

The Canon of the Bible (1999)

Larry A. Taylor

But in regard to the Canon itself, which they so superciliously intrude upon us, ancient writers are not agreed. Let the mediators, then, enjoy their own as they please, provided we are at liberty to repudiate those which all men of sense, at least when informed on the subject, will perceive to be not of divine original. John Calvin.[\[1\]](#)

Dictionaries and researchers define the word, "canon," as a body of books accepted as authoritative by some religious body. Thus there is no problem of the canon; most modern Protestants, and Protestant churches historically, accept exactly sixty-six books, thirty-nine books from Hebrew, which they call the Old Testament, and twenty-seven books written in Greek, which they call the New Testament. Protestants use and accept these books; therefore, there are sixty-six books in the Protestant canon.

Roman Catholics include fifteen more books or parts of books, and that is their canon; Greek Orthodox churches use most of these books, and these comprise their canon. The Jewish tradition is that of the Hebrew Bible only, of course, corresponding to the thirty-nine books of the Protestants. East Syrian Christians include fewer books than other Christians in the New Testament, while the Ethiopian churches use quite a few more books in both the Old Testament and New Testament.

The third American President, Thomas Jefferson, questioning the miracles of the New Testament while approving some of Jesus' moral sentiments, produced a thin volume which is called "The Jefferson Bible," edited literally with a razor and paste.[\[2\]](#)

One wonders, what is God's canon?

In *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, biblical apologist Josh McDowell cites the derivation of "canon" as coming from a root word meaning "reed", coming to mean some sort of standard. With regard to the Bible, a canon is an officially accepted list of books.

This is important with regard to the fundamentalist's attitude towards the Bible. If the Word of God is inerrant, or something close to it, then deciding that a book is a member of the canon of the Bible is to proclaim it infallible. The true believer now regards a canonical book as no mere human creation, but God-breathed and incapable of error. It now has magical powers. It has been observed by some Christians that fundamentalists do not so much worship Jesus as worship a book; thus, they are bibliolaters.

How can we discover which of thousands of religious books in the world have these magical powers? Most of the authors of this book, a response to Josh McDowell's *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, are skeptical of all religious claims, and are content to answer that there are no magic books. However, a Christian wishing to increase the gift of knowledge in a mature faith, must ask the same questions that skeptics ask.

If God wished to send a message to us, there would have been some way to communicate directly to us; everyone, in all eras. Instead, Jews, Christians and Muslims say that God sent a series of messengers, some of whom wrote books that were preserved.

But which persons were actually inspired? Some conservative Christians answer that, it is easy to see that the books of the Protestant Bible were written by God, while the books of other religions -- the Koran, for instance -- were instead the products of demon possession.[\[3\]](#)

We'd like to hear directly from God about which books constitute his message. As Paul wrote, "Let God be true, but every man a liar." (Rom. 3:4) But God has not spoken in this way. Instead, is there some special list, authorized by Jesus, or the original apostles, of books that are specially approved? "God says that these books are the Bible," we'd like to hear. There is no such list.[\[4\]](#) Who, then, decided what books would be in our Bible?

Back in the fourth century, some bishops took a vote on it. Rather, several church councils voted for conflicting lists, the contradictions of which took centuries more to resolve. These votes came after a long period of sorting and choosing by the churches at large, so that the choice was not haphazard; it was, however, arbitrary in many respects. Because of differences over the Apocrypha, there remains no agreement about which books are in the Christian Old Testament.

A Christian may answer that the Church chose the books that were already obviously of higher quality and inspired, and the councils approved these books because they were authoritative in themselves. In this view, the books of the Bible don't have authority because some bishops voted on it, but that they have obvious intrinsic qualities. Many scholars agree, that as a rough cut, the books that made the canon are mostly better in some ways than those that did not. However, few scholars would agree that there is a sharp line of difference between the two groups, a "bright line" definition, in lawyers' jargon.

What qualities, then, would lead one to believe that these books were not merely good or spiritual, but actually infallible?

For unbelievers, the choice is arbitrary, almost accidental. As we shall see, the choice of the books largely depended not only whether a book concerned the things of God, but that it had to describe the right kind of God, and the right kind of Jesus.

Protestants often contrast church tradition, on the one hand, with the authority of holy scripture, on the other. But since the 'Canon' is a church tradition, there really is only one kind of authority. Since the Holy Spirit was supposed to be working in the minds of the believers, and in the Church as the body of Christ,[\[5\]](#) it might seem reasonable to accept as inspired the actions of church councils throughout history. The Church of England, for instance, recognizes the first four or six Ecumenical Councils as authoritative.[\[6\]](#) Following this logic, we should inquire what the councils of historical Christianity declare to be books of the Bible.

However, if we examine church history, it is hard for us to see inspiration at work. There is God, and then there are churches, composed of ordinary fallible humans.

Individual Christians who may not believe in the authority of church tradition or councils should choose for themselves which books they regard as infallible. This approach, in fact, is in accord with some of the major Protestant traditions. John Calvin, the reformer of Geneva, wrote that the Word of God is recognized by the interior light of the believer. The Westminster Confession of the Reformed tradition declares that, "The authority of the Holy Scripture ... dependeth not on the testimony of any man or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof. ... Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness, by and with the Word, in our hearts. ..."[\[7\]](#)

Of course, most Protestants don't take the idea of an inner light as far as the Quakers, who found it a more important authority altogether than that of the written scriptures.[\[8\]](#)

In *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell warns us, "One thing to keep in mind is that the church did not create the canon or books included in what we call Scripture. Instead, the church recognized the books that were inspired from their inception. They were inspired by God when written."[\[9\]](#) Despite attempting to sever the Bible from any authority based on history or tradition, McDowell nevertheless argues for evidence of their historical support.

Furthermore, the following assertions cannot be supported by the evidence: (1) that the church did not create the canon; and, (2) that the church recognized these books as inspired from their inception. Instead, Christians of the first century recognized the written Old Testament as scripture, but honored an oral tradition of the teaching of Jesus and his apostles, a "living and abiding voice,"[\[10\]](#) and did not regard their written books -- when finally created -- as an inspired, fixed canon.

Indeed, inspiration seems to have little to do with the selection. As Gamble notes after a detailed discussion, "The NT writings did not become canonical because they were believed to be uniquely inspired; rather, they were judged to be inspired because they had previously commended themselves to the church for other, more particular and practical reasons."[\[11\]](#)

In the second century after the birth of Jesus, a core of what we know as the New Testament began to take shape. Many works that are now no longer regarded as scripture were used and included with now-canonical works from time to time and place to place. Finally, the specific group of 27 books that are now printed in Christian New Testaments came together in the fourth century CE. Christians still do not agree which books belong in the Old Testament, and there is no prospect of agreement.

What Books Belong in the Bible?

Mr. McDowell gives us a list of tests of a book for inclusion in the canon:

1. Is it authoritative?
2. Is it prophetic?
3. Is it authentic?
4. Is it dynamic?
5. Was it received, collected, read and used?

These criteria roughly correspond to some of those used throughout the history of western religion, especially Christianity. However, each one of them has problems.

The first four categories require subjective judgment. Usually, the works considered authoritative, prophetic, authentic and dynamic are the books that include doctrines and material with which you basically agree.

Whether a particular work was received, collected, read and used can be approached historically. There are at least two problems, however, applying this to one's faith.

If you study how religious bodies use a book, you are studying the conclusions reached by humans. The books they chose reflect their own ideas. Naturally, they chose books that were in line with the religious experience of particular communities. Human reason and experience is untrustworthy; after all, "Let God be true, but every man a liar." How can you know the word of

a perfect God by studying sinning humans, even if they are church members? Bishops? Councils? Popes?

Secondly, there is no one set of books received, collected, read and used by the entire Christian Church. As documented below, the canon as we know it did not exist for the first 300 years of the church. The use of lists of books varied over time and location; entire national churches to this day use a list of inspired books either longer or shorter than that used by American Protestants.

Nevertheless, defenders of the present canons may take comfort that the bodies of works revered by each community all have long histories of relative stability and tradition. The discussion that follows, however, shows that there is no one shiny list that Christians can boast about as *the* Bible, once and for everybody.

McDowell argues for "apostolic authority" as a criterion for inclusion of New Testament books.

What does this mean? If it means that some books seem more authoritative than others, this means that you accept the books that agree with the doctrines that you have already accepted.

Once again, this is a circular argument. Why was the Gospel of Thomas excluded? Because it was written from a doctrinal point of view that lost the political war within the established church.^[12] However, from a historical point of view, there is no warrant to consider Thomas less authentic than one of the currently received gospels.^[13] According to Charlesworth, "It is potentially misleading to use the terms 'noncanonical,' 'canonical,' 'heresy,' and 'orthodoxy' when describing either Early Judaism or Early Christianity."^[14]

"Apostolic authority" usually meant that a book was written either by an apostle, or by someone directed by an apostle. According to second century church writers, Mark was an associate of Peter, and Luke was a companion of Paul.

However, the authenticity of books of the New Testament was already in question in antiquity. Particularly disputed were Hebrews, James, 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation. The authorship of these seven books are indeed the ones questioned by Origen, about 200 CE.^[15] Hebrews is an anonymous book, and not really an epistle at all. Origen had some theories about it being written by a disciple of Paul, but concluded, "God only knows," who wrote it.^[16]

Questions, however, were also raised also about other books. Technically, all four gospels are also anonymous, being given their present names, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John by church tradition.^[17] Even ancient church leaders who agreed that "John" was the name of the author of the Book of Revelation disagreed about whether it was John the son of Zebedee, or a John the Elder.^[18]

Modern scholarship can demonstrate that more than half of the books of the New Testament were not written by apostles, nor by the persons named in tradition. For instance, C. F. D. Moule writes that the authorship of John is widely disputed, "And Matthew, in its present form, can hardly have been written by an apostle."^[19]

The dating of the gospels is within the possible natural life spans of these illustrious persons, and the books may possibly contain some material from eyewitnesses; nevertheless, the books, in the form we have them, seem to be second-hand compilation of diverse, even contradictory traditions. According to another scholar, the idea that Matthew was written by an eyewitness of

the crucifixion is chronologically possible, "But an investigation of the sources used in this Gospel will show that this cannot be the case."[\[20\]](#)

Harry Y. Gamble argues concerning apostolicity, that although it was used for judgments by the early church, it is "mistaken to confine the idea of apostolicity to literary authenticity." Several books thought to be written by apostles were rejected, while others who were anonymous or disputed made it into the canon. "Widespread and important as this criterion was, it must still be said that no NT writing secured canonical stand on the basis of apostolicity alone."[\[21\]](#) Burton L. Mack writes that at the time of early Christianity in the empire under Constantine, i.e., the fourth century, "There was apparently agreement on the criterion of apostolicity but not on which books were apostolic."[\[22\]](#)

If "apostolic authority" means that we accept the books approved by the original apostles, we have no idea what these figures accepted, except for the books of the Hebrew bible, and other works which they quoted. It is likely that none of what they wrote themselves - for instance, the undisputed letters of Paul --was considered inspired at the time it was written. Instead, first century Christians primarily used an oral tradition, the "words of the Lord;"[\[23\]](#) some of the books we now use appear to have written as secondary and complementary aids to devotion and evangelism.

Were the books read, collected, and used? Scholars posit the quality of catholicity, that they were used by the entire church, and indeed, were written to the entire church. However, most of the letters of Paul were written to particular local communities and not to the church at large, and thus were not catholic, i.e., universal.

Gamble finds that several books that met the standard of widespread usage, e. g., The Shepherd, 1 Clement, The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles (the Didache), did not make it into the canon, while other books which did not have a long history of usage and broad currency were included. Examples of books of this last category are James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John.[\[24\]](#)

The standard of orthodoxy is not explicitly stated by McDowell. But scholar Gamble emphasizes orthodoxy, and explains that it "means, of course, that the tradition of the church's faith was understood to be somehow extrinsic to the writings which were judged according to it. In this sense, it rightly said that ecclesiastical tradition was prior to scripture and served the touchstone of scripture's authority."[\[25\]](#) These documents, once chosen, also influenced the doctrines that the community accepted, and so the relationship was circular. The standard of orthodoxy, however, was not applied to the writings of Paul or to the synoptic Gospels.[\[26\]](#) It is was not imagined that Paul could write contrary to the assumed orthodoxy. Yet the differences of theology and detail are frozen into the texts, and the diversity of the very early church is sealed into the canon.

The Old Testament

The story of the Christian Bible begins with the Hebrew scriptures. The books in the following table comprise the Hebrew arrangement of the scriptures, called by Christians the Old Testament or Old Covenant. Most Christian Bibles contain 39 books, but the table of contents in a Hebrew edition will show 24 books. This is because several groupings of the books are combined into single books, which groupings were kept on a single scroll. The 24 books are the same books as the Protestant Old Testament in a different form. Most modern editions of the Bible use or refer to the Hebrew text as a standard, consulting other ancient versions for corrections of errors.

The Law, Torah: 5 books. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

The Prophets, Nebiim: 8 Books.

The Former Prophets, 4 books Joshua, Judges, Samuel (Our 1 Sam. and 2 Sam.), Kings (Our 1 and 2 Kings)

The Latter Prophets, 4 books Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel

The Twelve: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

The Writings, Ketubim: 11 books. Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles (our 1 and 2)

Books in the Hebrew Bible

The historical process of creating the Hebrew scriptures is reflected in the three-part structure of the tradition: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

The Law, or Torah, was the five books that were supposed to have been written by Moses. Traditional chronology, i.e., the little note in my King James Version, places Moses' death at 1451 BCE.

