62-64 A.D. |
| 2 Peter | 62-64 A.D. |
| Jude | 62-64 A.D. |
| John | 90s A.D. |
| 1 John | 90s A.D. |
| 2 John | 90s A.D. |
| 3 John | 90s A.D. |
| Revelation | 95 A.D. |

Consider the timeline below.

B. THE PROCESS OF CANONIZATION

1. **THE SKEPTICS VERSION OF THE PROCESS:** For people like Kurt Eichenwald, Dan Brown, and Bart Ehrman the argument of how the 27 books of the New Testament got together was as follows:

In the first centuries of Christianity was a cacophony of competing religious sects all clamoring for theological dominance over the hearts and minds of the masses across the Roman Empire. Each of these sects had their own collections of writings, written decades or centuries after Jesus' time, each with contradictory teachings on topics like sin, salvation, Jesus' divinity, the sacraments, and so on. Eventually one of these sects gained enough sway in the Roman Empire, that they got the support of the Roman Emperor, who made their sect the "official sect" of Christianity. This new "Official Sect" or "CHURCH" wanted to solidify its power over the hearts and minds of the masses and so it began a systematic process of banning all other opposing religious sects as well as all other competing writings. It finalized this process at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D by voting & decreeing that ONLY its books were true orthodox teachings of Christianity.

Sounds legit doesn't it? Sounds like one of the greatest manipulative power grabs in the history of the world. The problem is it isn't true. There was never a vote at the Council of Nicaea about the books of the Bible. In fact canonization wasn't even an issue at Nicaea – it was about the theological issues of Christology and the Trinity.

2. **EVIDENCE OF AN EARLY ORGANIC PROCESS OF CANONIZATION:** There is biblical and extra-biblical evidence that reveals the process of canonization was early, decentralized, and a process.

➤ EVIDENCE WITHIN THE NEW TESTAMENT OF A "CANON-CONSCIOUSNESS"

- a. **THE USE OF APOSTLES WRITINGS IN THE CHURCHES:** Throughout the early church the apostles writings were used in church services as authoritative writings. Consider what Paul says in Colossians,

And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

Colossians 4:16 (ESV)

Paul said to the Thessalonians church:

²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

²⁵ Brothers, pray for us.

²⁶ Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

²⁷ I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

²⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-28 (ESV)

The Apostle John also wrote his Revelation to seven major churches across Asia Minor:

⁹ I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹ saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

Revelation 1:9-11 (ESV)

Other examples of New Testament writers affirming that their writings are to be read publicly include [1 Thessalonians 5:27](#) and [2 Corinthians 10:9](#). The public reading of scripture is an old tradition within Judaism in which Jews would go to the synagogue and listen to the priest read from the holy scriptures.⁵⁴ This is given testament even within the New Testament itself ([Luke 4:17-20](#); [Acts 13:15](#) and [15:21](#); [1 Timothy 4:13](#)).

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.
[Jude 1:3 \(ESV\)](#)

Also consider [2 Peter](#),

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder,² that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandments of the Lord and Savior through your apostles,³ knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. ⁴ They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."
[2 Peter 3:1-4 \(ESV\)](#)

What is interesting within this text is verse 2. There is a juxtaposition between "prophets" and "apostles" that divine revelation has a two distinct phases or epochs.⁵⁵ Revelation in Jewish thought and early Christian thought was ALWAYS accompanied by a finalized written covenantal revelation.⁵⁶ The phrase "commandments of the Lord" is a phrase that is used within the Old Testament and almost always refers to written texts of the Old Testament scriptures. Why does this matter? Because here, in [2 Peter](#), the author affirms that "the commandments of the Lord" are from the apostles which implies the apostle's writings be on equal footing to those of the prophets. This kind of bi-covenantal structure happens in other New Testament writings such as [2 Corinthians 3:6](#) and [Hebrews 2:2-3](#).

¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.
[Ephesians 2:18-21 \(ESV\)](#)

The Apostles' insistence that their letters be read publicly to all the people in the churches logically implies that their letters were classified as scripture, divine revelation, on equal standing with the Old Testament writings.

The fact is that these passages reveal the idea that the early churches had collections of writings from the Apostles circulating among them, even at this time in the 1st Century. Even more the very fact that the apostles writings were being read alongside the prophets shows an emerging "canon consciousness" of a set of sacred books.

⁵⁴ Harry Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), pg. 206

⁵⁵ Very good analysis on this can be found in Michael Kruger's work *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books*, pg. 207-209

⁵⁶ Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, pg. 160-194 – This chapter lays out a textual and historical overview of the fact that Jewish and early Christian thinking of the idea of revelation was covenantal, redemptive, and written canonical texts. Tremendously detailed work that I highly recommend! For specific analysis of the [2 Peter](#) passage consider pgs. 207-209

- b. **THE APOSTLES WRITINGS EQUATED AS SCRIPTURE:** There is also evidence within the New Testament that the New Testament writings were already being considered AS SCRIPTURE literally in the lifetime of the Apostles:

¹⁴Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. ¹⁵And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶as 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 3:14-16 (ESV)

In this portion of Scripture Peter says that Paul's writings (the guy who wrote two-thirds of the New Testament books) were regarded as "scripture." In short, Peter was *equating* Paul's writings to the Old Testament Scriptures which were considered holy divinely inspired writings from God. It is also important to understand that 2 Peter is dated to around 64-67 A.D.⁵⁷ Those scholars who are more liberal affirm 2 Peter is a pseudo-writing still date it to roughly 80-90 A.D.⁵⁸

Also consider 1 Timothy,

¹⁵For some have already strayed after Satan. ¹⁶If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows.

¹⁷Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."

1 Timothy 3:15-18 (ESV)

Now this is an amazing portion of Scripture. Why you ask? Because in it Paul quotes from the Old Testament verse **Deuteronomy 25:4** when he says "*You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,*" and from the New Testament verse **Luke 10:17** when he says, "*The laborer is worthy of his wages.*" He prefaces these quotes by saying "For the Scripture says." This shows that Paul affirms that Luke's Gospel is holy divinely inspired Scripture just as the Old Testament books were divinely inspired.

- c. **THE APOSTLES AFFIRMING OR EQUATING THEIR WRITINGS AS SCRIPTURE:** The apostles themselves spoke of their writings as scripture. Consider:

¹³But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. ¹⁴To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

1 Thessalonians 2:13-15 (ESV)

And again,

³⁷If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. ³⁸If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

1 Corinthians 14:37-38 (ESV)

⁵⁷ ESV Study Bible introduction on 2 Peter, pg. 2415

⁵⁸ Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, pg. 205

- **EVIDENCE IN EXTRA-BIBLICAL SOURCES:**⁵⁹ There is a period of Church History known as the “Patristic Period” or “Early Church Fathers” period. This was a time of theological, philosophical, and apologetical reflection and clarification of the major ideas and teachings within Christianity comparable to Greco-Roman philosophy and Jewish teachings. This period runs from roughly the year 100 A.D. to 700 A.D. Let us do a brief survey of some of the core figures.

The need to finalize the authoritative literary limits of the New Testament books was happening for several reasons.⁶⁰

- Because the Apostles were dying out
- Other non-apostolic books were circulating in churches
- Heretical texts and movements emerged

Because of these and other reasons the Church began the process to formalizing the lists.

- a. **Origen of Alexandria (c. 184-254 A.D.)** Another canonical list comes from Origen, a Church Father who lived during the third century A.D. in Alexandria, Egypt. In his “Homilies on Joshua” he compares the New Testament authors with the trumpets of Christ.⁶¹ He says in this work:

So too our Lord Jesus Christ...sent his apostles as priests carrying well-wrought trumpets. First Matthew sounded the priestly trumpet in his Gospel, Mark also, and Luke, and John, each gave forth a strain on their priestly trumpets. Peter moreover sounds with the two trumpets of his Epistles; James also and Jude. Still the number is incomplete, and John gives forth the trumpet sound through his Epistles [and Apocalypse]; and Luke while describing the deeds of the apostles. Latest of all, moreover, that one comes who said, “I think that God has set us forth as the apostles last of all” (1 Cor 4:9 Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)), and thundering on the fourteen trumpets of his Epistles he threw down, even to their very foundations, the wall of Jericho, that is to say, all the instruments of idolatry and the dogmas of the philosophers.⁶²

What is so interesting from this passage is that Origen, living over a 150 years before the Council of Nicaea is discussing a list of canonical books that Christians believe in. This list is identical to our 27 books we presently have today. He even later mentions the authors of these books, which are identical to the authorship scholars ascribe today. He stated,

“Isaac, therefore, digs also new wells, nay rather Isaac’s servants dig them. Isaac’s servants are Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; his servants are Peter, James, Jude; the apostle Paul is his servant. These all dig the wells of the New Testament.”⁶³

Before there ever was an Athanasius there were canonical lists of the books that made up the New Testament.

