# *Building the Bible*

**(Release 1.02)**

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# Building the Bible

While researching material for the *12 Heresies of Christianity*, this author was asked to lead a women's Bible study – and discuss the origins of the New Testament. As we dove into the subject matter, the task expanded to also cover the history of what is commonly known as the Old Testament (or Hebrew scriptures). This brief book is an outgrowth of these four Bible study sessions.[1]

Somewhat surprisingly, there is little in the way of either mainstream or evangelical literature widely available on the topic of the historical origins of the modern Bible. Perhaps the most widely known descriptions are those which often are found as prefatory comments to various versions and editions of the *Holy Bible.*

## Context for Canonization

The seeming dearth of knowledge about the historical underpinnings of the 66 books now a part of the (non-Catholic) Christian Bible is perhaps best explained by the oft-noted comparison with sausage.[2] We know what sausage is, but do not necessarily want to know the contents or how sausage is made.

Today's accepted versions of the Holy Bible have come down to us a bit like sausage. The contents can be baffling, even disconcerting. As this historical review will demonstrate, the process of compiling what we know as the Bible was anything but tidy.

Divine inspiration may be claimed. However, this canon also is a collection of disparate manuscripts composed, edited, copied and translated by human hands. Errors of omission and commission could be and were made. Deciding what authors and books were in or out was no simple matter.

We take this four-step approach to our investigation into *building the Bible:*

I. Christianity after Christ to Constantine – a nearly 400 year quick tour
II. Canonization of the New Testament – the good, the bad & the ugly
III. Origins of the Old Testament – the Hebrew Scriptures
IV. What of Canonicity?

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[1] This review of *Building the Bible* represents a work in progress. Information has been obtained from sources generally deemed to be reliable. However, neither the accuracy of the source text nor our citation is guaranteed. Comments, questions, clarifications and corrections submitted to the author are appreciated. We reserve the right to make revisions and provide updated material without notice.

[2] The Roman Catholic Bible adds the Apocrypha to the 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament.

At first glance, this scheme of organization may seem a bit odd. After all, we do not get to a discussion of how the Bible was composed and compiled until well into this manuscript. We start not with the Bible at all, but rather with a review of the historical context in which the Bible was formed and framed. And then, we focus on the New Testament before considering how its precursor – the Hebrew Scriptures – were formed.

There may be some method to this madness. Two specific reasons for this approach are noted.

*First,* our premise is that one needs to understand the broader context of the development of the early church as a basis for then considering how the New Testament came to be. This is because the New Testament does not stand alone. This is no *deus ex machina*. Rather, the notion of Christian scripture emerges from the experiences of the church of the first 3+ centuries after the reported death and resurrection of Jesus.

*Second,* for Christians and non-Christians, there is value in understanding the development of the Old Testament in the context of the drive for a New Testament canon. While the Hebrew Scriptures were certainly composed before Christ, there is clear evidence that the impetus for Jewish compilation into an authorized set of documents – an Old Testament – came at least partially in response to the emerging Christian challenge.

Traditional Christian scholarship of the last two millennia has started with the Bible and then interpreted history from a biblical foundation. The traditionalist starts with Adam and ends with the apocalypse of John.

In effect, our approach turns this scheme of Christian scholarship *on its head.* We start with the historical setting, then interpret development of a Holy Bible within the imperatives of the early Christian culture. We look first at the New Testament, then work back to the Old.

As with beauty, the value of this *outside in* approach lies in the eye of the beholder.

## Definitions

Before getting underway, a couple of definitions are of importance. Clarification will, hopefully, avoid confusion that otherwise might otherwise result from different concepts of what often appear to be widely understood terms.

First, it is useful to understand what we mean by the term *Bible.* Here's a typical definition:

> **Bi ble** (bi b'l) [[ME & OFr < ML *biblia* < Gr, collection of writings, in LGr(Ec), the Scriptures (pl. of *biblion,* book) < *biblos* , papyrus, after *Byblos* (now *Dschebel* ), Phoenician city from which papyrus was imported]] **1** the sacred book of Christianity; Old Testament and New Testament: some Roman Catholic

> versions also include all or part of the Apocrypha **2** the Holy Scriptures of Judaism, identical with the Old Testament of Christianity ***n.*** **1** a copy or particular edition of the Scriptures **2** any collection or book of writings sacred to a religion *[*the Koran is the Muslim *Bible ]* **3** [**b-**] any book regarded as authoritative or official See also AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION, APOCRYPHA, AUTHORIZED VERSION, DOUAY BIBLE, JERUSALEM BIBLE, NEW AMERICAN BIBLE, NEW ENGLISH BIBLE, REVISED STANDARD VERSION, SEPTUAGINT, VULGATE[3]

What is important about this definition is the recognition that the term Bible is *not limited* to just one book. Within Christianity, there are multiple versions of what is viewed by different branches of the church as "authoritative or official."