A *single* book of the law was "discovered" in the temple at Jerusalem in the time of Josiah, about 641 BCE. This event brought about a religious reformation in the Kingdom of Judah.[\[27\]](#) Scholars believe that this was the book of Deuteronomy, or part of it. It probably was somewhat shorter than the complete book we have, because it was read twice in a single day.[\[28\]](#)

The greatest step in the Torah, or law, becoming canonical, is recorded in the Ezra tradition. On a new year's day festival in the fifth century BCE, there was a public reading of the "book of the law," and public instruction by priests and scribes. We are not told of what the law consisted at this time.[\[29\]](#) There eventually came to be *five* books of the law, either collected or edited from existing materials.

During the fourth to second century BCE, the Law reached final form and "canonical" status. The community of Samaritans uses the complete Torah, consisting of all five books, but no other part of the Hebrew Bible.[\[30\]](#) Despite the similarity of their beliefs, the Jews rejected the Samaritans about this time.

The Septuagint translation of the Torah (often signified by LXX, Roman numerals for seventy) probably began to be made in third-century BCE Alexandria, Egypt, for Greek-speaking Jews.[\[31\]](#) We read in the story of how the translation came to be made, that the Greek king wished the "law books of the Jews" to be added to the library at Alexandria, but not books of prophets or other writings at that time. This is consistent with the supposition that these last two divisions of the Hebrew Bible were not yet settled.

There are textual differences between the LXX and the Hebrew. In many of these, the Samaritan texts agree with the LXX against the Hebrew. Scholars use these clues to try to determine the original text; and in this case, witness to Hebrew usage from this period.

Some of the prophets spoke and wrote before the exile, and we believe that a portion of their writings have reached us today in the Bible. However, a great number of other writings also existed, and there is no evidence that there existed -- at the time of Ezra -- an exclusive collection of inspired writings outside of the Law of Moses, and yet also separate from religious writings in general.

There are a considerable number of works quoted by the Bible, but do not themselves appear in our canon. Some of them made it into the Apocrypha, some are preserved in fragments by the Jews in Qumran (the site of the Dead Sea Scrolls). Here is a list of sources used by Biblical writers, but that are not themselves preserved in our canon.

The Book of the Wars of Yahweh Numbers 21:14

The Book of the Just (Jashar) Joshua 10:13

The Annals of King David 1 Chronicles 27:24

More about David written by Nathan the prophet; a book by Samuel the Seer (not 1-2 Samuel), and a book by Gad the Seer. 1 Chron. 29:29

A biography of Solomon in the history of Nathan the prophet; Visions of Iddo the seer 2 Chronicles 9:29

The Annals of the Kings of Israel 1 Kings 14:19, 2 Chron. 33: 18; cf. 2 Chron. 20:34

The Annals of the Kings of Judah 1 Kings 14:29, 15:7

The Acts of Solomon 1 Kings 11:41

Histories written by Shemaiah the prophet, and by Iddo the seer 2 Chron. 12:15

Iddo's History of Judah 2 Chron. 13:22

Annals of Jehu son of Hanani 2 Chron. 20:34

An unknown and untitled work of Isaiah 2 Chron. 26:22

An unknown lament for Josiah by Jeremiah 2 Chron. 35:25

'Lost' books: A table of citations in the Christian Old Testament of books which are not part of the Bible.[\[32\]](#)

We note that use of a book does not necessarily convey canonical status. However, the style of quotation is a main clue to acceptance of a work as authoritative, especially by later rabbis, and by Christian writers. Indeed, at the time of the writing of the biblical books of Kings and Chronicles, there was no canon at all, save possibly part of the Law. This list does, however, show us that there were a number of books extant, from which some were later selected the ones worth preserving as scripture. A little later, we will deal with the books of the Old Testament Apocrypha, and with yet other works quoted by New Testament authors.

The progress of collection and effective "canonization" of the Hebrew Bible is shrouded in mystery. At some time after the Law was formed, the Jews collected writings attributed to the

prophets. A onebook Law of Moses, developed into the five-book Torah. To the Torah was added a second group of books, collectively called "The Prophets." There appears to have been, for some time, a two-part Hebrew "canon," the Law and the Prophets.[\[33\]](#) It was believed that true prophets had become rarer, and had ceased altogether by the time of the Maccabees.[\[34\]](#)

Later Jewish tradition, which may have influenced the closing of the Hebrew canon, said that inspiration ceased with the time of Ezra. Some Christians and Jews believed in the continuing revelation through prophets at least to the time of John the Baptist.[\[35\]](#) Thus, to them, the canon could not be limited to works of a previous age.

At the time of the continued translation of the Septuagint, the Law was complete, and the list of prophets was circumscribed. However, the third category, the Writings or *Kethubhim*, was still open. For this reason, the Septuagint is a variable collection, usually containing all or most of what we place in the Old Testament Apocrypha, as well as what is found in the Hebrew Bible. There seems to have been no "Alexandrian canon," for the Jews of Alexandria never had an official canon of that kind. The principles used for the LXX beyond that of the Law and the Prophets -- in the vague collection called "Writings" -- is not known.[\[36\]](#)

The earliest witness to a three-part Hebrew Bible -- the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings -- is in the prologue of the book of Ben Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus. The prologue in Greek, added by the translator, was written about 130 BCE. The writer refers to the Hebrew arrangement of the Old Testament in the opening passages: "the law and the prophets and the others that followed them." This shows that he probably used approximately the same books that we know. In particular, there is no list. In the text of the book, Sirach refers to most of the Old Testament. However, he does not cite from the books of Daniel or Esther, or refer to their leading characters. This appears to have been because these books had only recently been written[\[37\]](#) and not yet accepted. The expression, "the others," which stands in for the Writings division, is particularly vague and does not define what books are to be included in it.

Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian, is witness to the books used by the Jews in the first century CE. Josephus says that the Jews have exactly 22 sacred texts. Our Bibles have 39 books of the Old Testament. It is likely that certain books were folded together in the same scrolls (e.g., the Twelve Prophets), but consistent Jewish tradition after the second century C.E. makes 24 books, not 22.[\[38\]](#) Where are the missing books? Are they really missing?

Josephus presents a three-part division, similar to the known Hebrew canon, but he counts only 22 books. Besides five books of Moses, he writes that there are thirteen books of the prophets, and four books of hymns to God and precepts for life.[\[39\]](#)

His 22 books may have meant exactly the same books as the later rabbinical 24, although he does not give us the details. In order to get the same books as the Hebrew canon, it is supposed by some scholars that Ruth formed part of Judges, and Lamentations was counted with Jeremiah. Both of these assumed combinations occur across the major threefold division of the current Hebrew canon, as well as transferring all the books of the Writings to the Prophets except Psalms, Proverbs, the Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes.[\[40\]](#)

The joining of Ruth to Judges is supported by Christian sources, such as Origen as recorded by Eusebius.[\[41\]](#) Origen states that there are 22 books in the canon. So does Jerome, but he also gives the number in different passages also as 24 or 27, depending on the doubling of certain books.[\[42\]](#) To get to 24 from 22, Jerome specifically mentions moving Ruth and Lamentations to the Writings division of books. However, Jerome lived about three hundred years after Josephus.

The number, 22, doesn't seem necessarily to be an exact counting of anything, being an attractive round number; it is the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

Some scholars, based on this folding argument, are certain that Josephus is giving a fixed canon, the same as we know today. The certainty is unjustified. We just don't know what books he was using. According to prominent canon scholar James A. Sanders, "On the other hand, in the case of Josephus there may simply have been only 22 books to count as canonical by the beginning of the fourth quarter of the first century C.E. ... It is clear that there is too much certainty about Josephus' canon has been drawn from *AgAp* 1.37-43 [the passage in question]." [\[43\]](#)

Written about the same time as Josephus, the noncanonical book of 2 Esdras (14:45-8) gives the number of books as 24. In addition, there are supposed to be 70 additional, secret books given only to selected leaders. Thus, to the writer of 2 Esdras, there are many important religious books, but that are not canonical. The Babylonian Talmud mentions only the 24 books. [\[44\]](#) Josephus' 22 books can only be the same as the later canonical 24 if he is counting differently than all the early Jewish witnesses.

Even among the canonical books, there were differences in authority, and completely outside the written canon, there was oral tradition. According to James Barr, "For Jewish Law, the real canonical document is the Torah, and beside it the other parts of the biblical canon are quite subsidiary; but alongside the Torah there is from an early date the recognition of the oral tradition of law; and the elaborations of discussions of this oral tradition, eventually collected in the Mishnah and Talmud, though not termed 'canonical' or 'biblical', fulfills for Jewish law (along with the Torah itself) a role closer to that assumed by scripture, in relation to theology, in Christianity." [\[45\]](#)

In Jesus' time, it appears that it was not just the Pharisees that had oral traditions that rivaled scripture, but the Sadducees and Essenes as well. [\[46\]](#) Josephus, the historian, attributes some things to Moses that are not in the bible; [\[47\]](#) Philo's interpretations have the same source. Some of these were interpretations of the written law, arrived at by sages; but others were received traditions, said to have come from Moses himself, but unwritten.

In summary, at the time of Jesus, the Bible in Palestine consisted of the five books of the Torah, and the collection of the Prophets. Sometimes a third category was added to these two, the Writings, whose contents were undefined, but contained, at least, most of the books chosen for the later Hebrew bible. In Alexandria, the Writings were quite extensive, lacking a formal canon; but when the Bible was printed in Greek, it contained a varying number of books, usually most of what is now in the Apocrypha. To this was added an oral tradition of law, some of which is attributed was attributed to Moses. New Testament writers also quote from various traditions not in our Bibles quite freely, and treat them as if they were inspired. [\[48\]](#)

The third section of the Hebrew bible, the Writings, probably was crystallized about the end of the first century CE. Many scholars question whether the Council of Jamnia, in which Jewish scholars supposedly set the Hebrew canon, really took place at all.

The evidence for the decisions of the so-called Council of Jamnia is far from clear. From the fragments of discussions that have come down to us, we see that doubts were raised about Ezekiel, Proverbs, Esther, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Ezekiel was questioned because its description of ritual regulation differed from those of the Torah. Ecclesiastes was suspect because it appeared to contradict itself (e.g., 4:2, 9:4), and was alleged to contain heretical teaching (e.g., 1:3). [\[49\]](#)

Even after the supposed council of Jamnia, books of the Old Testament canon came in to question. As late as the third or possibly even fourth century CE, some rabbis denied that the book of Esther as "defiling the hands," the closest way in Hebrew to describe a book as being officially canonical.[\[50\]](#)

Ezekiel, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Esther

Books of the Old Testament disputed by some rabbis in the first century C.E. and later.[\[51\]](#)

In any case, the 24 book practical canon was widely adopted in the next few centuries until the emergence of the Massoretic text, but not quite universally. To this day, Ethiopian Jews keep a canon closer to the Septuagint.

Bishop Melito of Sardis, in the fourth century, went to Palestine to discover which Hebrew books belonged in the canon. McDowell cites the list of the Old Testament compiled by Melito, Bishop of Sardis. He made a journey to the eastern Roman Empire, "... the place where where it all happened and the truth was proclaimed, I obtained precise information about the Old Testament books, and made out the list which I am now sending you ..."[\[52\]](#)

Melito's list gives us insight about Christian use of the Old Testament in the late second century. Christians generally used the Old Testament as scripture, but Melito was uncertain as to what books should be included. If he had already known what they were, he would not have to journey. His report, repeated by Eusebius, omits Esther.[\[53\]](#)

Esther is not quoted by Christ, nor by any of the New Testament writers. There has been no copy of Esther found at Qumran, the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The early Christian church made no use of it, and no church father attempted an exposition of it. Origen does not include it in the list of historical books.[\[54\]](#) It was also omitted by bishop Athanasius in the famous Easter Letter of 367 C.E., the first list to include the exact set of books of today's New Testament;[\[55\]](#) and Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 391 C.E.) omitted it as well.[\[56\]](#)

Since several early Christian lists omit Esther, and because of the urgency of Melito's expressed intent, this is probably not a mere oversight. Lamentations and Nehemiah are also not listed, but it is probable that they are combined into Jeremiah and Ezra, respectively.

It appears that Esther is a bit of a mistake and embarrassment, and the Talmud contains relatively late criticisms of it. Finally accepted into the Hebrew Bible, more targums and midrashes were based on Esther, by subsequent rabbis, than any other portion of the OT. However, "With this verdict of late Judaism modern Christians cannot agree. The Book is so conspicuously lacking in religion that it should never have been included in the Canon of the OT., but should have been left with Judith and Tobit among the apocryphal writings," according to scholar Lewis B. Paton.[\[57\]](#)

What Does the New Testament say about the Old Testament?

Scholars agree that Jesus' use of the Old Testament books was generally the same as Palestinian Jews, so far as the use of books. Jesus refers to the Law and the Prophets, and once to the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, an indistinct collection. The New Testament writers omit Esther, as did the Qumran Essene community, as did Sirach, and many early rabbis. Jesus is often quoted as introducing passages with the quotation formula, "as it is written."

Seeking the testimony of Christ as witness to the Old Testament canon, Josh McDowell cites Luke 11:51 and Matthew 23:35. "From the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah." McDowell avers that Jesus endorsed the Hebrew canon as preserved by the Jews, from Genesis to 2 Chronicles, which is the last book in scripture according to the Jewish tradition.