But does this go back further? Yes!

- b. **Irenaeus (c. 130-202 A.D.)** was a Greek bishop, born in Smyrna (now Izmir in modern day Turkey), who became the lead church official of Lyon, a region of southern France. He knew Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John.

⁵⁹ For more detail on the important extra-biblical sources on the subject of canonization consider looking into: Michael Kruger, *The Question of Canon*, pg. 155-203

⁶⁰ You can read about this in N.T. Wright & Michael Bird’s book *The New Testament in it’s World*(2019), pg. 866-875

⁶¹ Lightfoot, *ibid.* pg. 158

⁶² Hom. Josh. 7.1, as cited in Metzger, *The New Testament Canon*, 139.

⁶³ Hom. Gen. 13.2.

In his famous work *“Against Heresies”* (c. 180 A.D.) Irenaeus defended Christianity against the heresy of Gnosticism. In this work we get insights into Christians views of a biblical canon of sacred books. He actually alludes to a four-fold division of Gospels saying,

There are four gospels and only four, neither more nor less: four like the points of the compass, four like the chief directions of the wind. The Church, spread all over the world, has in the gospels four pillars and four winds blowing wherever people live. These four gospels are in actual fact one single Gospel, a fourfold Gospel inspired by the one Spirit, a Gospel which has four aspects representing the work of the Son of God.

Not only did he affirm the fourfold division of the Gospels, he also identified in his writings the vast majority of the New Testament books as the central books understood and divinely canonical by Christian communities. The books he cited included: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 and 2 John, Jude, and Revelation. **Those not directly mentioned are Philemon and 3 John.**

- c. **The Muratorian Canon (c. 170-180 A.D.)** is regarded as the earliest known attempt at a complete canonical list of New Testament books. It is a manuscript discovered by the Italian historian and priest *Ludovico Antonio Muratori* (1672–1750), in the mid 1700’s, in Milan, northern Italy. This manuscript itself dates to roughly the 600s A.D. but its contents are copied from earlier sources dating to the 170s-180s A.D.⁶⁴

The fragment says the following,

... at which nevertheless he was present, and so he placed [them in his narrative]. The third book of the Gospel is that according to Luke. Luke, the well-known physician, after the ascension of Christ, when Paul had taken with him as one zealous for the law, composed it in his own name, according to [the general] belief. Yet he himself had not seen the Lord in the flesh; and therefore, as he was able to ascertain events, so indeed he begins to tell the story from the birth of John. The fourth of the Gospels is that of John, [one] of the disciples. To his fellow disciples and bishops, who had been urging him [to write], he said, ‘Fast with me from today to three days, and what will be revealed to each one let us tell it to one another.’ In the same night it was revealed to Andrew, [one] of the apostles, that John should write down all things in his own name while all of them should review it. And so, though various elements may be taught in the individual books of the Gospels, nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith of believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things have been declared in **all [the Gospels]**: concerning the nativity, concerning the passion, concerning the resurrection, concerning life with his disciples, and concerning his twofold coming; the first in lowliness when he was despised, which has taken place, the second glorious in royal power, which is still in the future. What marvel is it then, if John so consistently mentions these particular points also in his Epistles, saying about himself, ‘What we have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears and our hands have handled, these things we have written to you? For in this way he professes [himself] to be not only an eye-witness and hearer, but also a writer of all the marvelous deeds of the Lord, in their order. Moreover, the acts of all the apostles were written in one book. For ‘most excellent Theophilus’ Luke compiled the individual events that took place in his presence — as he plainly shows by omitting the martyrdom of Peter as well as the departure of Paul from the city [of Rome] when he journeyed to Spain. As for the **Epistles of Paul**, they themselves make clear to those desiring to understand, which ones [they are], from what place, or for what reason they were sent. First of all, to the **Corinthians**, prohibiting their heretical schisms; next, to the **Galatians**, against circumcision; then to the **Romans** he wrote at length, explaining the order (or, plan) of the Scriptures, and also that Christ is their principle

⁶⁴ Information comes from: Milne. *ibid* pg. 48; Lightfoot, *ibid* pg. 157; and <http://www.bible-researcher.com/muratorian.html>

(or, main theme). It is necessary for us to discuss these one by one, since the blessed apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predecessor John, writes by name to only seven churches in the following sequence: To the **Corinthians** first, to the **Ephesians** second, to the **Philippians** third, to the **Colossians** fourth, to the **Galatians** fifth, to the **Thessalonians** sixth, to the **Romans** seventh. It is true that he writes **once more to the Corinthians and to the Thessalonians** for the sake of admonition, yet it is clearly recognizable that there is one Church spread throughout the whole extent of the earth. For John also in the **Apocalypse**, though he writes to seven churches, nevertheless speaks to all. [Paul also wrote] out of affection and love one to **Philemon**, one to **Titus**, and **two to Timothy**; and these are held sacred in the esteem of the Church catholic for the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline. There is current also [an epistle] to the Laodiceans, [and] another to the Alexandrians, [both] forged in Paul's name to [further] the heresy of Marcion, and several others which cannot be received into the catholic Church — for it is not fitting that gall be mixed with honey. Moreover, the epistle of **Jude** and **two** of the above-mentioned (or, bearing the name of) **John** are counted (or, used) in the catholic [Church]; and [the book of] **Wisdom**, written by the friends of Solomon in his honour. We receive only the **apocalypses of John and Peter**, though some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church. But Hermas wrote the Shepherd very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the [episcopal] chair of the church of the city of Rome. And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among the Prophets, whose number is complete, or among the Apostles, for it is after [their] time. But we accept nothing whatever of Arsinoüs or Valentinus or Miltiades, who also composed a new book of psalms for Marcion, together with Basilides, the Asian founder of the Cataphrygians . . .

It is interesting to note that 22 of the 27 books of the New Testament are mentioned in this list. **The only books not listed are: Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and 3 John.** This may be due to the fact that the bottom of the manuscript is ripped off as well as the top. The point is that around 170-180 A.D. there was already a list of books considered to be part of the canon of scripture.

- d. **Theophilus of Antioch (died c. 183)** was a bishop of Antioch (southern Turkey) who wrote a work called *To Autolycus* (c. 170), which was an apologetic tract written to his pagan friend Autolycus defending Christianity's beliefs. In it he says,

“Concerning the righteousness which the law enjoined, confirmatory utterances are found both with the prophets and in the Gospels, because they all spoke inspired by one Spirit of God.”

What is interesting in this early writing is that Theophilus, a contemporary of the Muratorian Canon and Irenaeus, nonchalantly equates the Gospels in his writings to the Old Testament prophets. In other words, he equates the Gospel writings to that of scripture. But what Gospels did Theophilus mention as inspired in this text? Later on, in the text he quotes Matthew (5:28, 32, 44: 6:3), John (1:1), Luke (18:27), and gives indications of a harmonization with the Gospel of Mark.⁶⁵ Later on in his apologetic writing he cites Paul's Pastoral Epistles, Titus, 1 Timothy, and Romans as “prophetic Scriptures” and “divine words.”

