

THE BIBLE

HOW DID THE NEW TESTAMENT COME TO BE?

INTRODUCTION:

Why be interested in the proof of the validity of the New Testament canon? Simply put, if the twenty-seven books of the New Testament are not canonical, the New Testament is not the rule of faith and practice by which all men, in this Christian age, must walk in order to be pleasing to God; that is, in order to be saved now and eternally. If the New Testament is not God's inspired rule and standard, we have no such rule. If we have no inspired rule, and are without a divinely given standard, we would not know how to walk. Chaos and anarchy would be the order of the day. That means that any way we, as mere men, determine for ourselves would, and could, only lead to death (Prov 14:12). There would be no law to govern life and no way of determining right or wrong. There would be no way of knowing whether our thoughts, words, and deeds were pleasing to God. There would be no way of knowing that we could know God or even how to know God. Therefore, there could be no salvation through revealed faith and there could be no faith and no hope.

One writer, J. W. McGarvey, affirmed the need to find proof that the Scriptures are accurate and infallible. (*Evidences of Christianity*, 1886)

“The divine origin of the Christian religion depends for its proof on the evidence that Jesus of Nazareth is ‘the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ As He is the author of this religion, if it be proved that He is the Christ whose coming and work were predicted by the prophets of the Old Testament, and that He is the Son of God miraculously begotten, His religion is proved to be of divine origin, and to be for this reason possessed of divine authority.

But should we succeed in establishing the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and fail to show the authenticity of the writings on which we depend for a knowledge of His religion, the fact established would be of no practical value, seeing that we could not know how to secure to ourselves the blessings which the religion might offer. For this reason it is necessary to the practical value of an inquiry into the evidences of Christianity, that it furnish conclusive proof not only of the claims of Jesus, but of the authenticity of the Christian Scriptures.

Moreover, an authentic account of the Christian religion which should fall short of infallibility, would leave the mind a continual prey to doubt in regard to its exact teaching and requirements. If we have in the Christian Scriptures nothing more than an authentic account, such as wise and good but fallible men could give, we must be content, and not pretend that we have more. But our inquiry will not reach the result that is desirable unless we find proof that the Scriptures are infallible.”

Whereas the Old Testament was written over hundreds of years, the New Testament was completed within the span of fifty years, during the second half of the first century A.D. In various ways all of the books of the New Testament center upon **one person**—Jesus Christ. Some of the books tell of Jesus' life and ministry; these are called Gospels. Another, the book of Acts, tells of the birth and spread of the church, which is made up of those who believe in Jesus Christ and who meet together to worship and commemorate His death and resurrection. Still other books were written as letters, or epistles, to various people and churches. These epistles give instructions regarding matters of both doctrine and Christian living. The book of Revelation

appropriately concludes the New Testament with a message about the victory of God over His enemies and gives hope to Christians.

In order to understand where the books of the New Testament came from, we must learn about the important people and events that shaped these books.

I. The Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ:

As we have already pointed out, all of the New Testament books center upon the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the unique Son of God and the head of the church. His life and ministry made the old covenant, which is described in the Old Testament, obsolete and established the New Covenant with all believers, giving all people a way to come to God through faith in His Son.

The “beginnings” of Jesus actually go back before His birth to Mary. The apostle John describes Jesus as “the **Word**,” who has existed from the very beginning of time (John 1:1). John adds that **Jesus was with God and that He was God**. Yet John and the other New Testament writers also describe Jesus as the Son of God (John 1:14).

Regarding His earthly life, He was born during the reign of Herod the Great, around 5 B.C. (The B.C./A.D. dating system was developed hundreds of years after Jesus’ birth, and it was off a few years.) At this time the land of Israel had undergone many changes since the last book of the Old Testament (Malachi) was written. The Persians, who ruled over the Jews during Malachi’s time, were conquered by Alexander the Great, whose kingdom was quickly divided among four generals. Two of these generals were Seleucids, who ruled over modern-day Syria, and Ptolemy, who ruled over Egypt. The land of Israel, or “Palestine” as it came to be called was sandwiched between these two kingdoms, and as result it was the battleground for many disputes between the two kingdoms.