Stepping back, it is also important to acknowledge that a Bible need not even be a Christian collection of writings. The Greek root for "Bible" is drawn from a secular rather than spiritual reference.

Notions of which collection of biblical writings were to be regarded as "authoritative" takes us to a second key word – indeed the larger concept of a *canon.* Applied to the Christian Bible, the term canon refers specifically to "the books of the Bible *officially accepted* by a church or religious body as divinely inspired."[4] (*italics* added).

The pivotal question addressed by the second half of this manuscript is the historical process by which some books came to be officially accepted while others did not. But, before going there, let's set the historical context.

We begin with a quick nearly 400 year tour of early Christianity. This period begins with the date of Christ's reported ascension. It continues with Christians as a persecuted minority to the time when Christianity became the religion of the empire – via conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine.

The primary focus of this investigation ends in the waning years of the empire as both catholic orthodoxy and the New Testament canon solidified – a time marked by the ascendance of Jerome and Augustine. However, lest one miss the relevance of history, we conclude by discussing the question: "What of canonicity?" Is there a case to be made today for re-opening the question of which historical works should be in or out? Under what conditions?

But first, back to the historical roots of Christianity and canon.

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[3] Excerpted from *Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia*. Copyright (c) 1994, 1995 Compton's NewMedia, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[4] Excerpted from *Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia, op. cit.*

# I. Christianity From Christ to Constantine

With the physical departure of Jesus the Christ from the earthly sphere, the mantle of leadership passed to those disciples and others present at his reported ascension. Jesus' last words were directive and compelling:

> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."[5]

The apostle Peter emerges as the early spokesman for followers of Jesus the Christ. However, Peter's authority is soon usurped by that of Jesus' brother, James. The New Testament never quite says how this happens; we only know that initially Peter appears to be running the show; at a later point James is clearly head of the Jerusalem church.

But then Paul comes along and the picture rapidly becomes more complex. Paul's ministry extends out of Judea, well beyond the local reach of James. Paul taught in opposition to James, particularly with regard to the peculiar circumcision and dietary practices of the Jewish Christians.

These patterns of conflict and dissension did not end with the early and pivotal New Testament personalities. The next three centuries would be marked – repeatedly – by dissension and disagreement between various groupings within the nascent Christian movement. Christians found time to discuss and dispute – even during times of intense Roman persecution.

This also was a time of great intellectual ferment. Over the course of these first three centuries, much of the doctrinal basis for the succeeding 16+ centuries was formed. The oral tradition of repeating sayings and actions of Jesus gave way to the need for a more permanent, less changeable written record.

### *Overview Themes*

Four themes serve to frame this discussion. Understanding these themes is of considerable help when it comes time to consider how the canon of the New Testament was formed:

> *1. From the beginning, a diversity of Christian faith and expression has been experienced.* Significant conflicts of both a theological and personal nature were experienced from the earliest days of the New Testament church – repeatedly. Post-Jesus conflicts begin between Peter, James and Paul and carry forward

[5] Acts 1:8.

through periods of imperial persecution to the debates of Nicaea under the watchful eye of imperial authority.

*2. Roman persecution was periodic but intense.* These persecutions left their mark – affecting the response of Christians not only toward the non-Christian world but also toward each other. In particular, the debate was over how to treat those who folded (or apostasized) in the face of persecution versus those who stood firm.

*3. The spread of Christianity was focused on major urban centers of the Roman empire.* In the cities and at the heart of the empire, this was *a way* of life that could not be readily ignored. Unlike today, when American Christianity is strongest in rural communities, the early Christians were highly urban – as a *cutting edge* social movement.

*4. Nearly 300 years elapsed before Christianity emerged from minority to majority status.* This is more time than from the American Declaration of Independence to the early 21st century (i.e. the date of this present document). As digital America is different from colonial America, the fourth century when the New Testament came into being was a dramatically different place than the world of Caesar Augustus in the 1st century.

## *1st Century Patterns of Diversity & Conflict*

Jesus' earthly sojourn and the subsequent emergence of a Christian church are set within a socio-political milieu of conflict. Judaism was subject to the rule of Rome – engendering political and religious resistance to the governing order of the day. But the conflict was not limited simply to the roles of ruler versus subject. The subjects were war with themselves – in some ways as intensely as their conflicts with those in authority though the issues were not always the same.