- e. **Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 A.D.)** was a famous Christian theological and philosopher during the early 2nd Century A.D. (he was born in modern day Samaria and died in Rome, Italy). He wrote various theological and apologetic dialogues passionately defending the morality of the Christian life against pagans, heretics, and Jews. He was eventually denounced as subversive by the Roman authorities and was put to death. In one of his notable writings, called the 1st Apology (c. 155-157 A.D.), which was addressed to the Roman Emperor Antonius Pius to convince him to end persecution of Christians, Justin wrote about early church services of Christians. In one section he says,

⁶⁵ For more detail on this point read Michael Kruger, *The Question of Canon* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), pp. 164-166

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.⁶⁶

- f. **Marcion of Sinope (c. 85-160 A.D.)** was a bishop of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) who went to Rome and was later excommunicated for his views of believing there were two gods depicted in the Bible – the Old Testament God and the New Testament God. Without getting into his theology what is interesting is that Marcion and his sect created a canonical list of books they believe be acceptable and those that were not as early as 130-140 A.D. He was a radical who accepted Paul as the only “uncorrupted” apostle, and so accepted only the Pauline epistles. He wrote the Gospel, which was a corruption of Luke, and placed at the front what he considered the Pauline canon: Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Laodiceans (which was the name he gave to Ephesians; see Metzger, 2000, p. 532), Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. Marcion also subjected these epistles to extensive editing; he took out anything that did not conform to what he thought was Paul’s “doctrine” (Bruce, 1988, pp. 134-141). Some have held that Marcion left the book of Hebrews out of his canon because of its close association to the Old Testament (Aland and Aland, 1981, p. 49).
- g. **The Apostolic Fathers (c. 80-180)**⁶⁷ were a group of early Christian leaders, thinkers, and writers who lived during and shortly after the lifetime of the original 12 Apostles. They are the earliest extra-biblical writers about the history, beliefs, and practices of early 1st and 2nd Century Christianity.

These men wrote various tracts and treatises denouncing cultic and pagan practices and philosophies of the time, such as Gnosticism and Docetism. Their writings circulated across the early churches, were read, and used in some church services. The key figures that make up this group would be the following:⁶⁸

- **Clement of Rome (c. 1st Century-101 A.D.):** Was bishop of Rome (modern-day central Italy) who wrote several letters to Christians with the purpose to encourage them in the faith and affirm the authority of the clergy. He was an evangelist coworker with the Apostle Paul (actually being mentioned in Philippians 4:3) and was said to have been consecrated to lead Christians in Rome by the Apostle Peter before his death. One of his letters, “*The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*” (written c. 96 A.D.), is the earliest Christian document outside of the New Testament. This letter was so important to the Corinthian church that they read it in service alongside the other NT Scriptures.

In this work Clement cites, quotes, and/or alludes to Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Galatians, Titus, and Hebrews. Some scholars argue that all of Paul’s letters are somehow mentioned by Clement except for 1 & 2 Thessalonians and Philemon. Whatever the exact extent of the collection of NT texts Clement had, the fact is a vast majority of the New Testament is used by him, while he is writing in the 90s A.D., and his use is in a high-authoritative scriptural way. In other words, he carefully distinguishes his words from the Apostles, revealing a clear “canon-consciousness” of NT scripture. As Clement said in his letter,

“The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus the Christ was sent from God. The Christ therefore is from God and the Apostles from the Christ.”⁶⁹

⁶⁶ As quoted in Michael Kruger, *The Question of Canon*, pg. 172

⁶⁷ Go and read in more depth about these important Early Church figures: Michael Kruger, *The Question of Canon*, ibid, pg. 176-202; Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, pg. 210-225; J. Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity* (Colorado Springs, CO: 2013), pg 216-230; <http://www.ntcanon.org/authorities.shtml>; <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/churchfathers.html>

⁶⁸ Information on the Apostolic Fathers comes from Michael Kruger, *The Questions of Canon*, pg. 176-199

⁶⁹ 1 Clement 42:1-2

- **Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-108 A.D.):** Was bishop of Antioch (modern-day southern Turkey) who wrote various tracts and letters to the early Christian churches, focusing his efforts on defending Christianity against heretical and theological threats. A total of seven of those letters exist today. He personally knew the Apostle Paul and the Apostle John whom he was discipled under. He was eventually martyred c. 108 A.D. when he was thrown to wild animals for teaching Christianity. His very early letters reveal his intimate relations with many of the New Testament books, either directly through citation, quotation, allusion, or paraphrasing – this would include but not limited to the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John, as well as many of Paul’s epistles, including Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Galatians, 1 & 2 Timothy. Again, just understand, I am listing the books that we know are used by Ignatius, it doesn’t mean this is an exhaustive list of NT books he was aware of.
- **Papias of Hierapolis (c. 60-155 A.D.):** Was bishop of Hierapolis (modern-day southwest Turkey) who wrote roughly around the 120s A.D. The historical records reveal that Papias personally knew Polycarp, was an eyewitness to the preaching of the Apostle John, knew the daughters of Philip the Evangelist mentioned in Acts 21:8-9, and affirms that his information on the authentication of the New Testament writings he received (which would include explicitly the four Gospels, 1 John, 1 Peter, Revelation, & most of Paul’s epistles) actually came directly from “John the Elder” (Apostle John).
- **Polycarp (c. 69-155 A.D.):** Was bishop of Smyrna (modern-day western coast of Turkey) who wrote to the Christians in Philippi to encourage them to stand fast through persecution and against heretical teachings. The historical records reveal that Polycarp was converted from paganism to Christianity by the preaching of the eyewitness apostles. He became a personal disciple of the Apostle John and was very good friends with Ignatius of Antioch. In his writings he quotes, cites, or alludes to fourteen to sixteen New Testament books, including the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, John as well as Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians.
- **Barnabas of Alexandria (c. 70-131 A.D.):** Was a church leader in Alexandria (modern-day Egypt). We are not for sure exactly who this man was. What we do know is he wrote a work known today as “The Epistle of Barnabas” (written somewhere around 70–132 A.D., and some try and pinpoint it around 96-100 A.D.). Some Early Fathers of the Church ascribed the letter to Barnabas who is mentioned in Book of Acts, but most scholars today generally attributed the work to an unknown early Christian teacher, perhaps by the same name. Regardless the early dating of this work places it within the Apostolic Father’s tradition. In his letter the Gospel of Matthew is cited and alluded to in a high authoritative scriptural way, equating it to the level of Old Testament divine scripture. This again goes to affirm that very early on Christians were aware of a written New Testament, quoted it, and affirmed it as divine revelation on par with the Old Testament.
- **The Didache (c. 80-120 A.D.):** Also known as the “Teaching of the Twelve Apostles” was an early Christian manual of church practices, dealing with catechism, Christian ethics, church organization, and rituals such as baptism and the Lords Supper. Didache literally means It was written sometime in the First Century A.D., most scholars place it to around 100 A.D. We also know that the author of the Epistle of Barnabas was aware of this document because they directly quote it. In the Didache the author quotes the commandments of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount found in the Gospel of Matthew. What is interesting is the author then goes on to say,

“Do not abandon the commandments of the Lord, but guard what you have received, neither adding to them or taking away.”⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Didache, 7.1

This statement is similar in many ways to Deuteronomy 4:2 (OT) and Revelation 22:19 (NT) both of which affirm an “inscriptional curse” upon anyone who adds or takes away from the words written. That is interesting because this is directly in conjunction to the Didache quoting Jesus’ teachings from Matthew 6:9-13 AND it is interesting because it has this sense of a closed nature to the texts. While we cannot be sure of what texts the author of the Didache had, if we couple its words with the long list of other Apostolic Father quotations of books they possessed, we begin to see a picture emerging of only a set amount of particular books considered divine – which happen to be the same list of books we have in our New Testaments today!

- **Shepherd of Hermas (c. 1st Century-155 A.D.):** Was a famous allegorical/apocalyptic writing dated to the end of the 1st Century to the first half of the 2nd Century. It detailed out a series of visions and revelations given by an angel messenger (who dressed like a shepherd) to Hermas, a Roman churchman, who was a brother of Pius I, the Bishop of Rome from 140 to 155 A.D. The work is divided into three main sections: the first section describing five visions, the second section presenting 12 mandates, and the last section composed of ten parables. Its contents cover issues such as repentance, adherence to a strict moralistic life, and hope in the face of tribulation.

This work was so well circulated and read in the West that some churches read it along with the other New Testament scriptures and some copies of the New Testament included it within its pages. That said, while it was cited by several Early Church Fathers (i.e. Irenaeus, Origen) it was not considered to be the level of “divine scripture” in the majority of them (i.e. Tertullian, Athanasius, Eusebius).