Eventually, Palestine came under the firm control of the Seleucids, who began to oppress the Jews, forcing them to abandon their religious distinctions and conform to Greek customs. This caused a great uprising, led by a family known as the Maccabees. In time, this family allowed the Jews to gain independence once again. Eventually, however, the Romans took over Palestine, and they later placed the region under the rule of Herod the Great, an Idumean, not a Jew.

We should also note a couple of social developments that occurred during this period between the two Testaments of the Bible. First, the Jews began to establish synagogues, local places where they could gather to learn about and observe the Law of Moses and other books of the Old Testament. Second, there arose several politico-religious parties within Palestine. These included the Pharisees (who strictly adhered to the Law and the teachings of their rabbis), the Sadducees (mostly priests who denied many of the beliefs held by the Pharisees, such as the resurrection of the dead), the Essenes (who were even stricter than the Pharisees in their adherence to the Law), and various anti-Roman parties, such as the Zealots. All these groups would have touched our Lord’s life in some way or another as He lived and ministered in Palestine.

Jesus comes upon the scene near the end of Herod the Great’s reign. The Gospels tell us that the Holy Spirit, who came upon a virgin named Mary, conceived Jesus. Jesus’ earthly,

adoptive father was a carpenter named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Jesus was born in Bethlehem and grew up in the small town of Nazareth in Galilee, a northern territory of Palestine. Not much else is known of Jesus' early life, except that He grew in wisdom and possessed great knowledge of spiritual matters by the age of twelve (Lk 2:41-52).

When Jesus reached the age of thirty, He began His formal ministry period. His cousin, John the Baptist, who had already established a widespread ministry of his own, initiated this with His baptism. Early in His ministry, Jesus began preaching essentially the same message that John the Baptist had preached: ***“The kingdom of God is near! Turn from your sins and believe this Good News!”*** (Mk 1:15).

For most of His early ministry, Jesus traveled throughout the region surrounding the Sea of Galilee. In His hometown of Nazareth, Jesus made His mission clear: ***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for He has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the downtrodden will be freed from their oppressors, and that the time of the Lord’s favor has come”*** (Lk 4:18-19). This statement, taken from the Old Testament (Isa 61:1-2), made it clear that Jesus was God’s anointed (Greek *christos*)—that is, Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah written about by the Old Testament writers. Jesus then began His travels, healing the sick and casting out demons. He also began teaching about God and His Kingdom, often through the form of stories, or parables. These teachings often clashed with those of the Pharisees and other leaders of His day. Along the way Jesus selected twelve disciples as His special followers. These men lived and traveled with Jesus, listening to His teachings and witnessing His miracles. In time, they would be instrumental in the establishment of His church.

After three years of ministry, Jesus made a final trip to Jerusalem. Throughout His ministry He had told His disciples that He would eventually suffer and die in Jerusalem at the hands of His enemies. This is exactly what happened. On the Sunday before Passover, Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly, with all the people bowing down before Him and shouting, ***“Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”*** (Mk 11:9). Just a few days later, however, Jesus was arrested by the Temple guard, put on trial, and executed as a criminal by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. All this, however, was in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah’s ministry (Isa. 53:1-12).

But the story does not stop there. On the third day after His death, Jesus arose from the dead! He first appeared to some women disciples and then later to all the disciples. For forty days He remained on earth, proving to His disciples that He was truly alive and teaching them further about the Kingdom of God. Finally, Jesus was taken up into heaven, where He was seated at the right hand of God the Father.

II.