The New Testament clearly records theological and practical differences between the dominant sects of Judaism – particularly the Pharisees and Sadducees.[6] On the political front, we are told of the anti-Roman activities of the Zealots. The secular historian Josephus tells of further factionalism between those opposing imperial authority.

The Zealots represented a sect of rural Galilean origin. Their urban counterparts were the Sicarii – Judean Jews centered in Jerusalem – who engaged in acts of radical anarchy against both local (Herodian) and Roman authority. Yet in the days before the fall of Jerusalem (in 70 AD), it would be the rural, Galilean Zealots who would drive the urban Sicarii out from the city to the desert fortress of Masada.

[6] The Essenes represented a major socio-religious grouping that withdrew from the dominant cultural life of first century Palestine. Though not directly mentioned in the New Testament, there are those who have argued that Jesus was an Essene. Also noted is that the 1st century Jewish historian Josephus lived for a time with the Essene community.

It should not be surprising that the early church also experienced divergent ideas – within this mile of 1st century political, social and religious upheaval. Despite the efforts of Christian writings (notably the Acts of the Apostles) to downplay differences, the early church clearly comprised a diverse lot. And there were deep, intense conflicts which even Acts is forced to report (though in muted tone).

The nascent Church was affected by disagreements occurring on at least three levels:

- Apostolic conflict – beginning in the earliest days of the post-resurrection Christian movement.
- A perpetuation of Jewish conflict – escalating within little more than a generation both to rebellion against Rome and Jewish compatriots (as fratricide).
- Separation of the Judaism from Christianity – beginning with the self-proclaimed apostle Paul and exacerbated by the Roman destruction(s) of Jerusalem.

***Apostolic Conflict*** Early evidence of apostolic conflict clearly is on display involving at least three early pillars of the nascent Christian church – Peter, James & Paul. The first hint of the dissension to come is noted during Jesus' ministry and as a parenthetical comment in John's gospel: "(For not even his brothers believed in him.)"[7]

Jesus' brothers – including James – had attempted to get Jesus to come home, putting a stop to his earthly ministry. We are not sure what brought Jesus' brothers into the Jesus movement, but the signs are unmistakable shortly after the time of the reported ascension. After Jesus leaves, the writer of Acts notes that:

> All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, *as well as his brothers*.[8]

Later, when Peter is released from prison, he goes to the house of John Mark's mother and explicitly asks, "Tell this to James and to the believers."[9]

Yet later, Peter gets caught in a crossfire between James and Paul. The author of Acts reports that:

> But when Cephas came to Antioch, I *opposed him* to his face, because he stood self-condemned; for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them

[7] John 7:5.
[8] Acts 1:14.
[9] Acts 12:17.

> all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"[10]

***A Perpetuation of Jewish Conflict:*** The internal conflicts noted above were not unique to the nascent Christian movement; there was clear precedent with the mainstream of 1st century Jewish culture. Clearly on point, New Testament gospels record definite divisions between religious sects such as the Pharisees and Saddles.

On a political level, there were the rural radicals (Zealots) and urban radicals (Sicarii). At the time of Rome's war on the Jews, an unusual turn of events occurred. The Zealots (as rural revolutionaries) came into control of the besieged Jerusalem. The Sicarii made their last stand at Masada in the desert.

Even Rome's successful conquest of Jerusalem in AD 70 was aided and abetted by internal divisions between and among the Jewish defendants. Zealots led by John of Gischala conducted a reign of terror against other besieged residents of the City John's followers executed those of the upper Jewish class believed to be Roman sympathizers and even burned warehouses of food provisions needed to withstand the siege. Other factions were led by Eleazar (representing the preservation of the Temple) and Simon (invited in by many of the common people of the city).

The 1st century Jewish historian Josephus writes that John of Gischala and his cohorts:

> … set on fire those houses that were full of corn and other provisions. The same thing was done by Simon, when, upon the other's retreat, he attacked the city also; as if they had, on purpose, done it to serve the Romans, by destroying what the city had laid up against the siege, and by thus *cutting off the nerves of their own power*.[11]

***Separation of Judaism from Christianity:*** The beginnings of this separation can be traced back to Jesus. After all, it was Jesus who asked rhetorically:

> Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth?
> No, I tell you, but rather division!
> From now on five in one household *will be divided,*
> three against two and two against three;
> they will be divided:
>
> Father against son and son against father,
> mother against daughter and daughter against mother,
> mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law
> and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.[12]

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[10] Galatians 2:11-14.

[11] Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews,* 5.1.24.

[12] Luke 12:51-54.

