



HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE

Step #3 – Canon (continued)

Marcion (ca. 140 A.D.), a heretic with anti-Jewish prejudice, drew up a list of Scripture in which he rejected all books not written by Paul or Luke. He edited the “Jewish” elements out, but even in this he testifies to the existence of all 27 books which we have today.

The **Muratorian Canon** (ca. 200 A.D.), probably written by a contemporary of Pius of Rome, listed all New Testament books except 2 Peter as genuine.

Irenaeus (130-202 A.D.), a disciple of Polycarp, quoted from all New Testament books except Philemon, 3 John, and Jude.

Tatian (ca. 155-170 A.D.), made a harmony of the Four Gospels, called the “Diatessaron,” which testifies that four gospels and only four were recognized among the churches.

Tertullian of Carthage (160-200 A.D.), living while the original manuscripts were still in existence, referred to the Christian Scriptures as the “New Testament.” He quotes from all New Testament books except James, 2 Peter, 2&3 John. He says that Apostles wrote Matthew and John, while “apostolic men” wrote Luke and Mark. He lists all of Paul's epistles in the order we have them. He frequently quoted Acts and ascribed it to Luke. He quoted by name 1Peter, 1John, Jude, and Revelation. He attributed Hebrews to Barnabas.

Clement of Alexandria (165-220 A.D.), quoted by Eusebius, mentioned all 27 books of the New Testament, although some were disputed. He considered Hebrews to have been written by Paul through Luke.

Origen of Alexandria (185-254 A.D.) considered the 27 books that we have as being canonical. He did not consider Hebrews to be the work of Paul, but he did consider it to be canonical and apostolic.

Eusebius of Caesarea (264-340 A.D.), the “Father of Ecclesiastical History,” studied extensively and produced a catalog that contains all 27 books of our New Testament. He lived through the Diocletian persecution, following which he was asked by the Emperor Constantine to prepare 50 Bibles. Careful copyists made these and the New Testament portion contained the 27 books that we have today,

Cyril (315-386 A.D.), Bishop of Jerusalem, accepted all of the New Testament books that we have, except for Revelation.

Athanasius (326-373 A.D.), Bishop of Alexandria, wrote to Christians of his day. He accepted the 27 books that we have as the canon of New Testament Scriptures. He also added the following warning, “These are the fountains of salvation; in these alone the doctrine of religion is taught; let no one add to them or take anything from them.”

The *Council of Carthage* (397 A.D.) officially recognized the 27 books that we have as the canonical Scriptures for the Christian Church. There were other popular writings at that time, but these were not accepted as apostolic. The purpose of the Council was not to "make books canonical," but rather to officially recognize the generally accepted 27 writings and, thus, identify the growing body of apocryphal and pseudepigraphal writings that were not generally accepted as non-canonical.

Until the invention of the side-bound *codex*, which could accommodate a collection of writings, each book of the Bible (except for short books on a single scroll) was on a separate scroll. However, from the 4th-5th centuries, codex manuscript collections exist. The *Codex Sinaiticus* (ca. 300-350 A.D.) contains all of our present New Testament (300-350 A.D.). The *Codex Alexandrinus* (ca. 400 A.D.) contains all of the New Testament, except for a few missing pages. The *Codex Vaticanus* (ca. 350-400 A.D.) contains the New Testament Matthew through Hebrews 9:14. The *Codex Ephraemi* (ca. 400 A.D.) has fragments of all NT books except for 2 Thessalonians and 2 John.

Final thoughts on the Canon. The time between originals and copies supports the Bible's validity. The Dead Sea Scrolls jumped what had been a 1,000-year gulf between pre-Christian OT manuscripts and the oldest existing copies of the OT writings (9th century A.D.), proving the tremendous accuracy of the Hebrew copyists between 100-900 A.D. As for the NT writings, one parchment scrap of the Gospel of John (P⁵²) is a Coptic (Egyptian) translation that probably was made within 30-50 years of the original gospel record. Passages can be checked against numerous manuscripts, versions (translations), and quotations in the apostolic fathers.

The early church councils did not arbitrarily "create" the canon, assert "inspiration" for books that should not have been included, or exclude some which should have made it. Apostolic writings were read in the churches (1Thessalonians 5:27), circulated between churches (Colossians 4:16) during the apostles' lifetime, and, thus, the "canon" slowly and unofficially grew as the various writings became known to more and more churches. However, spurious writings were appearing in the second century and continued to do so throughout the era of persecution (until 313 A.D.). The Councils did what Christians at large wanted – distinguish the authentic from the spurious and officially settle the issue for everyone's benefit! The "canonizing councils" (after 325 A.D.), much closer to the historic situation than we, met to officially affirm those writings long accepted by the church and exclude those which could not meet the criteria of age, apostolic authorship, and basic doctrinal harmony with accepted writings. "Authenticity" was a major concern - a writing had to be traceable to the Apostles or their close associates (especially known by churches that would have originally received a letter), it had to be in doctrinal agreement with other Scripture, and it had to have widespread and continuous use by the churches. Having done their job well, later Councils testified to the common acceptance of a NT Canon - Laodicea (363), Hippo (393), Carthage (397,419).

Are we missing any "inspired" writings? In what we call "First Corinthians," Paul refers to something he had already written to them (1Corinthian 5:9,11) and no one is sure what Paul's "letter coming from the Laodiceans" (Colossians 4:16) is. However, we can be confident that God caused "sufficient" information to be preserved so that we can know what the Apostles taught in the churches (1Corinthians 4:17; 7:17).