Again, each of these guys wrote various texts that circulated across the early churches. Now what is interesting among these writings is the fact that they distinguish their writings from the Apostles writings, they quote extensively AS SCRIPTURE the words of the apostles, and quote from every New Testament book. For example, if we look at just Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp (who combined lived from around 35 A.D. to 155 A.D.), they alone quoted from 25 of the 27 books of the New Testament (excluding only Jude & 2 John). The point? To quote, paraphrase, allude to, or cite something means the text your citing has to be in existence before you! This means that there is no way that the New Testament writings came into existence in the 2nd or 3rd Centuries A.D.

3. **CRITERIA OF CANONICITY:** In other words, as books circulated across the Mediterranean World, how did church communities distinguish what books were “in” or “out” or “canonical” and “non canonical”? Consider the following criteria:⁷¹

- a. **Inspiration** – 2 Tim. 3:16. Ultimately, a book’s inspiration is the test for canonicity (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- b. **Apostolicity** - Written by an apostle or someone who was with one of these eyewitnesses. 1 Corinthians 14:37; 2 Thessalonians 3:17 – sign – “distinguished from others and is known.” (Jno. 13:20); 1 Timothy 3:15 – Necessary instruction on behavior; 2 Peter 3:15-16; 1 Tim. 5:18 (Lk. 10:7) – Writings of the apostles & prophets regarded as Scripture. *Important to make sure only apostolic / prophetic writings (inspired) were received as binding upon men!! (Gal. 1:8-9; cf. 2 Ths. 3:17)

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, ²⁰ *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself*

⁷¹ This listing of criteria comes from coalescing several sources: Paul Copan, *How Do You Know You’re Not Wrong?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005) pgs. 226-230; Craig Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe the Bible?*, pg. 58-64; Paul D. Wegner, Terry L. Wilder, and Darrell L. Bock chapter “Do We Have the Right Canon?” in *In Defense of the Bible: A Comprehensive Apologetic for the Authority of Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman), ed. Steven B. Cowan and Terry L. Wilder, pg. 406-409; N.T. Wright and Michael Bird, *The New Testament in its World*, pg. 873-874

*as the chief cornerstone.*²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22 (NIV)

- c. **Internal consistency** – The gradual nature & consistent (in harmony) with other books. *Important to make sure profane, purely human writings (mind & will of men) were not received as binding upon men!! (cf. 2 Ths. 2:1-2; Matt. 24:4)
 - d. **Universality** - Not always as clear (1 Ths. 5:27; Col. 4:16). *Important that all mankind accept every book as authoritative which is inspired by God!! (cf. 2 Pet. 3:16 – “all” & “rest of Scripture” to be respected & obeyed).
4. **THE FINALIZED PROCESS OF CANONIZATION:** The first formal holistic lists that we receive of universally accepted books come in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries A.D. Realize, that our brief survey above has already made it clear that a “canon consciousness” already existed in the New Testament, and lists of books were already circulating and considered to be “scripture” or “God’s Words” existed from as early as the late 1st Century to the early 2nd Century. However, consider also these formal lists.
- a. **Eusebius (c. 260-339 A.D.)** was a historian of Christianity, exegete, and Christian polemicist as well as bishop of Caesarea Maritima about 314 AD. In 324 A.D. he wrote his “Ecclesiastical History” (early history of the Church) and published a list of “recognized,” “disputed,” and “heretical” books Christians had or debated.⁷² The recognized books were the Four Gospels, Acts, fourteen letters of Paul, 1 John, 1 Peter, and Revelation; the disputed books were James, Jude, 2 Peter and 2 and 3 John – but he said those books were “recognized by the majority” in his day; the rejected books were the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle of Barnabas, and the Teachings of the Apostles.⁷³
 - b. **Athanasius (296-373 A.D.)** was the Bishop of Alexandria and one of the most important theologians on Christology in the history of the church. In 367 A.D. he wrote his annual Easter letter to his churches. In this letter he detailed out the books that they as Christians understood to be “scripture” or “canonical.” It is regarded as the first official public listing of all 27 books of the New Testament.

Immediately after his list of books, Athanasius stated:

*“These are the springs of salvation...Let no one add anything to them or take anything away from them.”*⁷⁴

Strangely enough, the list of books Athanasius classified as “canonical” included all of our present New Testament books BUT not the New Testament Apocryphal works!

5. **BUT WHY SUCH A LONG TIME FOR A FORMAL UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTED LIST?:** Now someone might say, “BUT WHAT ABOUT AN OFFICIAL LIST!?! WE DON’T HAVE ONE UNTIL ATHANASIUS IN THE 300S A.D.!!” Okay, and your point? Something can be canonical, as has been defined, before it is put on an official listing. Also consider the following:
- a. **Social & Political Barriers:** For 300 years Christianity was illegal and persecuted. It isn’t like Christians in the first three centuries had the leisure of gathering together to discuss and theologize or go to church and have latte’s in the church or be picky about styles of music. They were an outlawed sect that had sporadic and sometimes systemic wide persecution. This means there is no way an official ecumenical level meeting on books of the Bible could have ever happened UNTIL around the 4th Century A.D. when Constantine ended said persecutions.

⁷² *How Do You Know You’re Not Wrong?* Pg. 223

⁷³ Lightfoot, *ibid.* pg. 159

⁷⁴ Lightfoot, *ibid.* pg. 159

Which books would you be willing to die for? The very fact that there were books deemed illegal denotes the emergence of some form of a canon.

- b. **Philosophical & Cultural Barriers:** You also must consider the linguistic, religious, and epistemic differences that existed between people during the 1st Century and onward. Greeks and Jews for example had very different categories of thought on things such as God, the soul, and sacrifice. Just consider how different Hebrews understood the word “heart” in comparison to Greeks understanding of “mind.” Likewise, Romans and Greeks differed from Jews on understandings of justice and afterlife. And Jews had had heated debates over the nature of Messiah and resurrection. My point is these differences aren’t meted out overnight through writing a letter. The meanings within the letters have to be considered, debated, dialogued, and written on more so.
- c. **Geography and Technology Barriers:** Christians in ancient times didn’t have the luxury of Bible Gateway app or a book publishing organization. There weren’t computers, there weren’t newspapers, there weren’t post offices, and there wasn’t even a printing press at the time. The only way to get a letter from one person to the other was to copy it down on clay or parchment or papyrus and then physically deliver it via horse or foot. Such a process by foot would take weeks or a minimum of a few days one way. By sail it would still take days to reach coastal cities. You also must understand that the geography limited travel far more than it does today. Highways and tunnels didn’t really exist. Mountains and lakes and rivers could be far more of a barrier than presently. Yes the Roman Empire had a network of roads and bridges and canals but these didn’t extend to every city or principality.

- C. **CANONIZATION WAS AN ORGANIC PROCESS, NOT A FORMAL PROCESS:** Church Councils did NOT pick and choose what books were “in” and what books were “out” – rather the church councils were the culmination or verification of already established New Testament canon that was affirmed by the Church for centuries. To solidify this point further, I quote several prominent 20th Century theologians and Bible scholars:

The church no more “gave us” the canon than Sir Isaac Newton “gave us” the force of gravity. God gave us gravity by the work of His creation, and similarly, He gave us the New Testament canon by inspiring the original books that make it up.

J.I. Packer

“A book first has divine authority based on its inspiration, and then attains canonicity due to its general acceptance as a divine product. No church council by its decrees can make the books of the Bible authoritative. The books of the Bible possess their own authority and indeed had this authority long before there were any councils of the church.”

Neil Lightfoot

“One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and generally apostolic authority, direct or indirect. The first ecclesiastical councils to classify the canonical books were both held in North Africa -- at Hippo Regius in 393 and at Carthage in 397 -- but what these councils did was not to impose something new upon the Christian communities but to codify what was already the general practice of those communities.”⁷⁵

F.F. Bruce

“[I]t is important to emphasize that no church council made the canon of Scripture. No church by its decrees gave to or pronounced on the books of the Bible their infallibility. The Bible owes its authority to no individual or group. The church does not control the canon, but the canon controls the church. Although divine authority was attributed to the New Testament books by the later church, this authority was not derived from the church but was inherent in the books themselves. As a child identifies its mother; the later church identified the books which it regarded as having unique authority.”⁷⁶

Neil Lightfoot

Again, I say, the Church DID NOT come up with or arbitrarily produce the canon of Scripture! The canon of Scripture was already established even before any official church council occurred. The councils simply are the proverbial cherry-on-top of the New Testament canonization process.