In referring to Matthew 23:35, Josh McDowell brings up a real can of worms. In Matt. 23:35, Jesus is quoted as saying, "the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar." However the prophet stoned in the temple in 2 Chron. 24:20-21 is Zechariah the son of Jehoiada. According to scholars, there does not appear to be a plausible solution other than it was a mistake of some kind -- but of what kind, exactly? It has been suggested that "Matthew" has picked up the name of Zechariah the son of Baruch, who was also murdered in the temple precincts in 68 C. E., more than thirty years *after* Jesus was supposed to have spoken,[\[58\]](#) but within the time of the writing of the gospels.

The New Testament can't even quote the Old Testament straight.

The most likely explanation is that Matthew confused two persons together: Zechariah the priest (son of Jehoiada, 2 Chron. 24:20-2); and Zechariah the prophet (son of Berechiah, Zech. 1:1). It is unlikely that a literate Jew would have made this mistake. The Zechariah of Chronicles was the subject of a number of rabbinical traditions, making it a "not unfamiliar part of scripture."[\[59\]](#)

Of course, if Jesus was referring to some other, unknown Zechariah, then he could not have been bearing witness to the Old Testament canon -- which was what McDowell was trying to prove.

Protestant founder Martin Luther knew that the Bible contained verbal errors and inconsistencies. He knew that Mat. 27:9 mistakenly cited Jeremiah for Zechariah. 'But such points do not bother me particularly,' he wrote.[\[60\]](#)

We return to the story of the canon. Besides the passages listed by McDowell where the Christian New Testament quotes from the Hebrew bible, the NT book Jude (v. 14-16) quotes the noncanonical book, Enoch (1 Enoch 1:9). Is it scripture? Jude 9 also quotes an unknown work. Later commentators say this passage is a quote from the Assumption of Moses, which may be related to The Testament of Moses, of which we have a portion. Compare Heb. 11:37 with The Martyrdom of Isaiah.

Other N.T. quotations with unknown sources: John 7:38, Luke 11:49, and James 4:5.[\[61\]](#)

Jude 14-16 1 Enoch 1:9

Jude 9 Unknown, perhaps The Assumption of Moses

Heb. 11:37 The Martyrdom of Isaiah

John 7:38 Unknown

Luke 11:49 Unknown

James 4:5 Unknown

2 Timothy 3:8f Jannes and Jambres

Other works cited by New Testament authors which are neither in the Bible nor the Old Testament Apocrypha.

2 Timothy 3:8f, refers to the Egyptian magicians Jannes and Jambres. It seems that the author cites *The Book of Jannes and Jambres*, a work now available only in fragments.[\[62\]](#) This work is stated to be the source of the passage in 2 Timothy by the Christian writer Origen of the third century, and by Abrosiaster of the fourth century.

When the New Testament writers quote the Hebrew Bible (OT), they usually use the Septuagint, the Greek version prepared by Jewish scholars in Alexandria, Egypt. Unfortunately, the Septuagint contains some readings widely at variance with the Massoretic text, the Hebrew bible used as a basis for the OT used by Protestants. Furthermore, the Septuagint scrolls contained a varying number of books of the Apocrypha, interspersed with now-canonical books, which books of the Apocrypha are not accepted by Protestants. In this particular matter, today's Protestants have departed from early church tradition.

The Old Testament Apocrypha

1 Esdras

2 Esdras

Tobit

Judith

Additions to Esther

Wisdom of Solomon

Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach, or Sira

Baruch

The Letter of Jeremiah

The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men (addition to Daniel)

Susanna (Daniel)

Bel and the Dragon (Daniel)

The Prayer of Manasseh

1 Maccabees

2 Maccabees

The Apocrypha, as included in the Revised Standard Version (1957).

The Old Testament Apocrypha consists of these fifteen books in many of today's English language Bibles. In previous English editions of the Bible which included the Apocrypha, the Letter of Jeremiah was incorporated into Baruch, giving only fourteen books.[\[63\]](#)

Here are the books of the Septuagint in the Codex Vaticanus, which collection itself is an early witness of the New Testament (fourth century CE): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-4 Kingdoms (1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings), 1 and 2 Chronicles, 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras (Ezra-Nehemiah), Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, Job, the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Esther, Judith, Tobit, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Baruch, Lamentations, The Epistle of Jeremy, Ezekiel, Daniel.[\[64\]](#)

The Codex Vaticanus is cited by Josh McDowell on p. 47 of *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* as witness to nearly the whole Bible. It also contains six books of the Apocrypha. Esther is listed with Judith and Tobit, preceding the prophets. If Vaticanus is valid evidence for the text of the *New Testament*, why does it not likewise testify to the Christian use of the *Old*? The list of books included in the Sinaitic scroll are similar.

Later, during the Reformation, Catholic biblical scholar Erasmus wrote to Luther over a dispute concerning the freedom of the human will. In favor of his opinion, Erasmus cited a passage from Sirach (also called Ecclesiasticus), a book of the Apocrypha. "I think no one should detract from the authority of this book because Saint Jerome indicated it did not belong to the Hebrew canon," wrote Erasmus, "since the Christians received it into their canon, and I cannot see why the Hebrews excluded it when they included the Parables of Solomon [presumably Ecclesiastes rather than Proverbs] and the amatory Canticles [Song of Solomon]." Erasmus was trying to defend Sirach, rather than to reject Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs.[\[65\]](#)

In favor of the Apocrypha:

Highly regarded by Christians throughout centuries.

Ideas and images from the Apocrypha are presupposed by New Testament writers.

Linked to the Septuagint, the Greek language version of the Old Testament often favored by New Testament writers.

Quoted as scripture by many early Christian writers.

Many codices of the New Testament also contain the Septuagint, including various combinations of the books of the Apocrypha.

As part of the Vulgate, the Apocrypha was accepted as a Christian standard for centuries.

It was included by Protestants in the versions of Martin Luther, albeit with a cautionary note, and of King James. Standard part of English language Bibles until 1827; still printed in German Bibles.

Against the Apocrypha.

Not accepted by later Jews. Not preserved as part of Hebrew Bible.

No direct quotes in the New Testament from the 15 books. 1 Enoch is directly quoted, however.

Not quoted as scripture by Philo, an Alexandrian Jew, about the time of Jesus. However, Philo quotes little outside of the Torah.

Disputed or recognized as of lesser value by some early Christian leaders, notably Jerome.

Disputed by leaders of the Reformation, to varying degrees, as to authenticity, and to religious value.

Egregious historical inaccuracies and other faults.

There are four main positions of the modern church concerning the Old Testament Apocrypha:[\[66\]](#)

(1) The Roman Catholic Church accepts all the works of the Apocrypha, except the prayer of Manasseh and 1 and 2 Esdras, as parts of the canon. This decision, regarded as binding, was made at the Council of Trent in 1546 C.E.[\[67\]](#)

(2) The Greek Church has had many debates about the Apocrypha, but no binding decision. It accepts and uses all the books, except 2 Esdras.

(3) The Church of England does not accept the Apocrypha as fully canonical. However, they are highly esteemed, and "the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners." They are read in the regular cycle of readings in the public life of the Church, with the Old and New Testaments.

(4) Reformed churches -- and most of the non-Anglican Protestant churches -- do not accept the Apocrypha as canonical, or as nearly canonical. The Westminster Confession, for example, declares them to be "of no authority" in the Church.

Why Aren't the Old Testament Apocryphal Books Regarded as Canonical?

Here is a list of reasons given by Josh McDowell.

1. "They abound in historical and geographical inaccuracies and anachronisms."[\[68\]](#)

The canonical books also contain such inaccuracies and contradictions. For example, in Gen. 26, Ahimelech of Gerar is said to be a Philistine, but the story is set in the time of Abraham,[\[69\]](#) several hundred years before the Philistines.

In Genesis 14:14, reference is made to an exploit of Abraham to the northern city of Dan. This city, named after Abraham's great grandson, was not conquered and renamed by Israelites until hundreds of years later (Judges 18:29).

Deuteronomy, supposed to be a book written by Moses, contains an account of his own death, and a summary that "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses" which implies the passage of many generations.[\[70\]](#) Moses never crossed the river Jordan, according to the story, and remained on the east side. However, Deuteronomy was composed by someone within Palestine -- one the west side -- because the book refers to the east as "the other side of the Jordan."[\[71\]](#)

The Chronicler, the name usually given to the anonymous author of four OT books, describes King David as collecting ten thousand darics for the construction of the temple in Jerusalem (1 Chron. 29:7). The daric is a coin named after king Darius of Persia, who lived some five hundred years after David.[\[72\]](#)

The book of Esther, which, as we have seen, was very late in acceptance, lacked the seal of approval of New Testament writers, and was missing at Qumran, has many historical inaccuracies. If Mordecai was carried into exile in 597 BCE (2:6), he would have been over 110 years old by the reign of Xerxes.[\[73\]](#) How old would that make his cousin Esther, who was supposed to be famous for her great beauty? According to the Greek historian Herodotus, the queen of Xerxes was named Amestris,[\[74\]](#) not Esther or Vashti, nor does Esther appear as the name of any other Persian king.[\[75\]](#) It was Persian practice to marry strictly between the seven Persian royal founding families.[\[76\]](#) Amestris was the daughter of a Persian general. It appears that the only historical person in the entire books is Xerxes.

The condition of the Jews as a scattered people (3:8), and a time in which there is hatred and tension between Jew and Gentile, fit better with the Hellenistic period rather than the Persian.

2. "They teach doctrines which are false and foster practices which are at variance with inspired scriptures."

You have to decide first which doctrines and practices to accept. This is a circular argument: the canon endorses your doctrine, your doctrine endorses your canon.[\[77\]](#) Since Christians have never all agreed on either, confusion reigns.

Are we supposed to know who the real Christians are, first, and then inquire of them which books are in the Bible? Based strictly on behavior, it would be hard to find very many Christians at all.

McDowell poses as one who is arguing to non-Christian seekers, who want evidence from history to decide about Christ. As historians seeking objectivity, we should reserve judgment about the correctness of such points in dispute; I sympathize with the Roman judge who refused to judge a religious dispute of religious words and names (Acts 18:15). In the matter of the Apocrypha, apologists are asking us to first believe them that they can tell what doctrines and practices are false *before* determining which books are in the Bible. And so it goes around and around.

3. "They resort to literary types and display an artificiality of subject matter and styling out of keeping with inspired scripture."

Canonical works are also filled with literary types and artificial style. Why are Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes considered inspired?[\[78\]](#) Song of Solomon? So far as literary types, and artificial style, the characters of the Book of Esther are especially flat and one-dimensional.

Even Jerome lamented the comparatively poor style of the Hebrew prophets compared with the polished works of the Greco-Roman culture.

Jerome and Old Testament Style

According to his writings, Jerome had determined to go to Jerusalem and be a good soldier for Christ. Jerome, however, could not keep from reading his collected works of pagans. He would alternately fast and pray, and then read the works of Cicero, the Roman orator, or a Roman play. "After frequent night vigils, after shedding of tears which the remembrance of past sins brought forth from my inmost heart, I would take in my hands a volume of Plautus [a Roman playwright]. When I came to myself and began to read a prophet again, I rebelled at the uncouth style..."

Jerome went on to berate himself for enjoying a good Roman comedy, then wincing at the style of the Old Testament. He compared scripture to the full strength of the sun.[\[166\]](#) Jerome blamed his weakness on "the old serpent" -- the Devil.

Jerome fell into a deep fever. He has a dream of a stern Judge who accused him of being a Ciceronian, not a Christian. In his dream, the Judge ordered him to be severely beaten. Jerome begged the forbearance of the Judge, and renounced reading books of pagan literature, indeed, any secular writings. In my opinion, this was not a sound decision. I can't help feeling that modern chemistry could have helped poor brother Hieronymous.

In his story, Jerome acknowledges the superiority of style of the Greek and Roman writers. I like to think Jerome saw the Old Testament as vegetables--unappetizing, but necessary.

On the other hand, some of the other books, both canonical and noncanonical, have an interesting dramatic style. They belong to a genre of fiction, a kind of novella. In this category are the canonical books of Ruth, Jonah, Daniel, and Esther[\[79\]](#), the Joseph section of Genesis, and the noncanonical books of Judith, Tobit, 3 Ezra, and the story of Ahikar. The last five of these books mentioned have these common elements: each legend takes place in the court of a powerful and pleasure-loving king of ancient times. Daniel, Mordecai, and Ahikar all have similar positions of authority. "In all these stories the enemies of the Jews fail at the moment of their expected triumph, and perish by the same fate that they had planned for the Jews." There are a number of parallels between Esther and the "Thousand and One Arabian Nights," the later collection of stirring tales.[\[80\]](#)

In favor of some of the books of the Apocrypha, we note that Judith and Maccabees have inspired operas. Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) and Wisdom are considered to be of high literary quality, and are read and quoted in even some Protestant churches with appreciation.[\[81\]](#)

Martin Luther wrote about the apocryphal book of Tobit: "A truly beautiful, wholesome, and profitable fiction, the work of a gifted poet ... A book useful and good for us Christians to read."[\[82\]](#)

Are we saying that some of the books of the Old Testament should be dropped, and some of the books of the Apocrypha included? Maybe Christians should think about that proposition, but it is not the point at hand. The point is: there is no *clear* difference between the books of the Protestant OT canon, and the general body of Jewish and ancient neareastern literature.

4. "They lack the distinctive elements which give genuine Scripture their divine character, such as prophetic power and poetic and religious feeling."

Another circular argument. You have to determine what the proper religious feeling is first. Does your canon support your attitudes, or do your religious attitudes determine which books fit in your canon? What prophetic power is to be found in Ruth or Esther?