The Birth and Spread of the Church:

About a week after Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples (who were now called apostles, meaning “sent ones”) were gathered together in a room in Jerusalem. Suddenly, everyone in the room was filled with the Holy Spirit, and all of them began speaking in different languages. This took place during the festival of Pentecost, when Jews from all over the world were visiting Jerusalem. After a while the apostle Peter stepped forward and began preaching about Jesus, declaring Him to be the Messiah, who was crucified and raised to life again. Thousands of people responded to His message and repented of their sins. **They were baptized**

for the remission of their sins in the name of Jesus Christ and committed themselves to meet together to pray, listen to the apostles' teaching, celebrate the Lord's Supper and give of their financial means. The Lord's Supper had been established by Jesus as a way for His followers to remember Him and His great sacrifice, resurrection and His coming again. It involved partaking of bread, representing the Lord's body, and drinking of the fruit of the vine, representing the Lord's shed blood. This coming of the Holy Spirit and gathering of believers marked the birth of the church/kingdom.

Soon after this, Peter and the apostles began taking the message of Jesus throughout the world, despite many persecutions. One of their persecutors was a zealous Jew named Saul, who had been given special orders to hunt down and arrest Christians. One day as Saul was traveling to Damascus, the Lord Jesus appeared to him, and Saul became a new follower of Jesus. Over time, the church, which was initially leery of this new persecutor-turned-follower, came to trust that Saul's conversion was genuine. Saul, who soon began using his Latin name, Paul, exclusively, became a great leader and teacher in the church, and he was considered one of the apostles as well. Throughout his lifetime he made three trips throughout Asia Minor and Greece, planting and strengthening churches along the way. Paul was a key figure in the establishment of the gospel among the Gentiles, or non-Jews. Many of the books of the New Testament are actually letters, or epistles, written by Paul to the churches.

Soon after Paul's return from his third missionary journey he was attacked at the Temple by a Jewish mob which was angry at him for his role in converting many—including Gentiles—to Jesus Christ. A Roman officer arrested Paul, and before Paul was about to be flogged, he appealed to his right as a Roman citizen to appear before Caesar. So he was eventually sent to Rome, where he lived under house arrest for a couple of years before being released. A few years later, Paul was arrested again, and it is believed that Nero martyred him in Rome.

The other apostles continued their preaching, traveling throughout the known world spreading the Good News about Jesus. John lived in Ephesus until he was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he recorded the book of Revelation and then died. John's death marked the end of the apostolic age, that is, the era when the church was under the direct leadership of living apostles.

III.

The Canon of the New Testament:

The New Testament was written within the period of half a century, several hundred years after the completion of the Old Testament. There is a sense in which Jesus Christ established the New Testament content or canon, by way of anticipation. It was He who promised, "*the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you*" and "*He will guide you into all truth*" (John 14:26; 16:13).

From this we can derive the basic principle of canonicity for the New Testament, since it narrows down to a matter of divine inspiration. Whether we think of the prophets of Old Testament times or the apostles and their God-given associates of the New, the recognition at the very time of their writing that they were authentic spokesmen for God is what determines the intrinsic canonicity of their writing. It is altogether God's Word only if it is God-breathed. We can be assured that the books under question were received by the church of the apostolic age precisely when they had been certified by an apostle as being thus inspired.

After the various books of the New Testament were written and began to circulate among the churches, Christians collected certain books into single volumes. In the first century, each of the four Gospels was treated as an individual book about Jesus' life and ministry. By the end of the first century, many churches had collected Paul's epistles into one volume. Beginning in the late second century, Christians began to collect the four Gospels into one volume. This collection became known as "*The Gospel: According to Matthew, According to Mark, According to Luke, According to John.*" Later, in the second and third centuries, other Christians began to combine Acts with the General Epistles into one volume.