⁷⁵ Bruce, F.F. *New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Blacksburg, VA: Wilder Publications, 2009) p. 20

⁷⁶ Lightfoot, *ibid.* pp. 161-162

D. WHAT ABOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT APOCRYPHAL WORKS?⁷⁷

There has been much debate over the apocrypha. A few things need to be cleared up about it. The apocrypha aren't all bad.

1. **RECOGNIZED BOOKS, DISPUTED BOOKS, REJECTED BOOKS, HERETICAL BOOKS:** The historical and textual evidence we have of Early Christianity reveals there were very early collections of the New Testament books circulating across the young churches for the first three centuries of Christianity. We have already seen that there is ample evidence of extremely early, 1st and 2nd Century, evidence to suggest the NT books were already collected and set apart from other circulating texts, either heretical or otherwise. At NT scholar Paul Wegner has affirmed to aptly,

“The early church had more than two categories of writings. It was never a matter of seeing everything as either ‘inspired’ or ‘heretical’. Christian teachers recognized that there was a larger body of works that were, at least, para-canonical, useful to be read alongside the authorized body of normative Christian texts. When the church produced lists of books, the point was not so much to band everything else, but to identify the central core of works that were to be seen as ‘true, genuine, and recognized.’”⁷⁸

That said, let us briefly mention lists of books everyone agreed on, which were disputed, which were rejected, and which were deemed heretical by the vast majority of Christian communities:

- a. **RECOGNIZED BOOKS:** Books that were recognized universally as canonical with literally no dispute included:

- The Four Gospels
 - Matthew
 - Mark
 - Luke
 - John
- Acts of the Apostles
- 13 Pauline Epistles
 - Romans
 - 1 Corinthians
 - 2 Corinthians
 - Galatians
 - Ephesians
 - Philippians
 - Colossians
 - 1 Thessalonians
 - 2 Thessalonians
 - 1 Timothy
 - 2 Timothy
 - Titus
 - Philemon
- 1 John
- 1 Peter

⁷⁷ To read more in-depth analysis on the apocryphal and pseudepigraphic NT writings, consider looking at: Paul Wegner et al., *ibid*, pg. 413-427; Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, pg. 275-281; <http://www.ntcanon.org/writings.shtml>; <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/apocrypha.html>

⁷⁸ N.T. Wright & Michael Bird, *ibid*, pg. 873

b. **DISPUTED BOOKS:** Books that are in our Bible's today that had some debate around them were:

- 2 John
- 3 John
- 2 Peter
- Jude
- James
- Hebrews
- Revelation

Why was there debate around these books? Some of the overarching reasons for debating these books were:

- (a) **Authorship Difficulties** – Could it be confirmed who precisely the author was of the work? (i.e. Hebrews)
- (b) **Interpretation Difficulties** – How do we understand the theological message of the work considering the larger corpus of undisputed NT texts? (i.e. James & Revelation)
- (c) **Literary Stylization Difficulties** – How does one consider the literary and linguistic styles – their personal rather than corporate nature and brevity – of these books considering the broader corpus of NT texts? (i.e. 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude)

Despite these difficulties these works were cited as scripture by many of the earliest Christian writings and were put into canonical lists.

c. **REJECTED BOOKS:** Books that are not in our Bibles but were read alongside the scriptures, and some, for a time, believed them to be authentic were:

- Gospel of the Hebrews
- Gospel of the Egyptians
- Acts of Paul
- Acts of Peter
- 3 Corinthians
- Letter to the Laodiceans
- Apocalypse of Peter
- Shepherd of Hermas
- Didache
- 1 & 2 Clement
- Letter of Barnabas

We cannot go into the details of each one of these works, but the most notable in this collection would be: Didache, Shepherd of Hermas, and the Apocalypse of Peter.

d. **HERETICAL BOOKS:** These were books that were not included in any canonical lists of Early Christianity and were rejected by the overwhelming amount of Christian communities. However, because of social media and documentaries on “The Lost Books of the Bible” and other foolishness they become popularized along with the myth of the politicization of the canonization of the New Testament. There are several of these books but the most notable include books like the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Matthias, the Acts of Andrew, and the Acts of John. We cannot go into each one of these for times sake, but consider at least two of the most popular:

- **Gospel of Thomas (c. 140-170 A.D.)** is without question the most famous, and I would say infamous, extra-canonical gospels in existence. It is a Coptic manuscript discovered in 1945 at Nag Hammadi in Egypt and that contains roughly 114 esoteric and cryptic sayings of Jesus. It is difficult to precisely date this manuscript, some scholars date it to the late part of the 1st Century A.D., others put it in the late 2nd Century. Most scholars place it in the middle to late part of the Second Century A.D. (c. 140-170 A.D.). If such consensus holds then this alone discredits it for the simple fact that it is a pseudepigraphal work that was not even written by the Apostle Thomas, which is supposedly is from.

Furthermore, there are serious historical and theological problems with it. It has heavy Gnostic tendencies (teaching Jesus wasn't really divine and that He taught secret knowledge), it is never mentioned in any canonical lists, is not found in any New Testament manuscript collections, and was often condemned by many of the early Church fathers.

- **Gospel of Peter (c. 150 A.D.)** is another well-known apocryphal gospel. It is a pseudepigraphal work that purports to be written by the Apostle Peter but wasn't on the scene until the first half of the Second Century. Content wise it contains 60 verses in narrative style mainly focused upon the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Just like the Gospel of Thomas it appears to have Gnostic theological tendencies, depicting Jesus as super-human, not feeling pain during death, and ascending from upon the cross into heaven. While a few churches read this gospel in their congregations and a few church fathers quoted from it was never on any canonical lists of the early church, was never debated as being canonical, and was summarily rejected by Eusebius. It has a talking cross, a giant resurrected Jesus, eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection, anti-Jewish tendencies and much more. It shows that it has serious flaws with it and is not based off of accurate testimony of historical witness.

These books were ultimately rejected by the larger bodies of Christian communities not necessarily because they were heretical in nature but because they had no legitimate claim to apostolicity.⁷⁹ Simply put, they were not old enough. None of them could be traced back to the 1st Century of the Apostolic Age. They were written during the 2nd Century (100s A.D.) by second and third generation Christians. While they were

2. **UNDERSTANDING WHY THESE DIFFERENT BOOKS AREN'T IN OUR BIBLES:** The fact remains that none of these works were penned by the original biblical authors; because most of these writings were written either 30, 50, 100 or 300 years after the authors!! Most of these works are filled with myths, legends and fictional stories and furthermore are plagued with historical inaccuracies and contradictions.

Just like with the Old Testament Apocryphal books, the New Testament Apocrypha has serious flaws and can thus not be considered Scripture. In fact, the Apocrypha books (both Old and New) were never accepted as Scripture by the Church until over a thousand years after Jesus and the Apostles! It was not until the Protestant Reformation that there was a move to include the Apocrypha books into the canon of Scripture.