In particular, Esther does not contain any mention of God, nor of any religious act other than fasting. According to Paton, there is not one noble character in the book. Esther gains her victories not by skill or character, but by her beauty; when she wins the upper hand, she is relentless towards her enemies, securing not merely the safety of her people, but the ruination and slaughter of their enemies. "Morally, Est. falls far short of the general level of the OT., and even of the Apocrypha."[\[83\]](#)

I nominate Esther as the worst book in the Bible.

If some of the canonical works have little to recommend them but poetry, then why not admit Tobit and Judith as well?

Consistency for the New Testament?

If these standards rule against the books of the Old Testament Apocrypha on the basis of historical and geographical inaccuracies, how could some books of the New Testament be accepted by the same rules?

In Luke 2:1-3, the census of Quirinius is placed during the reign of Herod the Great, a displacement of some ten years.

The gospel of Mark seems to hold the record for the most geographical problems. Mark 7:31 says that Jesus and his disciples journeyed "out from the borders of Tyre ... through Sidon, to the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the borders of Decapolis." This is geographically nonsensical. "How many have been the headaches of commentators, trying to make sense out of that!"[\[84\]](#)

Mark 6:21 says that Antipas' birthday party was for "the chief men *of Galilee*." Yet in Mark 6:27, Antipas had the baptist beheaded in prison and his head brought to the party. Therefore the festivities were still in progress, and the guests must have been in Macharerus, Herod's southern palace, where John was imprisoned, according to Josephus. This was a good 100 miles from Antipas's Galilean headquarters. "Did 'the chief men of Galilee' walk all that way to a birthday

party?" Or did the author of Mark "simply have no idea how far it was from Tiberias to John's prison?"[\[85\]](#)

There is the story that Jesus cast out demons from a "man with a unclean spirit" to a herd of swine, who promptly drove themselves off a steep bank and drowned in the sea. Mark 5:1 specifies that the eastern side of the lake of Galilee is the country of the *Gerasenes*. "Gerasa is more than thirty miles southeast of the lake, too far away for the setting of the story which demands a city in the vicinity, with a precipitous slope down to the water. ... Matthew ... changed Mark's *Gerasenes* to *Gadarenes* (Mt. 8:28), Gadara being a well-known spa only eight miles from the lake."[\[86\]](#)

Believers did not choose their holy books by first determining their historical or geographical accuracy.

What the Apocrypha really means

The word, "apocrypha," simply means, "hidden books." A Hebrew synonym is *genuzim*, which in several places in the Talmud is applied to Proverbs, the Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes.[\[87\]](#) Heretical works, such as those by Christians, were put into a category of *separim hisonim*, or extraneous books. Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) fragments were found at Qumran; the same book was quoted freely as scripture by rabbis as late as the third or fourth centuries C.E.[\[88\]](#)

The books of the Apocrypha have survived only because Christians used them. Although concerned with Jews, and written by Jews, that nation did not preserve them.[\[89\]](#)

2 Maccabees is rejected by Protestants partly on doctrinal grounds. 2 Macc. 12.40-6 supports the doctrine of purgatory. In that passage, reference is made to the offering of prayers and sacrifices in behalf of the dead, "that they might be delivered from their sin."

In Luther's Bible, the books of the Apocrypha were preceded by his explanation that he did not think these books were canonical, but that he thought them "good and useful for reading." This action, together with the opinions of other Reformation leaders, started the Protestant rejection of the authority of the books of the Apocrypha; nevertheless, because of tradition, he could not omit them entirely. Luther did not include 1 and 2 Esdras, but they were put into the English Bible of the King James Version.[\[90\]](#)

The Authorized Version bible of 1611 included the Apocrypha. It was not clearly separated by a preface, as Martin Luther had included in his translation. In this English language classic, there was no clear explanation of subordinate rank.[\[91\]](#) The Church of England requires the books of the Apocrypha to be included in any edition of the Bible authorized for use in public worship. Indeed, the church provides for considerable use of these books in its lectionary.[\[92\]](#)

Historical Testimony of the exclusion of the Old Testament Apocrypha

McDowell quotes Geisler and Nix on a series of citations that support the conclusion that the Old Testament Apocrypha was never treated as inspired scripture. Other authorities disagree; some go as far as to define the Old Testament including the Old Testament simply as the traditional Christian canon.

McDowell writes that Jesus and the New Testament authors refer to almost all the books of the Hebrew canon. Almost, indeed. The New Testament writers do not refer to these canonical

books: Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes and Esther.[\[93\]](#) However, the NT refers the following passages from the Old Testament Apocrypha:[\[94\]](#)

Hebrews 1:3 Wisdom of Solomon 7:25-26

Hebrews 11:35f Refers to 2 Macc. 6-7

James 1:19 Ecclesiasticus 5:11

In Evidence that Demands a Verdict, it is written (p. 36): "No canon or council of the Christian church for the first four centuries recognized the Apocrypha as inspired." Unless we make some artificial restrictions, this claim is untrue. The books of the Apocrypha are on Bishop Athanasius' list in the Easter Letter of 367 CE.[\[95\]](#) This list is the first place that exactly the 27 books of our New Testament are to be found. If it was a good list for the New Testament, why is it not evidence for the Old? A list similar to that of Athanasius was ratified by the Synod of Carthage in 397 CE. Surely we should count this as within "the first four centuries," and it was within a mere thirty years of the initial defining of the New Testament. After 400 CE., the Church "officially accepted a canon longer than the Jews."

McDowell's scholars call the Council of Trent's 1546 inclusion of the Apocrypha in the canon a "polemical action" of the Counter Reformation. However, other scholars term this same action a reassertion of the "traditional Christian longer canon."[\[96\]](#)

These books, the Apocrypha, were accepted throughout the Greek and Latin world until at least the fourth century C.E., and most early church fathers treated them as scripture. Metzger, in *Introduction to the Apocrypha*, showed how New Testament writers used key ideas and phrases.

Old Testament Apocryphal works are quoted by the 'Apostolic Fathers.' For instance, the Epistle of Barnabas, besides referring to Old Testament prophets, also cites as prophets the authors of the Wisdom of Solomon (2.12), 2 Esdras (12.1), and 2 Baruch (11.9f.). A statement from 1 Enoch is quoted with the formula 'For the scripture says' (16.5-6). Although it seems Barnabas knew some of the material of the New Testament, he does not quote it as scripture.[\[97\]](#)

Irenaeus' Old Testament consisted of the books commonly accepted from the Greek Old Testament, including the additions to Daniel, Baruch, 2 Esdras, and 1 Enoch.[\[98\]](#)

Reformer John Calvin rejected the right of the Catholic Church to define a canon which included the Apocrypha. Nevertheless, Calvin quotes as scripture several of the books of the O. T. Apocrypha in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and elsewhere in his works.

The Apocrypha was included in the early German and English Bibles, including Luther's. It was part of the original King James Version, but American Bibles stopped printing it in 1827.

Currently most of the Apocrypha is accepted as canon among the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Armenian and Ethiopian churches, and Ethiopian Jews. Catholics accept a total of 73 books as canonical, but Eastern Orthodox churches accept even more (approximately the whole list above).

The Ethiopian Christian Old Testament contains these books, plus Jubilees, 1 Enoch, and Joseph ben Gorion's (Josippon's) medieval history of the Jews and other nations. Together with a larger New Testament, the Ethiopian Christian Bible consists of 81 books.[\[99\]](#)

The New Testament Canon

Reformer John Calvin and the Canon

First, we should note that reformer John Calvin wrote against the idea of a fixed canon of the Bible.

But the Romanists have another end in view when they say that the power of interpreting Scripture belongs to councils.

... They allege an old catalogue, which they call the Canon. and say that it originated in a decision of the Church. But I again ask, In what council was that Canon published? Here they must be dumb. Besides, I wish to know what they believe the Canon to be. For I see that the ancients are little agreed with regard to it. If effect is to be given to what Jerome says (Praef. in Lib. Solom.), the Maccabees, Tobit, Ecclesiasticus, and the like, must take their place in the Apocrypha; but this they will not tolerate on any account. [\[167\]](#)

Here Calvin took the line, later used by McDowell, that the books of the Bible are not authoritative because the Church has approved them. Calvin elsewhere argued that the value of the books should be evident to believers. In the present passage we see that Calvin doubted that there is such a thing as a fixed canon, and recognized the evidence of the early church that they sometimes used more or fewer books.

In context: Calvin was disputing with the Roman Catholic leaders about Church authority. The text, and in similar arguments elsewhere, referred specifically to a Roman Catholic canon which included the O. T. Apocrypha. Calvin also objected to Roman claims of authority to interpret the meaning of scripture, as well as which books constitute scripture.

Calvin wrote:

But in regard to the Canon itself, which they so superciliously intrude upon us, ancient writers are not agreed. Let the mediators, then, enjoy

their own as they please, provided we are at liberty to repudiate those which all men of sense, at least when informed on the subject, will perceive to be not of divine original.[\[168\]](#)

We don't dispute Calvin's high views of the Bible as the Word of God. or his use of the written scriptures as we know them.

However, he argued that acceptance of any particular book of scripture depends on an individual's knowledge and conscience. In context, Calvin specifically argued against acceptance of the O.T. Apocrypha, declared to be authoritative by the R. C. Church; logically, however. the "liberty to repudiate" given to "all men of sense" would apply also to all books of the Old Testament and New Testament.

Calvin and the Book of Revelation

With respect to Revelation, historians believe that Calvin gave this weird book less esteem. Several Protestant reformers had suggested that some books did not belong in the New Testament (Zwingli), or should be put into a New Testament Apocrypha (Luther, etc.).

First, we note that Calvin wrote commentaries on all New Testament books except 2 and 3 John, and Revelation. The two minor epistles could be excused on the basis of size; however, the Apocalypse of John could not be ignored on that account. T. H. L. Parker emphasizes that skipping Revelation could not have been an oversight; Calvin wrote commentaries on all the New Testament books in a systematic order, through the epistles. At this juncture, instead of completing the commentary with 2 and 3 John, and Revelation, Calvin instead went on to the historical books and the Old Testament. "To that extent, therefore, we may say that he was imposing a practical canon on the New Testament," Parker concludes.[\[169\]](#) The practical canon excluded Revelation.

There is a famous story that Calvin is supposed to have said, when asked about Revelation, that he "was not able to understand anything in so obscure a Writer, whose Name and History were not settled among the learned."[\[170\]](#) The

citation is indirect, and Parker is doubtful that Calvin actually said this.

Calvin quoted the book of Revelation at least a dozen times in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. To Willem Balke, author of *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, this is enough to prove that Calvin accepted the book with scripture, and not in a reduced status.[\[171\]](#)

On the other hand, Calvin quoted the Old Testament Apocrypha in the *Institutes* and his other works, and also quoted several ancient secular sources.

As a second major point, we note that Calvin's doctrinal views either ignore, allegorize, or are antagonistic to the theology expressed in Revelation. For instance, in *Institutes* 3.25.5, Calvin disputes the doctrine of the Millennium as a literal post-second advent rule of Christ. The Apocalypse had been used by the Anabaptists in their views of the imminent end of the world.

The town of Muenster, Westphalia, was taken over by militant Anabaptists in 1536, who were intent on establishing the Kingdom of God. Think of Muenster as Waco, Texas, in 1993, with the Branch Davidians held at bay by the Feds. Please excuse some license in imagining the following correspondence:

From: John Calvin, Geneva
To: David Koresh, Waco
Re: Revelation, aka. the Apocalypse of John

Don't take it so seriously.

JEAN.

According to McDowell, the basic factor for including a book in the New Testament was inspiration by God, and its chief test was apostolicity. We are to suppose the apostles wrote the books of the New Testament, knowing full well that they were writing scripture. The churches would then take these books, which they knew were inspired, and that became the New Testament. However, this scenario is contrary to the evidence.

For the first several generations of the Jesus movement, the idea of a "New Testament Canon" was unknown. Gradually, some books came to be used in churches for readings. The number of works used grew -- including works written much later but given out as written by one apostle or another. The lists maintained by churches and various authorities for approved usage differed

widely from one another. The problem is both that there were books included in these lists that are not canonical, and that some which are currently canonical were left out. The Christian church lasted for its first 300 years without the Bible as we know it.

McDowell brushes past the considerable arguments of the early church about the canon. Educated church leaders, including the reformer John Calvin, knew that the canon was the subject of numerous ancient disputes.