By the second century, several of the books of the New Testament were considered to be divinely inspired Scripture: the four Gospels, Acts, Paul's epistles, 1 Peter, and 1 John. Other books took longer to gain full recognition: Hebrews (because the author was unknown), James (because it was thought to have doctrinal differences with Paul's theology on salvation), 2 Peter and Jude (over the question of authorship), 2 and 3 John (because they were not well known), and Revelation (because its message and authorship were debated). By the middle of the fourth century, however, most issues had been resolved, and these books were also accepted by the church as divinely inspired and worthy of inclusion in the New Testament canon.

Irenaeus (a disciple of Polycarp, who was himself a disciple of the apostle John) had affirmed the canonicity of the fourfold Gospel in the second century. This fourfold Gospel continued to be confirmed by later Christian scholars, such as Hippolytus, Novatian, Tertullian, Cyprian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Dionysius. These writers also affirmed the canonical status of most of the other books as 2 Peter, Jude, 2 and 3 John, and Revelation. In the beginning of the fourth century, the well-known church historian Eusebius sought to establish the New Testament canon as consisting of those books which we now regard as Scripture today. Athanasius of Alexandria established this twenty-seven-book canon once and for all in the fourth century. In his Festal Letter (A.D. 367), Athanasius listed the twenty-seven books of the New Testament and admonished his readers, "*Let no one add to these; let nothing be taken away.*" At the close of the century, the Council of Carthage (A.D. 397) decreed, "*aside from the canonical Scriptures nothing is to be read in the church under the Name of Divine Scriptures.*" The council also listed the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as we have them today.

One must remember that as a product of God, the New Testament books were canonical as soon as they were written, though they may not have been "formally" recognized by men as such. Even before being written, and as soon as it was revealed, the rule of faith given by God was the standard of godly living (Jno 6:63; 14:26; 16:13). The steps were these: it was first spoken, then confirmed by miracles and finally, written (Heb. 2:2-4).

So, at first, in the New Testament age, God's rule for faithful living was given orally, then it was written (cf. Gal 1:9; 5:21; Phil 3:18; 2 Thess 3:10-12). In Phil 3:18, Paul spoke of the rule (canon), and then spoke of some who were not walking by it when he said, "I have told you often." That was before this epistle was written and would have been when he was at Philippi, and spoke to them in person regarding such people.

Just so, when Jesus walked upon the earth, spoke the words that He received from the Father (Jno 14:10), and preached the "gospel of the kingdom" (Matt 4:23), were His words authoritative (cf. Mk 1:22,27)? Certainly! That His words were written (and printed in red letters in some Bibles) does not increase their authority. The truth is that by His words we shall be judged; thus, by His words, we must live (Jno 12:48; 2 Cor 5:10; Acts 17:31).

The New Testament canon was, finally, given in written form. This process was completed over a period of about fifty years, culminating near the close of the first century. When written, these books were inspired and authoritative; thus, at the moment of their being written they were canonical in the true sense of the word. They were recognized by the original recipients and believers of the first century as authoritative and genuine; that is, from God. So, the inspired books were circulated among the brethren, resulting in the collection of these books over a period of time. The general circulation of all twenty-seven books would not come about until printing was invented.

A common practice was for an epistle to be read, copied, and sent on to another church. ***“And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea”*** (Col. 4:16).

The time required for collection was lengthened because of travel and communication difficulties, the diversity of places from which the books were written, and recipients to whom the books were addressed. Adding to this problem were the many false writings (counterfeit and apocryphal) alleged to be authentic, and other writings, which did not claim to be inspired, but that some regarded as such, were in circulation. The distinction had to be made as to which were canonical; the process was not accomplished immediately.

And though a section of the church may not yet have been satisfied of the apostolicity of a certain book or of certain books; and though afterwards doubts may have arisen in sections of the church as to the apostolicity of certain books (as of Revelation): yet in no case was it more than a respectable minority of the church which was slow in receiving, or which came afterward to doubt, the credentials of any of the books that then as now constituted the Canon of the New Testament accepted by the church at large. (Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p 415).

The fact that the early church questioned some of these books indicates the seriousness with which this question was considered.