The reason there was a move towards including the Apocryphal books into the canon is not because of the overwhelming internal evidence confirming their divine inspiration but because those books promoted the theological and political agenda of the Catholic Church that was facing massive schisms internally during the mid-1500s. You see, many of the Apocryphal writings affirm doctrines and theology that promoted the authority of the Catholic Church and undermined the Protestant position. For instance, the Apocryphal works affirm prayer for the dead; they affirm the use of indulgences; they promote salvation by works and so forth –

⁷⁹ Paul Wegner et.al., *ibid*, pg. 412

all of these theological ideas were promoted by the Catholic Church and opposed by the Protestant churches. And it was at the council of Trent in the mid-1500s that the Catholic Church reintroduced the Apocrypha back into Scripture and decided to elevate those writings as being equally authoritative to the Scriptures that we have today. That's where the Apocrypha came from. Even Athanasius, the Great Church Father of orthodoxy and Bishop of Alexandria, in his 39th Festal Letter (367 A.D.) also condemned the Apocrypha works as un-canonical.⁸⁰

3. **THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE DIVERSITY ARGUMENT OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY:** Do you notice what the argument is from skeptics like Eichenwald, Brown, and Ehrman? They say that BECAUSE early Christianity had disagreement over their sacred books, because all the books were not known by everyone right away, that somehow that proves there was no true Christianity and that the canon is a human political issue. It's a diversity argument saying that because there is diversity or disagreement, there is no truth. But this doesn't work! To answer this silly objection, I am going to quote Michael Kruger extensively on this point. This will be a lengthy quotation, but it is an extremely effective one:

"We are supposed to believe that the canon is composed of books that reflect the preferences of the "theological winners" . . . But there is a problem here. If the current form of the canon includes the preferred books of the theological winners and thereby represents a loss of great diversity, how, at the same time, can one claim that the canon is composed of contradictory books that reflect great diversity? If the 'winners' determined the canon, then why would they pick books from various and contradictory theological camps? One cannot argue that the canon is the 'invention' of the pro-orthodox designed to suppress the opposition and then turn around and argue that the canon is a cacophony of diverse theological viewpoints that stand in opposition."⁸¹

Kruger goes on to candidly affirm,

"If these books are really from God, it is argued, then why did it take the church so long to recognize them? And if the Spirit was really at work in the church, they why was there so much disagreement over them?.... The tumultuous history of the canon, then, has led critics to argue that the final consensus of the church cannot be the result of the Spirit's work, but must be the result of some theological faction imposing its preferred books on the rest of the church. . . . [But what] should we expect the development of the canon to be like?... [The assumption in this is] that we can only believe we have the writings God intended if there are very few (if any) dissenters and there is virtually universal agreement on all twenty-seven canonical books. . . . But how does the existence of competing truth claims in early Christianity remove the 'normative relevance' of the canon? Why does the existence of heretical groups mean that there can be no orthodox group?... The reason [for this kind of argument] is that [the critics] have quietly slipped a foundational assumption into the debate, namely, that the existence of diversity and disagreement is contrary to what we would expect if these twenty-seven books are really given by God. But that is the very issue in question. Such an assumption is directly rejected [when we consider the fact that:] (1) The Scriptures warn of false teaching (and false teachers), (2) there are spiritual forces opposing the church, (3) people often resist the Spirit by their sin and disobedience, (4) not all groups who claim to be the [church] are really part of it. . . . In addition to all these factors, the most critical issue is that God chose to deliver his canonical books to his church through the normal historical channels. Given that the twenty-seven canonical books were not lowered down from heaven in final form, but written by a variety of different authors, in a variety of different time periods, and in a variety of different geographical locations, we can expect that there would be an inevitable delay between the time a book was known and accepted in one portion of the empire as opposed to another. Such a delay would have eventually led to some disagreements and discussions over various books. If God chose to deliver his books in real time and history, then such a scenario would be inevitable and natural."⁸²

⁸⁰ <http://www.ntcanon.org/Athanasius.shtml>

⁸¹ Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, pg. 146

⁸² Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, pg. 198-199

E. BUT HOW ACCURATE IS THE TRANSMISSION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS?⁸³

Bart D. Ehrman, one of today's most popular N.T. textual critics today has said in his best-selling book *Misquoting Jesus* (2005):

"We don't have the originals [of the New Testament writings]! We have only error-ridden copies, and the vast majority of these are centuries removed from the originals and different from them, evidently, in thousands of ways."⁸⁴

He goes on to speak of the inaccuracies (variants) that exist between all the New Testament manuscripts,

"Scholars differ significantly in their estimates—some say there are 200,000 variants known, some say 300,000, some say 400,000 or more. We do not know for sure because, despite impressive developments in computer technology, no one has yet been able to count them all. Perhaps, as I indicated earlier, it is best simply to leave the matter in comparative terms. There are more variations among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament."⁸⁵

What Ehrman is bringing up is a very important point on the road of canonicity we have been traveling. This point isn't about the number of books that are part of the Bible, it isn't about the genre of the books, and it isn't about the historical dating of the books. The issue is rather one of transmission. Ehrman is arguing that the transmission of the original New Testament books is wholly corrupted.

So, is what Ehrman says true? Is the Bible filled with discrepancies and irreconcilable contradictions? Well, firstly it is important you know that none of the original manuscripts of the New Testament still exist. We do not have the original penned writings of Peter or Paul or John. Does that mean we are hopeless? Not at all!

What this brings up is the need for us to discuss the process of textual transmission of our Bible or **TEXTUAL CRITICISM**, which, if you recall from our study of the OLD TESTAMENT, is **a meticulous process of rebuilding the original words of ancient texts where no originals exist.**

Remember we have already done this with the OLD TESTAMENT writings. The process is the same with the New Testament.

If you recall, textual criticism, in layman terms, involves a process of analysis and reconstruction to "get back" to the original writing that you do not physically have. This process involves considering the following (and actually many more complicated) points:

1. **NUMBER OF COPIES:** you must look at the number of copies available. The more manuscripts available the better you can see how the text is "evolving" over time.
2. **TIME GAP:** you must look at the distance between those copies from each other and the original. The greater the distance between the original writing and the first copies of that writing, the greater chances of possible corruption and error.
3. **DISCREPANCIES:** You must look at the variations and similarities between those copies. The more differences between copies the less sure you can be of the original text.

Doing textual criticism is a long and arduous process but it literally allows historians to reconstruct historical writings and events to high degrees of accuracy that do not exist in their original physical states today. This is done in Egyptologist, Assyriologist, and Greco-Roman studies respectfully – actually all historical fields.

So, if we were to put textual criticism to the test of the New Testament what do we see in regards to their transmission? Let us answer this by considering the **NUMBER OF MANUSCRIPTS**, **THE TIME GAP**, and the **LEVEL OF DISCREPANCIES**.

⁸³ I recommend a few resources to understand the textual transmission of the New Testament in more detail: Daniel B. Wallace's chapter "Has the Old Testament Text Been Hopelessly Corrupted?" in *In Defense of the Bible: A Comprehensive Apologetic for the Authority of Scripture*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman), ed. Steven B. Cowan and Terry L. Wilder, pg. 139-164; Paul Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 1999), pg. 207-234; Joseph Holden & Norman Geisler, *The Popular Handbook of Archeology and the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013), pg. 99-130

⁸⁴ Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus—The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, first paperback edition (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), pg. 5

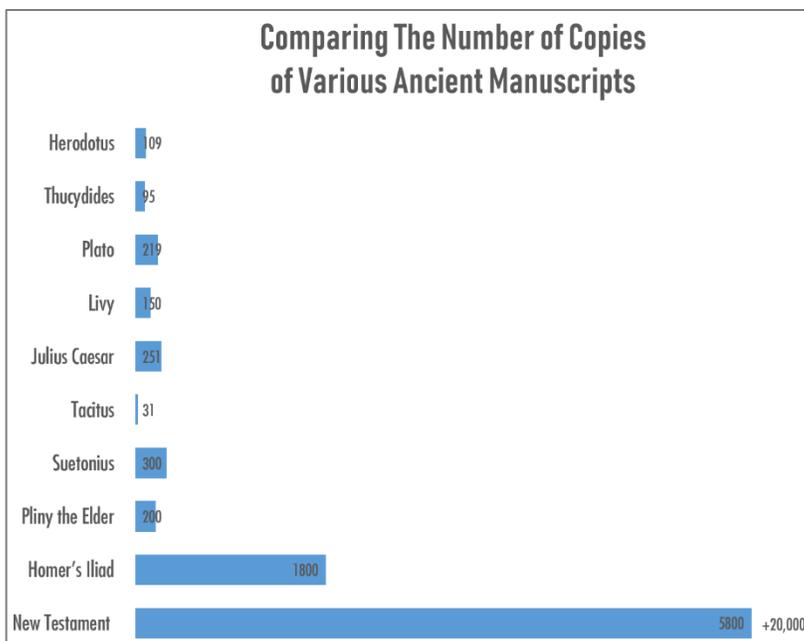
⁸⁵ Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, pg. 7

1. THE NUMBER OF NT MANUSCRIPTS:⁸⁶

If we were to compare the New Testament to the topmost important ancient writings we would find that the New Testament outshines all the competition.