According to scholar R. M. Grant, " ... [W]hile Christians who were concerned with defining a New Testament canon analogous to the Old Testament canon, they were in no position, at least in the first few centuries, to say exactly what was in it. The Old Testament canon during this time was more a process than an achievement."[\[100\]](#)

Bruce M. Metzger, analyzing the Apostolic Fathers (1 Clement, Ignatius, the Didache, fragments of Papias, Barnabas, Hermas of Rome i.e. The Shepherd of Hermas, and the so-called 2 Clement), concluded that for early Jewish Christians, "the Bible consisted of the Old Testament and some Jewish apocryphal literature. Along with this written authority went traditions, chiefly oral, of sayings attributed to Jesus. On the other hand, authors who belonged to the 'Hellenistic Wing' of the Church refer more frequently to writings that later came to be included in the New Testament. At the same time, however, they very rarely regarded such documents as 'Scripture'. "[\[101\]](#)

We have evidence of the spotty development and treatment of the writings later regarded as the New Testament in the second and third centuries CE. Gradually, written Gospels, and collections of epistles, different ones in different regions, became to be more highly regarded. Sometimes they were regarded as 'inspired' but still not fully equal to the Old Testament scriptures.[\[102\]](#)

According to Grant: "It should be added that in the writings of most of the Apostolic Fathers and some of the apologists, not to mention Irenaeus, Clement, and Origen, there are quotations of sayings of Jesus not preserved in the canonical gospels. Some of the sayings doubtless came from oral tradition; other may well have been preserved in books. The gradual development of the Canon was a process of exclusion and it lasted at least to the fourth century."[\[103\]](#) And again, "The Canon of the New Testament was the result of a long and gradual process in the course of which the books regarded as authoritative, inspired, and apostolic were selected out of a much larger body of literature. "[\[104\]](#)

The process was not haphazard, but it was tied to theological controversies. "Only when it could be decided that something was really Christian, while something else was not, could Christians come to make definite decisions about the authoritative books. This means that the process was somewhat circular, or at least that the mode of procedure could not be stated with logical precision. One might say 'Bible' and 'Church' grew up together."[\[105\]](#)

The Bible and the Church grew up together. This is much more accurate than McDowell's assertion that the Church did not create the canon or the books of the Bible. Yes, the Church wrote the Bible, selected and preserved the books; once chosen, the books influenced the further development of the church.

R. M. Grant discusses the divorce between historical authenticity and orthodox authority. "... This is to say that the development of the Canon and the development of Christian theology were closely interrelated, and supported one another. For this reason we cannot say that the gnostic gospels, revelations, and other books which were definitely rejected toward the end of the second century were necessarily written at a later date. They may well have been written early even

though they came to be viewed as unorthodox and non-canonical later. The question of canonicity or, to put it more historically, authority--since the term 'canon' was not used until the fourth century--did not and could not arise until the idea of orthodoxy had clearly arisen out of the second-century anti-gnostic debates." [106] Grant goes on to qualify his statement, allowing that the synoptic gospels and the writings of Paul were widely accepted relatively early.

Diversity of Early Christianity

Bart D. Ehrman provides the following points as summary of his introductory chapter on the New Testament and early Christian writings:

"1. Early Christianity was extremely diverse. It was not the unified monolith that modern people sometimes assume.

"2. This diversity was manifest in a wide range of writings, only some of which have come down to us in the New Testament.

"3. The New Testament canon was formed by proto-orthodox Christians who wanted to show that their views were grounded in the writings of Jesus' own apostles.

"4. Whether these writings actually represent the views of Jesus' own apostles, however, was in some instances debated for decades, even centuries." [107]

The Challenge of Marcion

There is no evidence of a canon of the New Testament before that of Marcion, about 140 C.E. This rich Christian challenged the rest of church by rejection of the Old Testament, and by collecting parts of what is now the New Testament, rejecting those he thought were too Jewish. [108]

The establishment faction of the church began to collect its own books to be held as authoritative. Over the next two hundred years, this process of rejection of competitive ideas, and the collection of scattered writings believed to have come from first century Christian leaders, i.e., apostles, became our New Testament canon.

There is no evidence that there existed any sort of canon in the first century. Marcion did not reject an existing, fixed list. Rather, the protoorthodox organized collections of existing writings after this challenge.

Certain books and collections became authoritative differently in different areas. The four gospels we know now, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were never mentioned together until 180 C.E. It seems that a collection of letters of Paul began to be put together in some areas, but that are unknown in other churches.

Early Christian Usage

Did the early Christians regard the books of our New Testament as inspired, as scripture, as a canon? To find evidence, we must examine how they were used by Christian writers. The quotation-formula, "it is written," is usually a clue that the writer regards the work quoted as scripture. The following sources were Christians writing in the early second century CE.

Contrary to the position of Josh McDowell, Ignatius never uses "it is written" for a quotation from the New Testament in his letters. The phrase is reserved for two quotations from Proverbs.[\[109\]](#) He did, however, show familiarity with several New Testament books. In the fourth century, however, a creator of a 'new Ignatius' filled his letters with the quotations he thought Ignatius should have provided.[\[110\]](#)

In his single extant letter, Polycarp regarded the sayings of Jesus and the epistles of Paul as authoritative for Christians, but not as scripture. Many passages echo the language of these books. In one passage (Philadelphians 12:1), Polycarp quotes the Septuagint of Psalms 4:5 together with Paul's Ephesians 4:26. Here, scholars believe that either he thought of 'scripture' as either being any writing, or that he thought he was quoting from the Old Testament. Nothing else in his letter indicates that he viewed New Testaments writings as scripture.[\[111\]](#)

The writer of the Epistle of Barnabas not only used Old Testament books, but also various Jewish apocalyptic writings quoting non-canonical books. He uses the formula, 'it is written' for books such as 1 Enoch, 2 Esdras, and 2 Baruch.[\[112\]](#) Barnabas never quotes any part of the New Testament as scripture, however.[\[113\]](#)

Barnabas 4:3 "As Enoch says." Passage not identified.

16:5-6 "It is written" applied to 1 Enoch 91:13. Also 1 Enoch 89:56.

12:1 2 Esdras 4:33, 5:5.

11:9 2 Baruch 61:7; "a prophet."

10:8, 11 Letter of Aristeas 128f, esp. 165.

A passage in a late manuscript Part of Psalms combined with the *Apocalypse of Adam*

References in Barnabas to non-canonical books as scripture[\[114\]](#)

The first to unmistakably quote the New Testament as scripture, "as it is written," seems to have been Basilides, a gnostic teacher at Alexandria in the first part of the second century C. E. An account of his teaching was preserved by Hippolytus.[\[115\]](#) Hippolytus, however, wrote in the third century. Grant concludes that the use of the New Testament as scripture arose in Alexandria early in the second century CE, which puts it perhaps thirty to fifty years before scholars had previously thought. He also hints that this may also be the time and place for the composition of 2 Peter, which itself contains reference to the letters of Paul as scripture.

The first Christian writer to include a New Testament author among "the holy scriptures and all the inspired men" was Theophilus of Antioch, about 180 C.E.[\[116\]](#) However, he also regarded the Sybil, a pagan oracle, as inspired.[\[117\]](#)

The first to use the term, "New Testament," was Irenaeus.[\[118\]](#) He "flourished" about 180 C.E. He is also the first to give the explicit formation of four gospels, and exactly four.

Incredibly, the early Christian teacher, Papias, is recorded as citing part of 2 Baruch, and ascribing it instead to the teachings of Jesus.[\[119\]](#)

The Didache, c. 100 CE. Primary authority is tradition, oral or written, mainly oral. May have known written Gospel of Matthew. Grant, *Formation of the NT*, p. 64f.

Papias, c. 110 CE. Three or more gospels, including at least Mark and John, perhaps including Gospel to the Hebrews; 1 John, 1 Peter. No trace of any Pauline epistles. Passage from 2 Baruch said to be teaching of Jesus. Grant, *Formation*, p. 68f.

Hermas of Rome, between 90-120 CE. Apocalyptic seems to be based on 2 Esdras. Only book quoted is the Jewish apocalypse, Eldad and Modat (Vis. 2.3.4). Allusions to Matthew and Ephesians. Grant, *Formation*, p. 72f.

1 Clement, c. 100 CE. Greek Old Testament used as scripture. Numerous allusions to gospels, Pauline epistles, Acts, Hebrews, but not quoted as scripture. Unknown 'scripture' quoted in 23.3-4 is probably a Jewish Apocalyptic work. Grant, *Formation*, p. 77f.

2 Clement, c. 125 CE. Refers to a saying from a gospel as scripture. In 11.2, quotes same Apocalyptic work as does 1 Clement. Uses Gospel of Thomas; oral tradition. Grant, *Formation*, p. 83f.

Ignatius, c. 125 CE. Uses language and images of 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Romans, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 (-2?) Thessalonians, and 1 Peter; perhaps Gospel of John; does not call them scripture. The only direct quotations are from Proverbs. Grant, *Formation*, p. 89f.

Polycarp, c. 130 Alludes to Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy; 1 Peter, 1 Clement; 1 or 2 John; Hebrews; at least one Gospel, Matthew; but did not regard the books as 'scripture.' Grant, *Formation*, p. 102f.

Barnabas, c. 130 Knows Matthew; probably John; phrases resemble 1, 2 Timothy. Does not quote any part of New Testament as scripture.

Justin, c. 150-c. 160 Old testament used for proof; refers to 'memoranda of the Apostles;' book of Revelation; uses oral tradition. Once refers to the 'memoranda' with the terms, "it is written that..." Grant, *Formation*, p. 106f.

Usage of New Testament as scripture by early Christian writers.¹²⁰

Many documents were in use at this early date that were later rejected. Eusebius contains the story of Serapion, a bishop of Antioch about 190 C. E., who hesitates with regard to the use of the Gospel of Peter.[\[121\]](#) That is, he and his congregation had already been using the book; what harm could come from a writing by the apostle Peter? Later, he heard from others that the book did not conform in doctrine. It was then rejected by the bishop. In the end, doctrine made a change in existing usage. It is evident that there existed at this time no fixed list of accepted, authoritative works.

Clement of Alexandria started writing in the last decade of the second century. He quotes explicitly from The Gospel according to the Hebrews. At one point, Clement states that there are only four received gospels, which would exclude the Gospel according to the Hebrews. After mentioning this point, Clement later quotes from *The Gospel according to the Hebrews*, but without giving his source;[\[122\]](#) he just sort of forgot where he had heard it.

There is peculiar connection between the Gospel according to the Hebrews and the canonical gospels. Scholars recognize that the story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery was not originally part of the Gospel of John (7:53-8:11). It is completely absent from the early manuscripts of John in Greek, and there are no comments on it by the early Greek church writers on John in its first thousand years.[\[123\]](#) In a few late copies where it actually appears, it is

sometimes stuck after 7:36 instead of where we now find it, or at the end of John, or even inserted into Luke (after Luke 21:38), instead. Yet there is internal and external evidence that the story is ancient, and quite attractive from a religious standpoint. It is a graceful story of forgiveness.

We read in Eusebius that "Papias relates another story of a woman who was accused of many sins before the Lord, which is contained in the Gospel according to the Hebrews."[\[124\]](#) We don't know if this is the same story that became inserted into John. But maybe, just maybe, a piece of a rejected gospel made its way into our Bibles.

Returning to the canon, by the end of the second century CE, it is correct to say that the outlines of the collections of Christian books were in place, with gospels and epistles, and that these writings were regarded as authoritative, apostolic, and inspired, but that they were not called 'the New Testament.'[\[125\]](#) Irenaeus introduced the idea that the Christians had four gospels, but no more; but there was as yet no list of books accepted authoritatively and exclusively.

About this time, we have evidence that such a list was beginning to be formed. According to the Muratorian fragment (c. 200), books Christians were obliged to read included only two epistles of John; one, maybe, of Peter, if you try to correct the text; and no mention of Hebrews. Also included was the Wisdom of Solomon, and the Apocalypses of John and of Peter.[\[126\]](#) This document is a fragment -- the beginning is missing -- that probably relates the books then in use in Italy. The Shepherd of Hermas was being read in churches, but the unknown author regards it as a recent work, and not authoritative. He also already warns of still other works, which are not to be received in the catholic Church.

According to R.M. Grant, the omission of 1 Peter from the Muratorian fragment is "striking, even shocking."[\[127\]](#) He thinks that the mention of this letter may simply have fallen out. However, this is the only information from this time and place; it is the tyranny of the single data point. It may be disputed as a mistake or oversight, nevertheless, the testimony as it stands is that this church did not use 1 Peter, James, or 3 John, but it did use the Apocalypse of Peter.

The church historian Eusebius, a contemporary of Constantine in the fourth century CE, listed recognized books. The list included Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; Acts; thirteen Pauline epistles; 1 Peter, 1 John, and 1 Clement (which does not appear in our Bibles). Books listed as disputed by Eusebius are Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. Eusebius makes clear that what was in dispute was not merely the usefulness of these books, but their authenticity.[\[128\]](#) It should be obvious that there was no pre-existing apostolic list of books; even the authorship of many of them were disputed three hundred years after the apostles.

Additional "canons", or lists are documented in Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

First Use of Today's Canon

The earliest exact reference to the `complete' New Testament, as we now know it, was in the year 367 CE, in the Easter Letter by Athanasius. This did not settle the matter. Varying lists continued to be drawn up by different church authorities. Metzger feels that the influence of Jerome and Augustine was the deciding factor in favor of the exact 27 (although Jerome also favored the Shepherd of Hermas and Barnabas).[\[129\]](#)

The list was formally accepted by a council at Rome in 382. Augustine personally campaigned for the same list at councils at Hippo, 393, at Carthage in 397, and at Carthage again in 419.[\[130\]](#)

However, none of these councils had effect throughout the Church, even in the Roman Empire; they were local in authority. Similarly, the various ecclesiastical letters had influence, but none had final authority.

Josh McDowell quotes from F. F. Bruce concerning the Synod of Hippo in 393, that the books did not receive "any authority the which they did not already possess, but simply recorded their previously established canonicity."[\[131\]](#) Despite the positive statement of Bruce, it is in contradiction to the evidence. McDowell continues, "Since this time there has been no serious question of the 27 accepted books of the New Testament by either Roman Catholics or Protestants." While Bruce's statement is historically questionable, McDowell's addition is plain wrong, in several ways. "*No serious questioning?*" As we will see, books of the New Testament are questioned by Catholics as "deuterocanonical," and likewise doubted by Protestant leaders such as Luther, Calvin and Zwingli.