The New Testament writers knew that what they wrote was from God. Paul pointed out that he had received revelation from God, had recorded this revelation in written *words*, so that when the Ephesian brethren read those words, they could understand (Eph 3:3-4). Peter wrote that what Paul had written was Scripture (2 Pet 3:15-16). Paul said, what Luke wrote was Scripture (Lk 10:7; I Tim 5:18). John was told to write what he saw and ***“send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia”*** (Rev 1:11). A blessing would be upon ***“he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand”*** (Rev 1:3).

Geisler and Nix list three of the most important stimuli for an official collection of the New Testament canon (*From God to Us*, pp. 101-103). They are:

- (1) The ecclesiastical stimulus to know which books should be read in the churches and translated into the languages of the converted peoples;
- (2) The theological stimulus to define the limits of apostolic doctrine;
- (3) The political stimulus through Diocletian’s edict of A.D. 303 to destroy all copies of the Scriptures; and Constantine’s subsequent order to Eusebius to make and distribute fifty copies of the Bible. As William R. Kimball wrote in his book, *The Book of Books* p. 175, “under Diocletian’s persecution, there was an urgent need to clearly establish which writings were worth dying for and safeguarding from confiscation.”

To the above three stimuli we add the following:

- (4) The growth of the church and the cessation of miraculously given oral revelation (I Cor. 13:8-13) also brought the need for each church to have a copy of the New Testament Scriptures in order to function as a New Testament church.
- (5) F. F. Bruce writing in his book, *The Books and Parchments*, pp. 95-96, affirms the abbreviated and altered “canon” of the heretic Marcion forced church leaders to “state the orthodox position regarding the canon more clearly.
- (6) In addition to point (1), the “proliferation of counterfeit writings” and “the rise of heretic sects...promoted sound, apostolic doctrine be officially established to offset their corruptive teachings.
- (7) There was the necessity of preserving the inspired writings themselves from corruption.

IV. INTERNAL EVIDENCES OF CANONICITY

It is neither wrong nor a lack of faith to want evidence as to the canonicity of a book. There were dozens of false “Gospels,” “Acts,” and “Epistles” in circulation in the first few centuries following the completion of the written revelation. As well, there were many “Post-apostolic” writings, which did not claim inspiration, but which were esteemed highly by members of the early church. The facts are that the so-called “evidences,” purported by those who deny the inspiration of the Bible, and consequently its canonicity, are refutable. On the other hand, the “evidences” of canonicity are “definite, abundant, and accurate—in fact overwhelming” as Turner writes in his book, *The Canon of the New Testament*, p. 8.

Geisler and Nix (*General Introduction*, pp. 94-97) give “Specific Claims That New Testament Books Are Spirit-Breathed,” showing each book has, within it, claims of inspiration. They are noted as follows:

- (1) Matthew begins with Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies (1:1ff) and concludes with His command to teach His Truth to all nations (28:18-20).
- (2) Mark, likewise, begins with **“the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets”** (1:1-2). He records Christ’s promise of the Spirit to guide them (13:11).
- (3) Luke wrote by inspiration as an authentic narrative (1:1-3), in order that Theophilus might **“know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed”** (1:4).
- (4) John writes, **“That ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God”** (20:31). He adds: **“This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true”** (21:24).
- (5) Acts claims to be the inspired record of what **“Jesus began both to do and teach”** (1:1).
- (6) Romans claims to be from the apostle Paul (1:1), who was taught by the Holy Spirit (9:1), and which doctrine they had learned (16:17).
- (7) I Corinthians also claims to be from Paul (1:1), **“in the words which the Holy Spirit teacheth”** (2:13), as commanded from the Lord (14:37).
- (8) 2 Corinthians is from the apostle Paul (1:1), who claimed authority given by the Lord (10:8, as a true apostle (12:12).