There are more than 5,800 Greek New Testament manuscripts in existence today, ranging in dates from the 2nd Century to the 16th Century. On top of this there are over 20,000 handwritten copies of the New Testament in other languages dating around the same time – including Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Gothic, and Arabic.⁸⁷

On top of this if all of these were destroyed, we could reconstruct the entire New Testament just off of the quotations from sermons, tracts, commentaries and articles written by the Early Church Fathers – there are over a million quotations from the New Testament from these men.⁸⁸

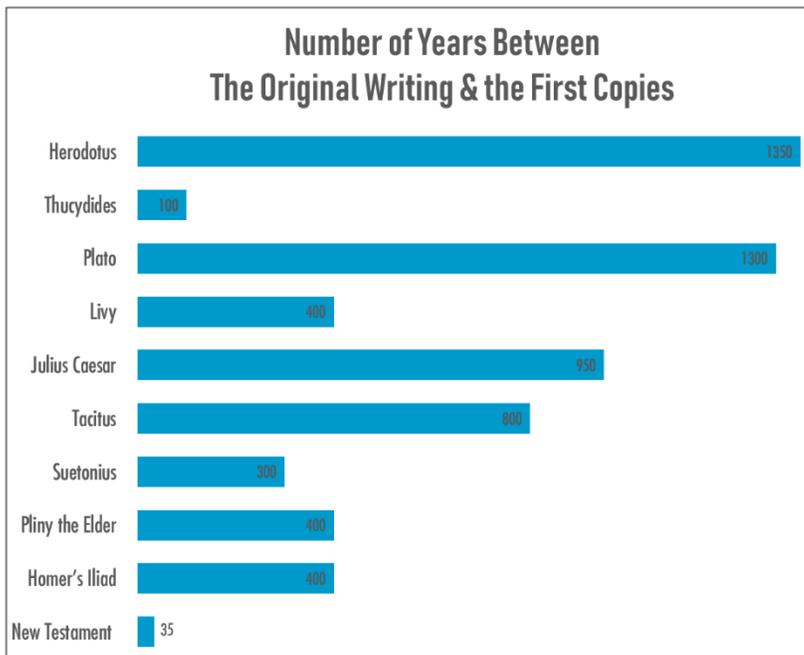


As one author has put it, the New Testament suffers from and embarrassment of riches.

2. THE NUMBER OF YEARS BETWEEN THE AUTOGRAPHS & THE FIRST COPIES:

Now let us consider time gap. Remember that the shorter the distance there is between the first copies of a document and the original autograph the smaller the chance of error or corruption seeping into a text.

First, consider other ancient texts. The Greek historian Herodotus, for example, who is considered the “Father of History,” and from whom we gain information about Athens, Sparta, Greek civilization, the Persian Wars, and Alexander the Great dates to about 1,350 years between when he wrote his histories and the actual copies we have of his histories. Another example would be the Roman historian Tacitus, from whom we get much of our information about the early Caesar’s and Roman History, is dated to about 800 years after the time he actually wrote.



⁸⁶ The manuscript and time-gap charts are composited from various sources: Holden and Geisler, pg. 129; Paul Wegner, ibid, pg. 235; Daniel B. Wallace’s article in *In Defense of the Bible*, ibid, pg. 150-151. However it must be noted that some of the bibliographical information in modern books are dated! I recommend considering these two online articles: <https://www.equip.org/article/the-bibliographical-test-updated/> and <https://www.josh.org/wp-content/uploads/Bibliographical-Test-Update-08.13.14.pdf> to get a sense of updated numbers for ancient literature manuscript numbers.

⁸⁷ Understanding Scripture Wayne Grudem et.al., pg. 112; Holden and Geisler, pg. 122; Can We Still, pg. 16-17; Daniel B. Wallace’s chapter in *In Defense of the Bible*, pg. 139-164

⁸⁸ Understanding Scripture, pg. 113

But what about the New Testament? If you remember we said that the New Testament has roughly 5,800 manuscripts. Of that total it is true that 80-85% come after the year 1,000 A.D. which is disheartening at first blush BUT there is more when you investigate it in more detail. Of the NT manuscripts before the year 1,000 A.D. around 12 of them come from the 100s A.D., about 64 come from the 200s A.D., and around 48 hail from the 300s A.D.⁸⁹ That would mean there is a total of 124 manuscripts within the first 300 years of Christianity. As Daniel B. Wallace, professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary and the founder and executive director of the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts has said on this point,

“[Although the] 124 manuscripts within 300 years of composition...are fragmentary...collectively, the whole New Testament text is found in them multiple times. And even within 125 years of the completion of the New Testament, the extant manuscripts include 49 percent of all verses.”

“It may be helpful to put these numbers into perspective. If we are comparing the same time period—300 years after composition—the average classical author has no literary remains at all. But if we compare all the manuscripts of a particular classical author, regardless of when they were written, the total would still average less than twenty, and usually less than a dozen—and they would all be coming much more than three centuries later. There are, in fact, three times as many manuscripts of the New Testament within two hundred years of its composition as there are of the average classical author’s work within two thousand years of its composition. Thus, to claim that we have ‘scarcely any’ early copies of the New Testament is hardly an accurate representation of the facts.”⁹⁰

BUT we can get more specific still. The earliest undisputed manuscript of a New Testament text is the *John Rylands Papyri* (P52) which comes from a codex (an early form of a book instead of a scroll). On the front side are seven lines from the John 18:31–33 and on the back verses 37–38 of the same chapter. It is dated to c. 125-130 A.D.⁹¹ This is an astounding find. The Gospel of John is the last of the Gospels to be composed and this copy of the last gospel dates to within 30-40 years of the Apostolic Age, when the apostles were actually alive and writing. Moreover, it is important to realize that this manuscript was found in Egypt, but the Gospel of John was composed in Ephesus, which is on the coast of western Turkey. This proves that the Gospel of John was already copied and widely circulated in the early second century A.D. (early 100s A.D.).

The earliest complete book of the New Testament is the *Bodmer Papyri*, which is almost the entirety of the Gospel of John, is dated to around 200 A.D., while the oldest surviving completed Greek New Testament is *Codex Sinaiticus* which is dated to c. 350 A.D.⁹²

It is also very important to note we possess tens of thousands of quotations of the New Testament from the Early Church Fathers (which span from the Apostolic Age (1st Century) to the Fourth Century (300s A.D.). In totality they there are more than 36,200 quotations of Scripture by these individuals which means we could reconstruct THE ENTIRE NEW TESTAMENT save for a few verses.⁹³ Consider some of these:

- Justin Martyr (100-165 A.D.) quoted the New Testament some 330 times
- Irenaeus (130-202 A.D.) quoted the New Testament some 1,819 times
- Clement of Alexandria (150-215 A.D.) quoted the New Testament some 2,406 times
- Tertullian (155-220 A.D.) quoted the New Testament some 7,258 times
- Origen (184-253 A.D.) quoted the New Testament some 17,922 times
- Hippolytus (170-235 A.D.) quoted the New Testament some 1,378 times
- Eusebius (263-339 A.D.) quoted the New Testament some 5,176 times⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Daniel B. Wallace’s article in *In Defense of the Bible*, *ibid*, pg. 147

⁹⁰ Daniel B. Wallace’s article in *In Defense of the Bible*, *ibid*, pg. 147-148

⁹¹ <https://biblearchaeologyreport.com/2019/02/15/the-earliest-new-testament-manuscripts/>

⁹² Holden & Geisler, *ibid*, pg. 114; Paul Wegner, *ibid*, pg. 237-238

⁹³ Holden & Geisler, *ibid*, pg. 124

⁹⁴ Numbers come from the charts in Holden & Geisler, *ibid*, pg. 125

That comes to a grand total of 36,289 quotations. However, if you remember, the earliest of earliest Church Fathers were known as the Apostolic Fathers. These guys were contemporaries of or knew the Apostles, living from the 1st Century to roughly 150 A.D. If you remember we discussed how these men actually confirmed the early dating of the New Testament Canon. Here let me simply list in shortened form again what books and texts they quoted from:

Pseudo-Barnabas (70-130 A.D.) cited Matthew, Mark, and Luke; *Clement of Rome* (95-97 A.D.) cited Matthew, John and 1 Corinthians; *Ignatius* (A.D. 110) referred to six of Pauls' epistles; *Polycarp* (110-150 A.D.), who was a disciple of the apostle John, quoted Romans, Galatians, and Philippians and often referred to the books of 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, and 2 John.⁹⁵ the *Shepherd of Hermas* (A.D. 115-140) cited Matthew, Mark, Acts, 1 Corinthians and several other books; the *Didache* (120-150 A.D.) referred to Matthew, Luke, 1 Corinthians, and other books; and *Papias*, companion to Polycarp, quoted John.⁹⁶

Ignatius of Antioch (circa 35-110 A.D.), who lived contemporaneously with the Apostles, among his works are citations from Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians. Clement of Rome (died circa 101 A.D.) he quoted from the Gospels, Romans and cited Ephesians, 1 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, James, and 2 Peter.⁹⁷

Also the Teaching of the Twelve, or Didache, (dated circa 100-120 A.D.) contains loose quotations of the New Testament scriptures, particularly Matthew, 1 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, and Revelations.⁹⁸

- **Clement of Rome (c. 1st Century-101 A.D.):** cited or alluded to Matthew, John and 1 Corinthians
- **Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-108 A.D.):** cited or alluded to Matthew, Luke, John, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Galatians, 1 & 2 Timothy.
- **Papias of Hierapolis (c. 60-155 A.D.):** cited or alluded to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, 1 John, 1 Peter, Revelation, & most of Paul's epistles) actually came directly from "John the Elder" (Apostle John).
- **Polycarp (c. 69-155 A.D.):** cited or alluded to fourteen to sixteen New Testament books, including the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, John as well as Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians.
- **Barnabas of Alexandria (c. 70-131 A.D.):** cited or alluded to Matthew, Mark, and Luke
- **The Didache (c. 80-120 A.D.):** cited or alluded to Matthew, Luke, 1 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, and Revelations
- **Shepherd of Hermas (c. 1st Century-155 A.D.):** cited or alluded to Matthew, Mark, Acts, 1 Corinthians and several other books

If we take just the quotes from **Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp** [who were historically, disciples of the Apostles] (who all lived from 35 A.D. – 155 A.D.), they alone quoted from 25 of the 27 books of the New Testament! (except: Jude & 2 John)

Even more, as if enough has not been given, recent studies that look at ancient libraries from the Mediterranean world have shown that manuscripts were in use anywhere from 150 to 500 years before being discarded.⁹⁹ What does this mean? It means that it is highly likely "a biblical book would most likely have been used to make countless new copies over a period of several centuries, leading to still more favorable conditions for careful preservation of its contents."¹⁰⁰ So when a skeptic like Ehrman says, "We don't even have...copies of the copies of the copies of the originals," they are wrong. This comes together when we consider that the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament come from the second century A.D. What this means is those very manuscripts are more than likely the very copies of the originals or at the least second generation copies of the originals. That is amazing!

⁹⁵ Holden & Geisler, pg. 125

⁹⁶ Geisler. *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1. pgs 463-464

⁹⁷ Holden & Geisler, pg. 125

⁹⁸ Holden and Geisler, pg. 126 & Geisler *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1. pgs 463-464

⁹⁹ Can We Will? Pg. 34

¹⁰⁰ Can We Still? Pg. 34

The fact of all this data is remarkable. The New Testament we have today has an abundance of riches. There is no other document of antiquity that has as many manuscripts, with as much external witness, and as small a window of time between when the autographs were created and the first copies are known, as the New Testament documents.

3. THE NUMBER & VIABILITY OF DISCREPANCIES AMONG THE COPIES:

Here is where it is mind blowing. As we can see, the Bible has more manuscripts and a shorter timeframe than any of the top 10 ancient pieces of literature. Now the interesting thing is that *there are literally no substantial contradictions* among the manuscripts!

If you remember the infamous skeptic scholar Bart Ehrman said all we have are copies of copies of copies of corrupted texts, that we have a tsunami of variants of our New Testament. Specifically, he said,

“[We have some] 200,000 [to] 400,000 or more [variants]... [In fact] there are more variations among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.”¹⁰¹

The Greek New Testament has approximately 138,000 words. At “400,000 variants” (just giving Ehrman the benefit of the doubt with this number) that means that for every word in the Greek New Testament there are almost three variants.¹⁰²

The problem with this is that Ehrman doesn’t tell the whole story. He doesn’t clearly define how scholars classify a variant and he doesn’t make people aware that the number of variants is tied to the number of manuscripts one possesses.

The fact is that the reason for so many variants is because we have so many manuscripts.

Because there are over roughly 25,000 N.T. manuscripts spanning 1,100 years, that means roughly 16 variants per manuscript, and only 8 variants per manuscript if the number is 200,000. As N.T. scholar Craig Blomberg has made crystal clear,

“[T]hose 400,000 variants, if there are that many, are spread across more than 25,000 manuscripts in Greek or other ancient languages. Suddenly the picture begins to look quite different. This is an average of only 16 variants per manuscript, and only 8 if the estimates of 200,000 variants is the more accurate one. Nor are the variants spread evenly across a given text; instead, they tend to cluster in places where some kind of ambiguity has stimulated them. [It has been estimated] that only 6 percent of the New Testament and 10 percent of the Old Testament contain the vast majority of these clusters.”¹⁰³

It must also be noted that Ehrman does not bother to state how variants are counted in ancient texts. He knows this as a scholar but he fails to mention it in his books!

You see the variant readings do not represent 400,000 *distinct areas* in the New Testament but rather it includes repeated offenses. You see if ONE WORD is misspelled in 3,000 manuscripts, this is counted as 3,000 errors!¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, Ehrman does not bother to let people know that of those variants noted literally 95 plus percent of them are insignificant mishaps. They consist of misspelled words and nonsense errors (i.e. slip of the pen). For example “we were horses among you” (Greek hippoi “horses” instead of epioi, “gentle,” or nepioi, “little children”) in Thessalonians 2:7 in one late manuscript.¹⁰⁵

Other variants would be copyist literary and grammatical changes, like the changes in synonyms or verbs.

¹⁰¹ Bart Ehrman quoted in *Can We Still Believe the Bible?* Craig Blomberg, (Grand Rapids, MI: BrazosPress, 2014), pg 16

¹⁰² Understanding Scripture, pg. 114

¹⁰³ Can We Still? Pg. 17

¹⁰⁴ Holden and Geisler, pg. 128

¹⁰⁵ Understanding Scripture, pg. 115

Literally only about 1% of the textual variants are classified as “meaningful” which means the variant changes the meaning of the text to some degree.¹⁰⁶ Most of these involve a word or a phrase (Ex: Romans 5:1, some manuscripts read “we have (Greek echomen) peace,” while others have “let us have (Greek echomen) peace.” The difference in the Greek is a single letter, the “e.”) but none of them change the foundational message and text of the Bible as a whole. Ehrman, knows this stuff. He even admits it,

“It would be a mistake . . . to assume that the only changes being made were by copyists with a personal stake in the wording of the text. In fact, most of the changes found in our early Christian manuscripts have nothing to do with theology or ideology. Far and away the most changes are results of mistakes, pure and simple—slips of the pen, accidental omissions, inadvertent additions, misspelled words, blunders or one sort of another.”¹⁰⁷

The scholarly consensus is that the accuracy of transmission among the NT manuscripts has been estimated at anywhere between 98.33 percent, to 99.75 percent, to 99.9 percent internal consistency from the oldest to the newest. Put another way, in the entire text of 20,000 lines of the New Testament, only 40 lines are in doubt (about 400 words), and none affects any significant doctrine.¹⁰⁸

The importance of all this is to affirm that the Bible you possess in your hand has been accurately copied down to such a staggering degree it is mind-blowing. No other ancient text, or religious text, comes close to such rigorous tests and survives.

¹⁰⁶ Understanding Scripture, pg. 116

¹⁰⁷ Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, pg. 55

¹⁰⁸ Kostenberger and Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), pg. 205.