The household Jesus was speaking of was just a house based on bloodline, familial ties. He also meant to separate his kingdom from the prevailing religion of the day and from the very existence of the Jewish-Israeli geo-political entity.

No gospel writer better depicts this enmity than Matthew. As Jesus nears the end of his ministry, he takes on the religious leaders of the day, exclaiming:

> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites … You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being *sentenced to hell*?[13]

Moments later, Jesus takes on the center of Judaism, Jerusalem itself:

> Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! … See, your house is left to you *desolate*. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'[14]

Just to make sure the point is clear, upon leaving the Temple, Jesus responds to the disciples who are pointing out to him the buildings of the God's holy place: "You see all these (buildings), do you not? Truly, I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."[15]

Jesus has condemned not only the Jewish leadership but also the holy place of Zion, the Temple at Jerusalem. These are words not of peace, but of war.

A few years later, the apostle Paul would pick up where Jesus left off. Opposing those Jewish Christians who advocated circumcision as a test of Gentile (non-Jewish) salvation, Paul would write: "I wish those who unsettle you would *castrate themselves."*[16]

This same Paul that openly scorns acknowledged church leadership, noting that: "… from those who were *supposed to be acknowledged leaders* (what they actually were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality); those leaders *contributed nothing to me* …"[17]

Just to make sure know one misses his point, Paul inserts the parenthetical remark: "… what they actually were makes no difference to me…" In any event, "those" Christian leaders, led by James as head of the Jerusalem church, contribute "nothing" to Paul.

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[13] Matthew 23: 29-33.
[14] Matthew 23:37.
[15] Matthew 24:2.
[16] Galatians 5:12.
[17] Galatians 5:6.

In sharp contrast with Paul, James attempted to keep Christianity within the fold of Judaism. It was James who would write that: "… whoever keeps the whole law but fails *in one point* has become accountable for all of it."[18]

In the end, James not only proved unsuccessful; he paid with his life. In the wake of the death of the Roman appointed governor, Festus, the Sadducee inspired Sanhedrin would take action to condemn James to death – and to then carry out the execution.

The death of James set in motion a series of events eventually leading to the Jewish insurrection and subsequent Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. When the newly appointed procurator Albinus arrived in Judea, he responded to complaints from friends of James, replacing the high priest responsible for James' death. Albinus then initiated the campaign to destroy the anti-Roman Jewish terrorists of Jerusalem. The result was to be further insurrection, followed by the unsuccessful Jewish war against Roman occupation.

### *Post Apostolic Movements of the Early Church*

By the end of the first century after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the outlines of the Christian movement were clearly visible. Two sets of events during this century would serve to shape the church that would come after:

- The ministry and death of the apostles – severing the connection with those who had direct personal contact with Jesus.
- The first and second destructions of Jerusalem in AD 70 and 130 respectively – with the second destruction sealing the dispersion of the Jewish population from Jerusalem and much of the rest of the Palestine area.

The great movements of the early church – through both of these events – involved issues both of *theology and practice.* We now move to consider some of the great movements that shaped Christian thought and practice up to and through the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine – as traced chronologically by the chart on the next three pages. The chart starts with the apostolic tradition ending in the early second century and extends to the final post-Constantine sects of the fifth century.

[18] James 4:9-10. Despite his emphasis on the essential nature of good works, James does not suggest that the law gives license to judge the actions of lawbreakers: "Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?" (4:11-12)