- (9) Galatians, written by ***“Paul, an apostle (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead)”*** (1:1), recorded the revelation that Paul did not receive from man but ***“by the revelation of Jesus Christ”*** (1:12). No other gospel was to be received or preached, lest the preacher be accursed (1:8-9).
- (10) Ephesians also claims to be written by an apostle (1:1). Paul received by revelation and wrote the words he received in order that the Ephesians could read and understand (3:3-4).
- (11) Philippians comes through an apostle from ***“God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ”*** (1:1-2). It enjoins, ***“Those things which ye have been learned, and received and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you”*** (4:9).
- (12) Colossians, from the apostle Paul, with greetings from ***“God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ”*** (1:1-2), authoritatively answered the heresy which confronted the Colossians (2:4-8), and included the command that it was to be read in the church of the Laodiceans (4:16).
- (13) I Thessalonians, again from Paul, claims to be the ***“word of the Lord”*** (4:15), and gives the command, ***“I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren”*** (5:27).
- (14) 2 Thessalonians, also from the apostle Paul, warns about a false letter ***“as from us,”*** that is, purporting to be from Paul (2:2), and declares its authority by saying: ***“And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed”*** (3:14).
- (15) I Timothy is from “Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1). It claims authority in 4:11, ***“These things command and teach.”***
- (16) 2 Timothy adds, ***“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus”*** (1:13), and gives the charge, in the presence of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, ***“Preach the word”*** (4:1-2).
- (17) Titus, another epistle from the apostle Paul, commands, ***“These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority”*** (2:15). Paul adds, ***“this is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly”*** (3:8).
- (18) Philemon claims apostolic authority (from Paul), and greetings from ***“God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”*** (1-3). It also “asserts apostolic authority” (8).
- (19) Hebrews begins with a claim to be from God through Christ (1:1-3), and concludes with a call to accept this letter of exhortation (13:22).
- (20) James introduces himself as a ***“servant of God”*** (1:1), and gives divine instruction concerning practical Christian living; that is, concerning doctrine (ch. 2) and practice (ch. 3).
- (21) I Peter is from ***“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ”*** (1:1), in which, as he penned, ***“I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the grace of God wherein ye stand”*** (5:12).
- (22) 2 Peter, also written by Peter (1:1), calls them to remember the ***“commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior”*** (3:2), for it is the ***“more sure word of prophecy”*** (1:19).
- (23) I John, written by one who was an eye and ear witness (1:1), proclaims Christ that their ***“joy may be full”*** (1:4), and that they might have eternal life (5:12).
- (24) 2 John writes a commandment (4-5), warns against deceivers (7), and declares the necessity of abiding in the doctrine of Christ (9-11).
- (25) 3 John was written by one with apostolic authority (9-10), who has the ***“truth itself”***

- (12).
- (26) Jude writes of the “common salvation” and the *“faith which was once delivered unto the saints”* (3).
- (27) Revelation begins with *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him”* (1:1), through John, one of the prophets (22:9). It concludes with the warning of the severe consequences for one who would add to or take from that which was written in the “book of this prophecy” (22:18-19).

Therefore, when consideration is given to each book of the New Testament, each claims, whether directly or indirectly, to be of divine origin and to possess divinely given authority, that in “all of its parts and as a whole the New Testament claims to be the inspired Word of God.”

V. EXTERNAL EVIDENCES OF CANONICITY

Though the canonicity of the New Testament books was acknowledged in the first century, the Synod of Hippo (A.D. 393) was first to list the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. *“It did not confer upon them any authority which they did not already possess, but simply recorded their previously established canonicity”* (F. F. Bruce, *The Books and Parchments*, p. 113). *“In A.D. 397, the Council of Carthage demonstrated a universal recognition by listing all the books of the New Testament, as they are today, acknowledging them as genuine”* (Sidney Collett, *All About the Bible*, p. 57). Councils did from time to time pronounce their approval on certain lists...simply giving official approval to what had already come to be accepted by the church under the guidance of the Spirit of God. The Council of Carthage’s list was in exact agreement with that of Athanasius and Jerome. They adopted the following rule: *“It was also determined, that beside the canonical Scriptures nothing be read in the churches under the title of divine Scriptures.”* (J. W. McGarvey, *Evidences of Christianity*, p. 60). The present order (canon) of books in our New Testament is not the chronological order in which the books were written. The Council gave the New Testament books in the following order, which is the same order in which we have them today, saying: *“We have received from our fathers that these are to be read in the churches.”*