Furthermore, McDowell's careful enumeration of Catholics and Protestants is much too convenient, leaving out the Eastern churches. The Syrian National Church used the Diatesseron for several centuries instead of the fourfold Gospels of the West, and it held out against some of the general epistles and Revelation. The canon of the Nestorian church consists of only 22 books, excluding 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation.[\[132\]](#) This East Syrian church persists today.[\[133\]](#)

In 692 CE, a council of Eastern bishops at Constantinople apparently adopted the list with the 27 books. It issued decrees that, so far as the books of the New Testament are concerned, quite incongruous and contradictory opinions.[\[134\]](#) The council sanctioned the list of the synod of Carthage, and the list of Athanasius, which recognized the minor Catholic epistles and Revelation, and also the Synod of Laodicea and the eighty-fifth Apostolic Canon, which omitted them.[\[135\]](#) Metzger concludes that this situation could only have happened if the council members simply had not read the documents involved. So much for the helpfulness and accuracy of the Holy Spirit working in church councils.

The apparent acceptance of the Book of Revelation by the Eastern church by a church council did not settle it for all concerned. There continued to be considerable grumbling among the Greek bishops.[\[136\]](#) According to a tabulation made by Westcott, in the tenth century no fewer than six different lists of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were received in the Greek Church.[\[137\]](#)

The Time of The Reformation

At the time of the Reformation, the canon of the Bible, Old and New Testaments, was called into question. Generally, the Protestants disputed the Catholic claim to interpret scripture, either by Papal decree or by the action of church councils. No one had defined the limits of the Bible until the (Catholic) Council of Trent, 1546. From this time, the Roman Catholic Church declared that the Old and New Testaments, plus the deuterocanonical books that were called Apocrypha by the Protestants, were scripture.

In this dispute, John Calvin rejected the idea of any fixed canon of the Bible. He did, indeed, use the Protestant-accepted books as the Word of God. However, Calvin had a well-known aversion to some books, such as Revelation. Some historians believe that this aversion may have taken the form of actually demoting 2 and 3 John and Revelation to a status lower in authority than the rest of scripture.[\[138\]](#)

Luther seemed to doubt the canon both of the Old Testament and the New. "I so hate Esther and II Maccabees that I wish they did not exist. There is too much Judaism in them and not a little heathenism."[\[139\]](#)

At Geneva, where reformer Calvin held sway, one Sebastian Castellio was denied ordination because he held that the Song of Songs was not inspired.[\[140\]](#) However, Castellio later translated an edition of the Bible which included the Song of Songs.

In the new Testament, Martin Luther condemned the Epistle of James as worthless, an 'epistle of straw.' Others have translated his phrase as, "a right strawy epistle compared to the others." Furthermore, he denigrated Jude, Hebrews, and the Apocalypse (Revelation). He did not omit them from his German Bible, but drew a line in the table of contents, putting them on a lower level than the rest of the New Testament.[\[141\]](#) If you had picked up the early German Bible translated by Martin Luther, and turned to the table of contents of the New Testament, this is what you would have seen: 23 books of the New Testament would appear in a numbered list. Below this list would be a line across the page. Below the line, unnumbered, would be Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation.[\[142\]](#)

I have a Martin Luther Bible printed in 1965. The German has the old Gothic script, and the table of contents page for the New Testament numbers the first 26 books as if they are fully accepted as part of the New Testament. Revelation is unnumbered.

In Prefaces to each of the four books, Luther explains his doubts as to their apostolic authority .

Hebrews Teaches, contrary to Paul, that there can be no repentance for sin after baptism [Heb. 6:4-6].

James "A right strawy epistle, compared to the others." [This comment was omitted in Luther's later editions.] It contradicts Paul by teaching justification by works.

Jude Dependent on 2 Peter, and quotes Apocryphal works.

Revelation Full of visions that do not belong to the task of apostolic writer; the writer recommends his own book much too highly; the book does not show Christ clearly. [\[1522\]](#)

Luther's objections to New Testament Books

Luther wrote that he did not want to impose his opinion about Revelation on others, but as for himself, his spirit could not find its way into the book.[\[143\]](#) In other words, in deference to tradition and conservatism, he did not act on his own opinion and exclude these books altogether from his Bible.

In a later edition, this preface to Revelation is superseded by another one. The new preface seems to have been contrived to find in the book a condemnation of Thomas Müntzer. This radical leader had used Revelation. In 1545, the preface summed up the message of Revelation: "That Christ is with his Saints to the end of the world despite plagues, beasts, and evil angels."[\[144\]](#) This later opinion is hard to square with a plain reading of Revelation. God is credited with sending plagues on the earth.[\[145\]](#) The angels of the vials of the seven last plagues, destroying the earth and sea, were working for God.

This late preface notwithstanding, Luther elsewhere also described Revelation as neither apostolic nor prophetic and resembling the dreams of the Abbot Joachim,[\[146\]](#) a wild visionary of the end of the world.

The test for Luther was whether a book proclaimed Christ. "That which does not preach Christ is not apostolic, though it be the work of Peter or Paul; and conversely that which does teach Christ is apostolic even though it be written by Judas, Annas, Pilate, Herod."[\[147\]](#)

Zwingli, at the Berne disputation of 1528, denied that Revelation was a book of the New Testament.[\[148\]](#)

Calvin, in his argument with Roman Catholic authority, rejected the idea that there was a fixed Canon. Historians have noted his aversion to the book of Revelation.

Among other Protestant leaders, the reformer known as Karlstadt divided the New Testament into three ranks of differing dignity. On the lowest level are the seven disputed books of James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, Hebrews, and the Apocalypse, i.e., Revelation.[\[149\]](#)

Oecolampadius declared that while all 27 books should be received, the Apocalypse, James, Jude, 2 Peter 2 and 3 John should not be compared to the rest of the books.[\[150\]](#)

The doubts of the major reformers were followed in some of the Protestant traditions, but not others. The same four books doubted by Luther are labeled 'Apocrypha' in a Bible from Hamburg in 1596. In Sweden, beginning in 1618, the Gustavus Adolphus Bible labels the four dubious books as 'Apocryphal New Testament.' This arrangement lasted for more than a century.

Early in his career, Erasmus, the Catholic humanist at the time of the Reformation, and principal scholar of the received text of the Greek New Testament used by Protestants, doubted both that Paul was the author of Hebrews, and that James was author of the epistle bearing the name. He also questioned the authorship of 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude. The style of Revelation precluded it from being written by the author of the Fourth Gospel,[\[151\]](#) i.e., our book of John.

The official position of the Roman Catholic Church itself should also be considered. The Church proclaims itself to be the authority for the canon and the interpretation of scripture; therefore, it was the owner of the list of 27 books. Nevertheless, the *Catholic Biblical Encyclopedia*, entry "Canon," proclaims that 20 books of the New Testament are inherently worth more than the 7 deuterocanonical books (Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, James, Jude, Revelation), acknowledging that the authenticity or reliability of them had already been challenged by ancient Christian authorities.[\[152\]](#) Note the terminology: many Catholics name the books of the Old Testament Apocrypha as being deuterocanonical; in other words, of a second canon, or of canon of secondary nature. Here, Catholic scholars also name seven books of the Protestant New Testament as being deuterocanonical, demoted to a secondary status.

The New Testament Apocrypha

McDowell lists, without comment, a few books not accepted in today's NT canon. Apparently he is ignoring the occasional designation of lists of some of the pastoral epistles and Revelation as being spurious or deuterocanonical (see previous section).

Various groups of early churchmen accepted one or more of these books as 'recognized'. For instance, the Codex Sinaiticus, celebrated even by Josh McDowell,[\[153\]](#) includes the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas. The Shepherd of Hermas was regarded as inspired

scripture by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen.[\[154\]](#) Both Hermas and Barnabas are favored, albeit ambiguously, by Jerome.[\[155\]](#)

1 Clement was widely regarded, and was included by Eusebius as one of the unquestioned, recognized books. Irenaeus uses the word *scriptura* for 1 Clement, but again, this may have meant merely 'writing.'[\[156\]](#) 1 Clement is included in the Codex Alexandrinus, another copy of the New Testament cited by McDowell.[\[157\]](#)

The Codex Claromontus contains a list of canonical books, which includes Barnabas, The Shepherd, i.e. Hermas, and the Apocalypse of Peter.

The Epistle of Paul to the Laodiceans is found in more than one hundred Latin Vulgate manuscripts, including the oldest. It is included in all eighteen German Bibles printed prior to Luther's translation, beginning with the first German Bible of Johann Mental in 1488.[\[158\]](#)

Clement of Alexandria recognized obscure works such as the Preaching of Peter and the Apocalypse of Peter.[\[159\]](#) He quotes from The Gospel According to the Egyptians, and once introduces a quote from The Gospel According to the Hebrews with the formula, 'It is written.' Almost everything written, including that by pagan writers, is considered 'inspired' by Clement of Alexandria.[\[160\]](#)

Baruch, Sirach, The Wisdom of Solomon, Tobit, Judith, 1-2 Maccabees, Additions to Daniel, 1 Enoch, 2 Esdras, Assumption of Moses, Gospel According to the Egyptians, Gospel According to the Hebrews, Traditions of Matthias, The Didache, 1 Clement, Barnabas, Hermas, The Preaching of Peter, The Apocalypse of Peter

Some books regarded as inspired by Clement of Alexandria, c. 200 CE.¹⁶¹

Additions to Daniel, 1 Baruch, 3 Baruch, Judith, 1-2 Maccabees, Tobit, Wisdom of Solomon, Assumption of Moses, The Apocalypse of Elijah, The Ascension of Isaiah, Jannes and Jambres, Prayer of Joseph, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs

Books used by Origen, d. 235 CE.¹⁶²

The Copts, who are the modern Egyptian Christians, add more books. The Ethiopian church canon, yet larger, includes Hermas, 1 Clement and 2 Clement, the Apostolic Constitutions, making 38 books all together for its New Testament.[\[163\]](#) The Sahidic version, an early witness to the canon, included The Shepherd (of Hermas), 1 Clement, and the Acts of Paul.[\[164\]](#)

Why don't modern American Protestants rejoice in the discovery of lost books of the Bible preserved in a corner of Christian Africa? The Ethiopian Old Testament includes 1 Enoch, which is quoted in Jude, a book of the canon of white Christians. The only copies of this ancient book known to scholarship were found written and preserved in a language of black Africa. Are not their traditions as valid as those of European nations?

Some Conclusions

No justification is necessary for a religious body to extend recognition to a group of books, or to declare such recognition withheld from others. However, Josh McDowell, in following a hard apologetic line, insists that the evidence for Christianity is objective, and that "Christianity is a FACTual religion." *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* is supposed to be so compelling that the doubter is left without excuses.[\[165\]](#)

In defense of Protestant Christianity, McDowell does not merely try to show that the Protestant canon is proper to its own churches, but that the Protestant canon is better than any others, and contains exactly the right books.

There are two means to defend this position. One way is to examine the history of the canon in Christianity. Although McDowell disavows that the Bible depends on any particular church for authority, he nevertheless proceeds to build a case for the historical support of the Protestant canon. The conclusions he reaches are at variance with historical facts.

In particular, the very early Christians did not regard any part of the New Testament as scripture. Later, in developments of the second, third, and fourth centuries, Christians gradually put together patterns of usage that amounted to canons. In the fourth century, when the "bishops took a vote on it," compromises were made between regional church traditions to reach a list of our 27 New Testament books.

The Old Testament, as used by the churches, and as codified by the councils, included what is now called the Apocrypha, contrary to current Protestant usage.

The second way to justify a particular canon is through the inner light of the believer. The inner light is supposed to bear witness to the truth and usefulness of these particular books. I say, "That is all very nice for you, but... if you're asking me to believe you and your inner light, I would like better evidence before I think a particular set of books is infallible."

The historical argument fails, and the appeal to believers is unsatisfying to unbelievers. Scholars agree: there is no ancient canon, no warrant from Jesus or apostles to use a particular set of books; and there is no one set of clear criteria that can be used to judge whether a book should or should not be canonical.

Sidebar: Anachronisms in Daniel

Dating Daniel to the Hellenistic period instead of the claimed time of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon does not depend on assumptions about inspiration or the possibility or impossibility of divine prophecy. Much of the following is conveniently summarized in Gerald A. Larue's book on the Old Testament.[\[172\]](#) Instead of depending on a pre-existing bias, we have evidence in the book itself that it was written during some of the events described in the prophecies.

Knowledge of the Babylonian-Persian period, roughly 600 to 500 years before the common era, as revealed in the book of Daniel is vague, and on occasion, inaccurate. The opening verse (1:1) states that Jehoiakim surrendered Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar. Instead, Jehoiakim was already dead by the time the city was taken, according to 2 Kings 24:1-10. (The account in 2 Chronicles has a different order of events, but it doesn't help Daniel.) Thus, if the author really had lived in the sixth and seventh centuries BCE., he was mistaken about then-current events.

Belshazzar (Bel-shar-user) is identified in Daniel as the son of Nebuchadnezzar and is called "king" (5:1). But Belshazzar's father was Nabonidus. Although Belshazzar was a regent, he never became king.

King Darius is called a Mede, the *son* of Xerxes (Ahasuerus), in Daniel 9:1, although we know that Darius was a Persian and the *father* of Xerxes.

As the story moves into the Greek period it becomes more accurate. Suppose we didn't know whether the narratives of chapters 9 and 11 are divine prophecies written centuries in advance. Suppose we didn't know, either, whether they were written during or after the events.