## Great Movements of the Early Church (thru Constantine)

| Movement (Time Period) | Comments |
|---|---|
| Apostolic Tradition (to *c.* 135) | Prevailed up to the second Jewish rebellion and destruction of Jerusalem (132-136 AD), with consequent turning away from apocalyptic Jewish and Christian expectations. Completion of this era also marked the end of the Judeo-Christian period of Church history. |
| Gnosticism (from the 1st century on) | Roots can be traced to apostolic era and stated New Testament concerns of Peter, Paul and the author of I John, attributed to Simon Magus or Carpocrates. From *c.* 130-160, Gnosticism represented an emerging tradition (centered in Alexandria and Syria) as a reaction to the final Jewish dispersal and withdrawal from apocalyptic hopes. Gnosticism was predicated on *secret knowledge* of the mysteries of the universe and consequent ability to overcome demonic forces guiding the universe. To the Christian Gnostic, the source of illumination is Christ. Basic to Gnosticism is the conviction that the created, material world is evil. It was not created by the true, good God but was made by a lesser being. Only by escape from the material into the spiritual can there be salvation. |
| Ebionites (from 70 AD) | Refers to "the poor" Jewish Christians who emigrated to Pella in Transjordan after the first destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70), reinforced by the second destruction from the Bar Kochba rebellion of 132-135 AD. Denied Christ's full deity.[19] Also rejected the virgin birth but believed the Spirit descended on Jesus at baptism in the form of a dove. |
| Docetism (mid-to-late 1st century) | An early form of Gnosticism preached in the first century, known largely from the response generated in the Pastoral and Catholic epistles of the New Testament and the *Letters of Ignatius.* Suggested that Christ only appeared to have human form, denying the humanity of Christ to ensure that his divinity remained untainted.[20] |
| Chiliasm (early 2nd century) | Also known as millenarianism, the belief that, with the second coming, Christ will reign for 1,000 years. While most orthodox Christians in the 2nd century appear to have been supportive, it was anathema by the 4th century to historian Eusebius and may be a reason Eusebius regarded the early 2nd century church patriarch Papias as simple-minded. |
| Logos Christology (from early-to-mid 2nd century) | Rooted in the Gospel of John's presentation of Jesus as the Logos or Word. Started by Ignatius and championed by Justin, who expanded the theology to include Old Testament and Greek motifs. Advocated as a Christian theology superceding Judaism, predicated on the seemingly contradictory concepts that God is One, Jesus is God, yet Jesus is other than the father. Some proponents, including Justin and Origen, did not hesitate to call Jesus a "second God." |
| Apologists (from 130 – 180 AD) | Reflects the beginnings of post-New Testament/apostolic writings, particularly through the mid part of the second century. Included authors such as Quadratus, Justin Martyr, Justin's disciple Tatian, Melito of Sardis, Athenagoras and Theophilus of Antioch. Often technically addressed to respective Roman emperors, these writers offered the first reasoned explanations of the church's beliefs and doctrines – as a defense against the attacks of Roman philosophers and other critics of Christianity. |
| Alogi (late 2nd century) | A group that apparently flourished in Asia Minor as opponents both to reason (in theology) and to Logos theology. The Alogi rejected the Johannine gospel and |

[19] Eusebius commented that: "…the name of Ebionites hints at the poverty of their intelligence, for this is the way a poor man is referred to by the Hebrews." From *The History of the Church,* 3.28.

[20] Specifically refuted by I John 4:2 stating that "… every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God."

| Movement (Time Period) | Comments |
|---|---|
| | Revelation, which they attributed to the heretic Cerinthus. |
| Catholicism (first cited in early 2nd century) | As an institution, the Catholic Church claims an existence dating back to the 1st century AD, with Saint Peter as first pope. The current name of the church is derived from its base in Rome and from a Greek term meaning "universal." Over time, the word Catholic has also come to symbolize the wholeness of the church. By the latter half of the second century, early forms of Catholicism were defining moral and doctrinal teaching authority that increasingly came to be accepted as orthodox belief, drawing distinctions with heretical doctrines, particularly Gnosticism. The first clear exercise of Roman Catholic authority came when Victor, bishop of Rome (189-198) excommunicated churches of Asia Minor for refusing to use the Roman rather than the Jewish calendar date for Easter.[21] |
| Encratites (starting mid 2nd century) | A conservative sect attributed to the Assyrian born Tatian and started in Syria. Generally agreed with orthodox Catholic doctrine but fostered an extreme asceticism similar to the Jewish Essenes – including rejection of meat, intoxicating beverages and sexual intercourse. |
| Montanism (mid-to-late 2nd century) | Emerged in Phrygia and Galatia (*c.* 156-172) in reaction to pogroms against Christians. Led by the one-time priest Montanus and companions Priscilla and Maximilla. Announced the Parousia (second coming) some 15 miles from Philadelphia. Montanists called for an ascetic way of life and rejection of the secular world. Revived apocalyptic expectations with the announced and forthcoming end of the world, favored martyrdom and forbade flight to avoid persecution. Produced the first religious schism of the Christian east (particularly Asia Minor). |
| Novatianist Schism (mid 2nd century) | A response to the issue of whether those who lapsed (or apostasized) during the Decian persecution of 249-251 should be treated together or as individual cases (on their respective merits). Novatus (Novation) and other presbyters of Carthage advocated a rigorous position toward treatment of the lapsed, opposing Cyprian's ordination as bishop – especially as he went into hiding. Novatus joined forces with Novatian of Rome in 251. That same year, the Council of Carthage imposed lengthy penances and proportional punishments, and also excommunicated the Novationists. With renewal of persecution, a second synod in May 252 decided to immediately restore to communion all those who showed genuine signs of repentance. |
| Manichaeanism (mid 3rd century) | The views of an African group led by Mani, a Persian philosopher. Mani taught that the world was created by two principles, Good (the Kingdom of Light) and Evil (the Kingdom of Darkness), that the human's soul was good, the body evil. Affected by Zoroastrianism and other Oriental religions as well as by Christianity. Emphasized the consubstantiality of Christ and God the Father. Regarded as the final flourish of Gnosticism, followers wandered and ended up in southern France until eliminated by a crusade during the Middle Ages. In the 4th and 5th centuries, the "Manichaean heresy" in North Africa was a strong rival of Christianity; Saint Augustine was a Manichaean before conversion to Catholic Christianity. |
| Monarchianism (late 2nd century) | Inclined toward Judaism, emphasized the single rule of God. Took the opposite route to the contradiction posed by Logos christology. Affirmed that God is one and Jesus is God, but denied that Jesus is other than the Father. Viewed Logos christology as a threat to monotheism. In the west, were usually called *Patripassians* or "Father sufferingers." |