“Four books of the Gospels, one book of Acts of Apostles, thirteen Epistles of the Apostle Paul, one of the same to the Hebrews, two Epistles of the Apostle Peter, three of John, one of James, one of Jude, one book of the Apocalypse of John.”
(J. W. McGarvey, *Evidences of Christianity*, pp. 60, 61)

Earlier, Athanasius who was “Bishop” of Alexandria from A.D. 326 to 373, listed the true books of the Bible, including the New Testament as we have it today, in order to prevent the weak from being deceived by apocryphal books. *“He declares that these books have been ‘delivered to the fathers’ by those who were ‘eye witnesses and ministers to the world,’ and that he had learned this from the beginning.”* (Ibid. p. 61)

Cyril (A.D. 315-386), “Bishop” of Jerusalem, composed a list of the books which were inspired Scriptures, and included in it all the books of the New Testament with the exception of Revelation. The Sinaitic Manuscript believed to have been copied at the request of Constantine (A.D. 311) contains the twenty-seven books of the New Testament and two others placed at the end *“to indicate that they were doubtful books or that they held an inferior or secondary position.”* Eusebius (A.D. 270-340), who has been called “The Father of Ecclesiastical History,” listed all twenty-seven books. He says of Hebrews, James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John and Revelation that though questioned, *“they are nevertheless constantly recognized by most of our*

ecclesiastical authorities.” Origen (A.D. 185-254), noted as “a competent and unimpeachable witness,” whose knowledge of the composition of the New Testament reached back into the early second century, in a sermon on the book of Joshua, listed all the books of the New Testament as they are today. He notes that some held in doubt 2 Peter and 2 and 3 John, but “*he expresses no such doubt as existing in his own mind.*”

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 165-220), who lived within sixty-five years of the apostle John, gave explanations of all the New Testament books in his work “Hypotuposes” (Outlines). He did not omit the books which some styled “disputed.” Tertullian (A.D. 160-240), wrote about all the New Testament canon except 2 Peter, James, and 2 and 3 John. Irenaeus, who was taught by Polycarp, a disciple trained by John, became “Bishop” of Lyons in A.D. 180. His writings show his acquaintance with and acceptance of all the books of the New Testament, with the exception of Philemon, Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John. The Muratorian Canon, composed no later than A.D. 170, lists all the books except 1 and 2 Peter, 1 John, James, and Hebrews. As these important Epistles are absent, while II and III John, and Philemon, far less important, are present, it is more probable that the former have been lost from it than that they were originally omitted.

These lists, given by men, some of whom had direct connections to the time of the last living apostle show the books of the New Testament were known and recognized as authoritative from the first century. Therefore, as McGarvey concluded, “*the evidence from catalogues alone is credible proof that all of the New Testament books originated in the days of the Apostles.*” By the end of the third century, the “church fathers” had declared all twenty-seven books as authoritative, and nearly every verse of the New Testament was cited in one or more of the over thirty-six thousand citations by the “fathers.” In addition, there are more than eighty manuscripts, about two hundred fifty uncial manuscripts, more than two thousand cursive manuscripts, and almost three thousand lectionaries that attest to the accuracy of copies or portions of the New Testament canon. “A grand total of over **24,000 manuscript copies or portions of the New Testament** are in existence today.” (William R. Kimball, *The Book of Books*, p. 185)

VI. MAN CAN TRUST THE NEW TESTAMENT

The twenty-seven books of the New Testament (Matthew through Revelation) are the authoritative rule from God for man. They comprise the New Testament canon of sacred Scripture. Other books have been set forth by some as “canonical,” but their exclusion from the canon has been because they have, by their own composition and content, shown themselves to be the works of men. Comparing them with the inspired books quickly and adequately convinces the thoughtful reader of their lack of divine inspiration; therefore, their lack of canonicity.