We would still notice, however, that the accuracy of the correspondence of the prophecy to the historical events drops off sharply at 9:27 and at 11:31. The writer knows of the desecration of Yahweh's altar by Antiochus IV in 168 BCE, but not of the restoration of worship by Judas Maccabeus three years later. Either the divine foresight loses focus between 168 and 165, or that is when the book was actually written.

The presence of Persian and Greek loan-words lends support to the Hellenistic dating, i.e., much later than Nebuchadrezzar. Dan. 3:5 has Nebuchadrezzar commanding people to prostrate themselves at the music of the *symphonia*, clearly a Greek word,^[173] hundreds of year before Greek influence in the area. This word, *symphonia*, first appears in Greek in the second century BCE, and so Daniel could not have been written before then.

Considering the evidence, scholars say Daniel clearly belongs to the time of Antiochus IV, not four hundred years earlier.

Bibliography

Ackroyd, P.R., and C. F. Evans, eds. *The Cambridge History of the Bible*. Vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to Jerome*. Cambridge: University Press, 1970.

Anderson, G.W. "The Old Testament: Canonical and Non-Canonical." Ch. 6. in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*. Vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to Jerome*. Ackroyd, P.R., and C. F. Evans, eds. Cambridge: University Press, 1970. Pp. 113-159.

The Augustine Club. "Development of the Biblical Canon."
<<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine/a/canon.html>>.

Bainton, Roland H. "The Bible in the Reformation." Ch. 1. in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*. Vol. 3: *The West From the Reformation to the Present Day*. Greenslade, S.L., ed. Cambridge: University Press, 1963; pp. 1-37.

Barr, James. *The Scope and Authority of the Bible*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980.

Bouwsma, William J. *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988.

Campanhausen, Hans von. *The Formation of the Christian Bible*. 1968. Trans. by J. A. Baker. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972.

Chadwick, Henry. "The Bible and the Greek Fathers," in *The Church's Use of the Bible*, D. E. Nineham, ed. London: SPCK, 1963.

-----*The Early Church*. New York: Dorset Press, 1967.

Charlesworth, James H., ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1983.

----. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Vol. 2, *Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1985.

Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Wheaton College <<http://ccel.wheaton.edu/fathers/>>

Crehan, F. J. "The Bible in the Roman Catholic Church from Trent to the Present Day." Ch. 6 in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*. Vol. 3: *The West From the Reformation to the Present Day*. Greenslade, S.L., ed. Cambridge: University Press, 1963. Pp. 199-237.

Davis, Glenn. "New Testament Canon."
URL:<<http://www.best.com/~gdavis/ntcanon/main.htm>>.

Dentan, Robert B. "Apocrypha: Jewish Apocrypha." *Oxford Companion to the Bible*. Metzger and Coogan, eds. Oxford: University Press, 1993. P. 37f.

Du Toit, A. article, "Canon: New Testament." *Oxford Companion to the Bible*.

The Ecole Initiative. *Early Church Documents Online*. URL:
<<http://cedar.evansville.edu/~ecoleweb/documents.html>>

Ehrman, Bart D. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

----. *The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Filson, Floyd V. *Which Books Belong in the Bible?* Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957.

Gamble, Harry Y. *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

Grant, R. M. *The Formation of the New Testament*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965.

----. "The New Testament Canon." Ch. 10, *The Cambridge History of the Bible*. Vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to Jerome*. P.R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans, eds. Cambridge: University Press, 1970. Pp. 284-308.

Greenslade, S.L., ed. *The Cambridge History of the Bible*. Vol. 3: *The West From the Reformation to the Present Day*. Cambridge: University Press, 1963.

Hartono, W. "Canon of the New Testament." URL:
<<http://webusers.anetstl.com/~nosmo/canonnew.htm>>.

Hoffman, R. Joseph and Gerald Larue, eds. *Jesus in History and Myth*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1986.

Kelly, J. N. D. "The Bible and the Latin Fathers," in *The Church's Use of the Bible*, D. E. Nineham, ed. London: SPCK, 1963.

Lampe, G. W. H., ed. *The Cambridge History of the Bible*. Vol. 2. *The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*. Cambridge: University Press, 1969.

Lane Fox, Robin. *The Unauthorized Version: Truth and Fiction in the Bible*. New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 1992.

Larue, Gerald. *Old Testament Life and Literature*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1969. Electronic reprint, by permission of the author, at the *Secular Web*, URL <http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/gerald_larue/otll/>.

Mack, Burton L. *Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of the Christian Myth*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995.

Metzger, Bruce M. *An Introduction to the Apocrypha: Based on the Revised Standard Version*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1957.

----- . *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.

Moule, C. F. D. *The Birth of the New Testament*. 3rd ed., rev. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982.

Nineham, D. E. *The Church's Use of the Bible: Past and Present*. London: SPCK, 1963.

Pagels, Elaine. *The Gnostic Gospels*. New York: Random House, 1979; Vintage Books ed., 1981.

Parker, T. H. L. *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*. 2nd ed., Westminster, 1993.

Paton, Lewis Bayles. *The Book of Esther*. Part of series, *The International Critical Commentary*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908; reprint ed., 1964.

Reid, George J. "Canon of the New Testament." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Transcribed by Ernie Stefanik. URL: <<http://www.knight.org/advent/cathen/03274a.htm>>. Encyclopedia Press, 1913; Electronic version: New Advent, Inc., 1996.

Rypins, Stanley. *The Book of Thirty Centuries: An Introduction to Modern Study of the Bible*. New York: Macmillan, 1951.

Sanders, E. P. *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990.

Sanders, James A. "Canon: Hebrew Bible." In the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, ed.-chief. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

----- . *Torah and Canon*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972.

Vox Reformata . Article, "Canon." URL: <<http://www.pastornet.net.au/rtc/canon2.htm>>.

Wesley Center for Applied Theology, Northwest Nazarene College. "The Noncanonical Gospels," resource web page. <<http://wesley.nnc.edu/noncanon/gospels.htm>>.

----- . "The Complete Works of Josephus," web page. <<http://wesley.nnc.edu/josephus/>>.

----- "The Church Fathers," web page. Includes pointers off-site to online works: Barnabas, Hermas, Clement, Ignatius, Polybius, Irenaeus, etc.
<<http://wesley.nnc.edu/noncanon/fathers.htm>>.

Westermann, Claus. *Our Controversial Bible*. Trans., ed., by Darold H. Beekman. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960; trans. 1969.

C. S. C. Williams. "The History of the Text and Canon of the New Testament to Jerome." Ch. 2, *The Cambridge History of the Bible*. Vol. 2. *The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*. Lampe, G. W. H., ed. Cambridge: University Press, 1969. Pp. 27-53.

Notes

[1] "John Calvin on the True Method of Giving Peace to Christendom and Reforming the Church," in *Tracts and Treatises in Defense in Defense of the Reformed Faith*, by John Calvin; trans. Henry Beveridge. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1958 (reprinted from Calvin Trans. Soc., Edinburgh, 1851), p. 267.

[2] Thomas Jefferson, *The Jefferson Bible: The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, intro. by E. Forester Church, afterword by Jaroslav Pelikan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989; orig. published U. S. GPO., 1904).

[3] Steve Van Nattan, *Allah, Divine or Demonic?* online at URL: <<http://www.balaams-ass.com/alhaj/page19.htm>>

[4] There exists a list in the so-called Apostolic Canons, supposedly written at the end of the first century. "The Canons of the Holy and Altogether August Apostles," Wheaton Christian Ethereal Library, URL <<http://ccel.wheaton.edu/fathers/>>. The "Apostles" list includes 1, 2 and 3 Maccabees, and maybe Judith and Sirach, among the books of the Old Testament, and 1 and 2 Clement in the New, along with the Apostolic Constitutions. It omits Revelation. These canons are included by name with those approved by the Synod in Trullo, 692 CE.

The Apostolic Constitutions, moreover, warn the reader not to read books that falsely claim to be written by the apostles. The work is itself reckoned as a forgery. Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 322.

[5] Matthew 18:18-20; John 14:16-17; John 16:7-13; and many other passages.

[6] Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, Appendix A, p. 335; John Cosin, a bishop, in Bettenson, p. 305.

[7] The Westminster Confession of Faith, Article 1, 1643, in Bettenson, Henry, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 1963), p. 245. Taken from Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, v. III.

[8] Robert Barclay, *Apology for the Quakers*, 1678, as cited in Bettenson, *Documents*, p. 253.

[9] Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (San Bernadino, Calif: Here's Life Publishers, 1972, rev. ed. 1979), vol. 1, p. 29.

[10] Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (New York: Dorset Press, 1967), p. 42. Papias, although reporting the written gospels, prefers oral traditions about Jesus, the "living and abiding voice." Fragment in Eusebius, *Church History*, 3.39; Ehrman, Bart D., *The New Testament and other Early Christian Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 362-3, for background and comment.

[11] Harry Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 72.

[12] Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979; Vintage Books ed., 1981), p. 31-32. Her book-long argument documents the political side of early orthodoxy, and the struggle of a hierarchy determined to keep power.

[13] Helmut Koester, introduction, "The Gospel of Thomas," in James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978; paperback ed., 1981), p. 117. Koester thinks that Thomas may date as early as the second half of the first century. Bart D. Ehrman dates it to the early second century in *The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 116-7; and rounds it off to 120 CE in *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 41; extensive treatment p. 177f.

[14] "Early," for both religions, in this case would be before 100 CE. James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, v. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1983), Introduction, p. xxiv.

[15] Grant, *Cambridge History of the Bible*, v. 1, p. 303.

[16] Eusebius, *History of the Church* 6.25.3-14.

[17] Papias, as recorded in Eusebius, *History*, 3.39. Eusebius nevertheless derides Papias as not being very intelligent. A longer list of references for Matthew is in C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), p. 122ff. Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979; Vintage books ed., 1981), p. 20.

[18] *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, article, "Revelation."

[19] Moule, op. cit., p. 242. Moule here refers the reader to any good N. T. Introduction.

[20] J. C. Fenton, *The Penguin New Testament Commentaries: Saint Matthew* (London: Pelican Books, 1963; Penguin Books, 1993), pp. 12, 14.

[21] Gamble, op. cit., p. 68.

[22] Burton L. Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament: The Making of the Christian Myth* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 288.

[23] Chadwick, op. cit., p. 42-3. The use of oral tradition is especially apparent in 1 Clement. In 1 Thess. 2:13, Paul refers to the "word of God" -- the oral Gospel of Paul's preaching -- that the Thessalonians had received.

[24] Gamble, op. cit., p. 71.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., p. 70.

[27] 2 Kings 22:8-23:25.

[28] 2 Kings 22:8-10. Larue, *Old Testament Life and Literature*, ch. 19 contains the story of the Deuteronomic reforms, the life of Josiah, and the reasons scholars exclude Mosaic authorship of the book.

[29] Neh. 7:73b-8:18. Larue, *op. cit.*, ch. 31.

[30] Ibid.

[31] "Aristeas to Philocrates," in James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, etc., vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985), pp. 735.

[32] J. H. Charlesworth, ed., and introduction, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, v. 1, p. xxi.

[33] For example, Jesus mentions the "law and the prophets" in Mat. 22:40, leaving out the third division, "writings." Also Mat. 5:17, 7:12, 11:13; Luke 16:16; Acts 13:15, 24:14, 28:23; Rom. 3:21. "Moses and the prophets," Luke 16:29, 31. In Luke 24:44, a three-part division is used, "in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms." According to Sanders, the Greek *psalmoi* here is vague and "inarticulate," and could mean any collection of Jewish religious hymns, but probably represented a collection of Biblical psalms, but not a stabilized collection as we know it. James A. Sanders, article, "Canon: Hebrew Bible," in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, ed.-chief (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

[34] I Macc. 4:46; 9:27; 14:41.

[35] Mat. 11:13.

[36] Larue, *op. cit.*

[37] Anderson, *Cambridge Hist. Bib.*, p. 129.

[38] James A. Sanders, "Canon: Hebrew Bible," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 840. The only exceptions are a few *midrashim* in which the rabbis count 35 books by unrolling The Twelve.

[39] Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.39-42.

[40] Anderson, *CHB*, p. 136.

[41] Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 6.25.2.

[42] Jerome, *Prologus galeatus*, as cited by Anderson, *CHB*, p. 138.

[43] James A. Sanders, *op.cit.* On this point Sanders cites S. Talmon, "Heiliges Schriftum und Kanonische Bücher aus jüdischer Sichtüberlegungen zur Ausbildung der Grösse 'Die Schrift' im Judentum," in M. Klopfenstein et al., ed., *Die Mitte der Schrift* (New York: 1987).

[44] *Baba Bathra* 14b; cited by Grant, *CHB*, p. 300.

[45] James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), pp. 129-30.

[46] E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), ch. 2.

[47] Ibid., p. 98. He cites Safrai, 'Oral Torah,' in *Literature of the Sages*, part 1 (*CRINT* II.3.1), ed. Safrai (Assen and Philadelphia: 1987), pp. 35-119. For a list of laws of Moses not in the Torah, E. P. Sanders, art., "Law In Judaism in the NT period," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), vol. 4, sect. E.2.c., pp. 259. For instance, in *Against Apion* 2.25, Josephus maintains that it is a law of Moses to forbid abortion, which is nowhere to be found in the Pentateuch; in *Antiquities of the Jews* 4.8.13, the law is supposed to enjoin prayer twice a day.

[48] Mat. 2:23, "He shall be called a Nazarene," is attributed to words spoken by the prophets, and is in no Old Testament text.

[49] Babylonian Talmud, *Yadayim* 3.5; as cited by Anderson, *CHB*, v. 1, p. 134. The discussion refers to another passage, *Shabbath* 30b.