[21] The Jewish date for celebrating the eucharist for Easter was marked as the fourteenth of the month of Nisan (or the beginning of Passover), regardless of the day of the week. The Roman practice eventually prevailed, with the resulting observance of Easter on the Sunday following the Jewish Passover.

| Movement (Time Period) | Comments |
|---|---|
| Sabellianism (mid-to-late 3rd century) | An eastern form of the monarchian position developed by Sabellius to explain the Father, Son and Spirit as three roles or modes in which one God is revealed rather than as three distinct realities within the Godhead. Also known as Modalists. Maintained that Jesus is God the Father, who Himself became the Son by incarnation, thus denying the distinction of separate persons within the Godhead. The principal opponent to this form of modalistic monarchianism was Hippolytus, the sometimes schismatic Bishop of Rome. |
| Donatism (4th to 5th centuries) | A schism originating in the Diocletian persecution of 303-305 which was especially severe in Carthage and Numidia. Donatists required deposition of clergy who abandoned the church during the Roman persecutions and rebaptism of heretics seeking reconciliation with the Church. A rigorous and independent movement of the "pure" in opposition to the orthodox Catholic Church that ultimately frustrated and angered even the Roman emperor, Constantine. Fueled in part by nationalistic and socio-economic hostility to the Roman presence in North Africa – notably rural Berbers and Phoenicians. Largely quelled by use of force advocated by Augustine in the 5th century leading to persecution and deaths of some adherents, though followers remained to the 7th century and the Islamic conquest of North Africa. |
| Meletianism (early-to-mid 4th century) | An Alexandrian group that favored rigorous treatment to re-admittance who lapsed (or renounced their faith) during the great Diocletian persecution at the start of the fourth century. Their claim to be the "church of the Martyrs" received popular backing in Egypt. Later aligned with Arians in opposition to Athanasius. |
| Arianism (4th century) | A doctrine first associated with the presbyter Arius. Stipulated that the Son is finite and created by the Father, is neither eternal nor immutable, and therefore is subordinate in essence to the Father. This doctrine was rejected as heresy in 325 AD by the Council of Nicaea, but enjoyed some resurgence including imperial acceptance periodically through much of the fourth century. |
| Appollinarianism (mid-to-late 4th century) | Asserted Christ's full deity but at the expense of denying His full humanity. This view was rejected and condemned in AD 381 by the Council of Constantinople, which asserted that Christ is both God and Man. |
| Nestorianism (4th/5th century to present) | Instead of accepting that concept that two natures reside in one Person, the Nestorian heresy suggested two separate natures and two separate persons of the godhead. The Council of Ephesus (AD 431) condemned Nestorianism, holding that the two natures are indivisibly united. |
| Eutychianism (to 5th century) | Maintained that the union of the divine and the human resulted in one theanthropic (part God, part man) nature of Christ. Rejected along with other early heresies at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. |

To the reader of the 21st century, many of these names will be unfamiliar. However, their ideologies, the conflicts created and their resolution have shaped Christianity as we know and practice it today.

Issues that permeated these conflicts were essentially seven-fold:

- The nature of God and relationship of the Father to the Son
- Secret versus revealed knowledge of God
- Apocalyptic visions of imminent *end times*

- Apologists defending Christianity to a skeptical and, at times, oppressive wider governing culture
- Pressures toward conformance to (orthodoxy) versus alternate views (heresy)
- Asceticism as a means to experience the divine
- Provisions for re-acceptance of Christians who had strayed from the church

While the names associated with these movements may have changed, these same issues continue to confront modern Christians.