If we can trust Christ, we can trust the New Testament of Christ. As Geisler and Nix pointed out in their *General Introduction*, p. 88,

“In a real sense, Christ is the key to the inspiration and canonization of the Scriptures. It was He who confirmed the inspiration of the Hebrew canon of the Old Testament; and it was He who promised that the Holy Spirit would direct the apostles into “all truth,” the fulfillment resulting in the New Testament.”

God's Word is complete, full, finished, and final. He determined it would be so, and He has declared it to be so (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:3; Jude 3). Its preservation to the present day is not accidental, but is according to His plan and providence. Therefore, He can call upon man to keep His Word, for it is just that, His Word. Though translated from the original language, "*The integrity of a book is preserved when it has been transmitted without material change; that is, change which affects its meaning*" (McGarvey, p. 7). Therefore, an accurate translation is a reliable translation in which man can trust.

"Two and a half centuries of careful work have established a New Testament text as near as possible to the original. In a few instances there is still some doubt about the precise form of the text, but these are of minor importance and none affects the essential teaching of the New Testament." (David Alexander and Pat Alexander, eds. *Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible*, p. 73)

"The art and science of textual criticism has helped determine the New Testament's reliability beyond any reasonable shadow of doubt. The massive abundance of manuscript copies in possession have aided textual scholars in establishing the the exacting accuracy of manuscript translation and transmission, as well as the divine authorship, accuracy, and preservation of the New Testament over the last 1,900 years." (Kimball, p. 185)

"Inspiration of the Bible resides not merely in the original Hebrew and Greek words, but in the truth itself. Any correct translation is inspired. To the extent that it is correctly translated it is the inspired word of God. Jesus and the Apostles quoted from the Septuagint—a human translation of the Old Testament—and called it the word of God. If Christ and His apostles could hold up a human translation of the Old Testament and call it the word of God there is not any good reason why we should not hold up any correct translation of the Bible and call it the Word of God. Away With this infidel notion that we do not have an inspired Bible today." (Foy E. Wallace, Jr., *A Review of the New Versions*, xiv)

Man can argue against God's canon, disputing its authority, blaspheming its Author, and denying its authenticity—**but it will remain**. The "New Hermeneutics" folks can rail on about culture changing Scripture, but the New Testament canon does not change. It still is, and shall be as long as this world continues, the same rule by which we are to walk (Phil 3:16). Jesus said, "**Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away**" (Matt 24:35). "**But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you**" (I Pet 1:25). Man must receive it as the Word of Truth (Jno 17:17), which is "**able to save your souls**" (James 1:21).

CONCLUSION

*"In conclusion, it is necessary to emphasize that no church through its councils made the canon of Scripture. No church—in particular the Roman Catholic Church—by its decrees gave or pronounced upon 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 inherit in the books themselves."* (Neil R. Lightfoot, *How We Got The Bible*, p. 87)

Questions

1. Why should we be interested in the proof of the validity of the New Testament canon?

2. Contrast the difference in the length of time it took to write the Old Testament and the New Testament.

3. All of the New Testament books center upon one person. Who is this?

4. Discuss a little about the time in which Jesus was born.

5. Tell a little about the earthly ministry of Jesus.

6. Discuss the birth and spread of the Church.

7. How did Jesus establish the New Testament content or canon, by way of anticipation?

8. Who was Irenaeus and how did he enter the picture of the canon?

9. Discuss some internal evidences of canonicity.

10. Discuss some external evidences of canonicity.

11. Why can we trust the New Testament?