[50] Babylonian Talmud, *Meg.* 7a; *Sanh.* 2; as cited in "Esther, Book of," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, p. 635.

[51] R. M. Grant, *Formation of the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 35.

[52] Eusebius, *History of the Church* 4.26.7f.

[53] Ibid., 4.36.14.

[54] Lewis Bayles Paton, *The Book of Esther* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908; reprint 1964), p. 97.

[55] Filson, *Which Books Belong in the Bible?* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 49.

[56] "Esther, Book of," *Dictionary of the Bible*, James Hastings, ed.; rev. ed., Frederick C. Grant and H. H. Rowley, eds. (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1963), p. 269.

[57] Paton, op. cit., p. 97.

[58] Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 4.5.4. William Whiston, trans. The reference to the anachronistic identification of the Zechariah in Matthew is given in a translator's note to Josephus' account.

[59] Anderson, *CHB*, p. 131.

[60] Cited by Bainton, *CHB*, v. 3, pp 12-13.

[61] Metzger, *Introduction to the Apocrypha*, pp. 151ff; G. Larue, *Old Testament Life and Literature*, pp. 440-1; Grant, *Formation*, p. 33-34.

[62] Charlesworth, James, ed., *O. T. Pseudepigrapha*, v. 2, p. 430.

[63] Metzger, *Apocrypha*, pp. 3-4.

[64] Anderson, *CHB*, v. 1, p. 142.

[65] *De Libro Arbitrio*, ed. J. Von Walther, *Quelleschriften zur Geschichte des Protestantismus*. Cited by Bainton, *Cambridge History of the Bible*, v. 3, p. 6.

[66] Filson, *op. cit.*, p. 89-90.

[67] See also Crehan, *CHB*, v. 3, pp. 202-4.

[68] The problems of Tobit and Judith are summarized in Larue, *Old Testament*, ch. 28 and 29, and in Metzger, *Apocrypha*.

[69] The listing of the numerous contradictions of the Bible is a bit tedious. However, many of the contradictions and anachronisms are clues used by scholars to discover the structure, purpose, and period of documents, including the Bible. Dr. Larue includes a short list of such fruitful clues in chapter 3 of *Old Testament Life and Literature*.

[70] Deut. 3:14; 10:8; 34:6.

[71] Deut. 1:1-15; 3:8; 4:46. *The Holy Scriptures According to the Massoretic Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1955), "beyond the Jordan." Cited by Larue, *op. cit.*, ch. 19.

[72] Michael D. Coogan, "Money," art. in *Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford: University Press, 1993); H. Hamburger, art. "Doric," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (New York: Abingdon Press).

[73] "Esther, Book of," *Dictionary of the Bible* (Hastings, rev. ed.), p. 269.

[74] *History* 9.109-13.

[75] Larue, *op. cit.*, ch. 27.

[76] Herodotus, *History* 3.88.

[77] This point is recognized by historians; see Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (New York: Dorset Press, 1967), p. 45.

[78] Ruth and Esther, of course, are in the form of entertaining fictions of good story-telling style. Larue, *Old Testament*, ch. 25 (Ruth) and ch. 27 (Esther). As we have noted, Erasmus chided Luther in regard to the rejection of the Apocrypha, and in Erasmus' opinion, Sirach was actually better than Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. Luther himself derided Esther, and praised noncanonical Tobit.

[79] A "historical romance:" *Dictionary of the Bible*, art., "Esther;" "well-developed plot ... [the] book is best understood as a novella," Gene M. Tucker, art., "Esther, The Book of," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*; "In view of these facts the conclusions seem inevitable that the Book of Est. is not historical, and that it is doubtful whether even a historical kernel underlies its narrative." Lewis Bayles Paton, *The Book of Esther*, p. 75.

[80] Paton, op. cit., p. 75f.

[81] Metzger, *Apocrypha*, passim.

[82] 'Preface to the Book of Tobit,' Luther's translation of the Bible, 1534 edition. Cited by Metzger, *Apocrypha*, p. 37.

[83] Paton, op. cit., p. 96.

[84] H. Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark*, NCB (London, 1976). Also cited by Wells, *The Historical Evidence for Jesus*, p. 230. The journey described is like "travelling from Cornwall to London by way of Manchester" (A.E.J. Rawlinson, Westminster Commentary); as cited in D.E. Nineham, *The Gospel of Saint Mark* (Penguin New Testament Commentaries, 1963), p. 203. An American example might be to go from Los Angeles to San Diego by way of Santa Barbara; or, New York to Philadelphia by way of Baltimore.

[85] Scholar Pierson Parker compiled a long list of problems with Mark. I found his points summarized in *Jesus and the Gospel: Tradition, Scripture, and Canon*, by W. R. Farmer (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

[86] H. C. Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (London, 1977), pp. 102-3, as cited by Wells, *Historical Evidence for Jesus*, (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1988) p. 230. There are textual variants here, but, "*Gerasenes*: This is probably what Mark wrote, the other names being guesses by copyists ..." Nineham, *Saint Mark*, p. 153; also, p. 40, Mark is someone "*not* directly acquainted with Palestine."

[87] Aboth of Rabbi Nathan, ch. 1; Shabbath, Babylonian Talmud, esp. 13b, 30b.

[88] Anderson, *CHB*, v. 1, p. 156.

[89] Filson, op. cit., p. 78-9.

[90] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

[91] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[92] Robert B. Dentan, "Apocrypha: Jewish Apocrypha," *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, Metzger and Coogan, eds. (Oxford: University Press, 1993), p. 37f.

[93] "Canon of the Old Testament," *Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 123.

[94] B. Metzger, *Apocrypha*, pp. 151ff; Grant, *Formation*, p. 33.

[95] "Canon of the Old Testament," *Dictionary of the Bible* (Hastings), p. 123. Athanasius puts some of the Apocrypha in a separate list of "good reading," including Esther. Other parts of our Apocrypha are put in among Old Testament books (Epistle of Jeremiah and Baruch).

[96] *Ibid.*

[97] Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 57.

- [98] Cited by Grant, *Formation*, p. 152.
- [99] Bruce M. Metzger, article, "Bible," in *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 1993.
- [100] Grant, *Formation*, p. 51.
- [101] Metzger, *Canon*, p. 72.
- [102] *Ibid.*, ch. 4-6.
- [103] Grant, *CHB*, v. 1, p. 296.
- [104] *Ibid.*, p. 284.
- [105] Grant, *CHB*, v. 1, p. 299; also Grant, *Formation*, p. 186.
- [106] Grant, *CHB*, v. 1, p. 285.
- [107] Ehrman, *NT: Introduction*, p. 13.
- [108] Gamble, *op. cit.*, p. 59f.
- [109] Grant, *CHB*, v. 1, p. 292.
- [110] *Ibid.*, p. 295.
- [111] *Ibid.*, p. 293.
- [112] *Ibid.*, p. 293.
- [113] Barnabas 4:14 uses the phrase, "it is written" for a saying we now find in Matthew 22:14, but he does not tell us where it was written. 6:13b resembles Mat. 19:30, 20:16(?), but it refers to a saying, not writing. In the notes printed with the Letter of Barnabas, these are the only passages which are marked as even resembling the New Testament. Numerous quotations of the Old Testament of scripture are found in this book, as well as other works. In Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament and other Early Christian Writings* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998); reprinted from *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Jack Sparks (Thomas Nelson, 1978).
- [114] Grant, *CHB*, p. 293; Grant, *Formation*, pp. 106-8; Jack N. Sparks, ed., "The Letter of Barnabas," from *The Apostolic Fathers*, included in B. Ehrman, ed., *The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader*, pp. 344-58; A. F. J. Klijn, trans. "2 Baruch", in J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, pp. 615-80. The Letter of Aristeas is the source of the legendary origin of the Septuagint. Aristeas *O.T. Pseud.*, v. 2, p. 21-23.
- [115] Hippolytus, *Refutation of Heresies*, 7.25.1-3, and 7.26.7; as cited by Grant, *CHB*, p. 293; *Formation*, p. 122f.
- [116] Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolycum*, 2.22; as cited by Grant, *CHB*, p. 294.
- [117] *Ad Autolycum* 2.9, as cited by Grant, *Formation*, p. 141.
- [118] *Against Heresies* 4.9.1; cited by Williams, *CHB*, v. 2, p. 50.

- [119] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.33.3-4; 2 Baruch 29:6; Grant, *Formation*, p. 70-1.
- [120] Grant, *Formation*, p. 62-108, 136.
- [121] Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 6.12.3-6. Grant, *CHB*, p. 296.
- [122] Clement of Alexandria Str. 5.96.3; cited by Grant, *Formation*, pp. 112, 165.
- [123] Raymond E. Brown, *John (i-xii)*, vol. 29, N.T., of the *Anchor Bible* series (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 335f.
- [124] *Hist. of the Church*, 3.39.17.
- [125] Grant, *Formation*, p. 161.
- [126] In Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*. Also Grant, *CHB*, p. 301.
- [127] Grant, *Formation*, p. 159.
- [128] Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 3.24.15; 6.25.10.
- [129] Metzger, *Canon*, p. 236.
- [130] *Ibid.*, p. 238.
- [131] McDowell, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
- [132] A. Du Toit, "Canon: New Testament", in *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 1993.
- [133] J. H. Charlesworth, ed., "Introduction: Canon," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, p. xxiii.
- [134] Metzger, *Canon*, p. 216.
- [135] Available in print in the *Post-Nicene Fathers*, and online at the Christian Classics Ethereal Library at Wheaton College <<http://ccel.weaton.edu/fathers/NPNF2-14/7appndx/amphiloc.htm>> and related pages.
- [136] R. J. Hoffman, "Other Gospels, Other Christs," in R. J. Hoffman and Gerald Larue, eds., *Jesus in History and Myth* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1986), p. 145. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, "Introduction," p. xxiii.
- [137] Westcott, *The Bible in the Church*, p. 227; as cited by Metzger, *Canon*, p. 217.
- [138] William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), p. 120 and note on p. 266. T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's NT Commentaries*, 2nd ed., 1993, pp. 116-119. Metzger, *Canon*, pp. 245-6 nn.
- [139] Tischreden, I, no. 475, p. 208; cited by Bainton, *CHB*, v. 1, p. 6-7.
- [140] Cal. Op. 11, 674-6 = *Corpus Reformatorum* 39, as cited by Bainton, *CHB*, p. 8-9.

- [141] Metzger, *Canon*, p. 243.
- [142] Filson, op. cit., p. 130.
- [143] Erlangen edition, 63, 115, 169; as cited by Bainton, *CHB*, v. 3, p. 7.
- [144] Erlangen ed., as cited by Bainton, p. 8.
- [145] Rev. 22:18b, "If any man add unto these words, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book..." KJV. Also Rev. 16:1.
- [146] *Works of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia ed. 1932, 6, 477); cited by Basil Hall, *Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 3, p. 86.
- [147] Erlangen ed., 63, 156f; cited by Bainton, *CHB*, p. 7.
- [148] Metzger, *Canon*, p. 273.
- [149] *Ibid.*, p. 241.
- [150] *Ibid.*, p. 244.
- [151] Metzger, *Canon*, p. 241.
- [152] J. E. Steinmueller and K. Sullivan, article, "Canon," *Catholic Bible Encyclopedia*, (New York: J. F. Wagner, 1956). Similarly, the 1913 Catholic Encyclopedia, which is available on the internet.
- [153] McDowell, *ETDAV*, p. 47.
- [154] Metzger, *Canon*, pp. 65, 188.
- [155] *Ibid.*, p. 236.
- [156] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.3.3; cited by Grant, *CHB*, v. 1, p. 295.
- [157] Metzger, *Canon*, p. 187-8.
- [158] *Ibid.*, p. 239.
- [159] R. Joseph Hoffman, "Other Gospels, Heretical Christs," in *Jesus in History and Myth*, R. Joseph Hoffman and Gerald Larue, eds. (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1986), p. 145.
- [160] Metzger, *Canon*, p. 130-135.
- [161] Grant, *Formation*, p. 164-8.
- [162] *Ibid.*, p. 169.
- [163] A. Du Toit, "Canon: New Testament", in *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 1993. Also Charlesworth, *OT Pseudepigrapha*, v. 1, Introduction, p. xxiii-xxiv.

[164] Williams, *CHB*, v. 2, p. 52.

[165] McDowell, *ETDAV*, Introduction, *passim*.

[166] Jerome, Letters 22.30.2. *The Letters of St. Jerome*, Trans. by C. C. Mierow. Notes by T. C. Lawler. Vol. 1. In *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, no. 33, ed. by J. Quasten and W. J. Burchardt, S.J. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1963.

[167] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.9.14 (selections).

[168] "John Calvin on the True Method of Giving Peace to Christendom and Reforming the Church," in *Tracts and Treatises in Defense in Defense of the Reformed Faith*, by John Calvin; trans. Henry Beveridge. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1958 (reprinted from Calvin Trans. Soc., Edinburgh, 1851), p. 267.

[169] T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, second edition, Westminster, 1993, p. 119.

[170] Pierre Bayle, *Philosophical Dictionary*, II. p. 265 note[P]. As cited by Parker, p. 118.

[171] v. Balke, p. 295.

[172] Gerald A. Larue, *Old Testament Life and Literature*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1968, p. 405f. "Daniel, Book of," *Bible Dictionary* (Hastings, rev. ed.).

[173] KJV, "dulcimer," with note, "singing, Cald. *symphony*." Modern versions often render it "bagpipe." Also vs. 10 and 15.