***Personalities of the Early Church to Constantine:*** An appropriate but abbreviated introduction should also involve personalities of the church without whom many (if not most) of these movements would not have occurred.

Unfortunately, a detailed listing of the people involved is beyond the purpose and scope of this canonical history. However, a passing acquaintance with key figures of the first three centuries is both interesting and useful as a means to appreciate the diversity, the commitment and the eccentricities of these early personalities. A summary listing of key church figures is provided as supplemental information at the end of this chapter.

One person is worth noting specifically in advance – for purposes integrally linked to a better understanding of this historical tour. The key figure in recording the events of the post-New Testament church is an individual named Eusebius of Caesarea.

Often called the Father of Church History, Eusebius wrote the first complete history of the Christian Church and a biography of the emperor Constantine. He figured prominently both as a participant and subsequent writer regarding the events at the Council of Nicaea . Without Eusebius and his antecedent Origen, much of what little early church history we have today would not have been preserved.

## *Post Apostolic Christianity*

As noted, a chronology of the ideologies of the church appropriately begins with the Apostolic tradition (where the New Testament canon leaves off). The chronology reaches its climax with the Arian movement that precipitated the Nicaean Creed – and the resultant conjunction of church and state.

To begin this excursion, it is essential to travel back in time – to the period just following the reported resurrection of Jesus the Christ. The term *apostolic era* refers to the time period of those who had first had direct, first hand experience with the human Jesus.

This apostolic period ends about the time of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The leader of the Jerusalem church, James, was put to death in about 62 AD. The death of the apostle Paul likely occurred pre-64 and Peter by 64.

The years immediately following the fall of Jerusalem are what one writer has described as "among the most obscure in the life of the primitive Church."[22] However, a variety of sources provide clues that, taken together, yield a portrait (albeit somewhat fuzzy) of Christianity in the last third of the first century and up through the second (final) destruction of Jerusalem by AD 135.

Prior to 64 AD, parts of the Christian Church appear to have been in conflict with Jewish authority but not as directly with Rome. For example, the early Christian historian Eusebius records that Pontius Pilate communicated the subject of Jesus death and resurrection to the Roman emperor Tiberius. Eusebius summarizes what occurs with the comment: "For Pilate knew all about Christ's supernatural deeds, and especially how after death He had risen from the dead and was now generally believed to be a god."[23]

While the Roman senate reportedly rejected the report of Jesus' resurrection, Eusebius also reports that an earlier Christian writer stated that emperor Tiberius actually came to favor Christians. The interest of Tiberius actually led him to go out of his way to defend the early practice of Christianity throughout the empire. Despite Senatorial objection, the emperor "stuck to his own view, and threatened to execute any who accused the Christians."[24]

The first reported conflict with Roman authority appears to have occurred after Tiberius, occasioned by the conflagration of Rome during the reign of Nero.

The Roman historian Tacitus writes that a fire destroyed ten of Rome's 14 districts in 64 AD. This occurred during the reign of Nero who found scapegoats described by Tacitus as "those whom the populace called Christians, who were detested because of their shameful deeds." In the aftermath of the conflagration, Christians were arrested, tried and put to death as part of public entertainment spectacles.[25]

As the great apostolic leaders passed from the scene, the church was now firmly established. This was a church largely influenced by the apostle Paul, but also by others.[26] For example, there had been a body of believers at Rome before Paul wrote his first epistle to the Romans. Peter's first epistle addresses Christians in the provinces of Pontus, Cappadocia, and Bithynia to which Paul did not travel.

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[22] W.H.C. Frend, *The Early Church,* Fourth Printing, 1987.

[23] Eusebius, *The History of the Church,* 2.1.2.

[24] From Tertullian, *Defence of the Christians,* as quoted by Eusebius, *op cit.*

[25] Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44.

[26] At Romans 15:20, Paul writes that: "I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation, …"

There were active groupings of Christians in Palestine centered on the Jerusalem church. Other evangelists of the Pauline period included Apollos, Epaphras, Epaphroditus, and Junias.[27]

Matthew and John appear to address communities in Syria and possibly Asia Minor. After Stephen's martyrdom, Antioch as capital of the Syrian province became a second focal center of Christian activity. Antioch is the location where the term "Christian" was first applied to followers of the Way.

The converted apostle Paul is commonly viewed as the leader of efforts to launch a Gentile mission with separation from Jewish laws. Interestingly, Paul may have been following in the footsteps of the man whose murder he earlier oversaw – Stephen. Before the ruling body of the Sanhedrin, it was Stephen who was accused of one who "… never stops saying things against this holy place and the law."[28]

The Jerusalem church came to be governed by James and a group of elders. There is some evidence that the *post-apostolic church* continued to be governed by what the later church historian Eusebius of Caesarea describes as "a cousin of the Savior."[29] Even from the epistles of Paul, it is somewhat unclear as to how the churches elsewhere in the earlier pre-70 period were governed.

In the wake of Roman destruction, the only account of the fate of the Jerusalem church again comes from Eusebius, who relates that members of this community migrated to the Transjordan city of Pella before the serious fighting began. Some historians have concluded that Christians in Palestine took a neutral position during the conflict, which may have served to further estrange Christianity from Judaism.[30]

At any rate, conflicts between Christianity and Judaism were particularly pronounced in Roman cities throughout the empire. The author of the New Testament epistle to Titus is particularly blunt in his assessment of those who taught continued adherence to Jewish customs:

> There are also many rebellious people, idle talkers and deceivers, *especially those of the circumcision;* they must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for sordid gains what it is not right to teach. It was one of them, their very own prophet, who said, "Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons." That testimony is true. For this reason, rebuke them sharply, so

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[27] W.H.C. Frend, *The Early Church*, Fourth Printing, 1987.

[28] Acts 6:13.

[29] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.11.

[30] This viewpoint is expressed, for example, by Williston Walker et al in *a History of the Christian Church*, Fourth Edition, 1985. Walker also notes that by the end of the first century, the rabbis of the reorganized Judaism inserted into prayers an anathema precluding a "Nazarene" from participating in the liturgy of the synagogue.

> that they may become sound in the faith, not paying attention to *Jewish myths* or to commandments of those who reject the truth.[31]

By the beginning of the second century, a hierarchical ecclesiastical Christian structure had begun to take shape with bishops and deacons.[32] Interest in maintaining an authentic Christian heritage remained considerable, as reflected in the letter of second century Ignatius commending the church at Ephesus for having "always been of one mind with the very apostles."[33]

Ignatius may have tried to steer between the extremes of Gentile Christians willing to surrender belief in the incarnation and traditionalists who wanted Christians to return to observance of Jewish law. In the end, he came down more on the side of separation. By the time of his travel to martyrdom at Rome, Ignatius found time to clearly distinguish Christian from Jewish teaching, writing: "It is *monstrous* to talk of Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism."[34]

Roman persecutions of Christians during this period tended to be brief but intense. Persecutions occurred under the emperors Nero, Domitian and Trajan.

However, despite this common interest, each church was generally autonomous in governance from any central authority. The church body or *ekklesia* was understood to be whole and complete within its own place.

By about 100 AD, there were Christian groups in Asia Minor, Syria, Macedonia, Greece and the city of Rome. By 130, there was a clear Christian presence in Egypt.

Early Christianity was primarily an urban affair. However, by about 111-113, Pliny the Younger (governor of Bithynia), reported to the emperor Trajan that "the contagion of that superstition (Christianity) has penetrated *not only* the cities but also the villages and country places."[35]

Despite modern perceptions, this was not a time of harmony between but rather of ecclesiastical factionalism and disputes. The noted historian of the early Christian church Williston Walker has written: "Christianity in the opening decades of the second century was a movement beset with debate and conflict." However, there also were "forces at work which were pushing the churches toward common solutions of these problems – forces which, in effect, demanded that they make up their collective mind about what they stood for."[36]

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[31] Titus 1:10-12.

[32] The offices are described in sources such *as* the Pastoral Epistles, *I Clement*, and the *Didache.*

[33] Ignatius, *Ephesians* 11.2.

[34] Ignatius, *The Apostolic Fathers* 10:3.

[35] Pliny, *Epistle* 96.

[36] Williston Walker, et al, *A History of the Early Christian Church*, first edition 1918, fourth edition 1985.

It is during this early second century period that Ignatius first refers to a *catholic* (or universal) church – essentially described as "wherever Christ is."[37]

A regular pattern of Sunday service emerged, typically involving prayer, praise, Scripture reading, preaching, prophecy and celebration of the eucharist. In daily life, Christians were clearly distinguishable by practices of fasting and prayer together with injunctions against second marriages, leaving babies, abortion, and participation in pagan festivals. Christians supported each other both formally and informally.[38]

***Apologists & Gnostics:*** From about 130-180 AD, the emerging doctrines of the early mainstream church are derived from the teachings of early writers known as the Apologists. The term is from the Greek *apologia*, meaning a speech for the defense.

Through this time, Christianity was clearly a movement on the defensive – throughout the empire. Jerusalem had been destroyed for the final time by the Roman army after a second Jewish uprising in 130 AD. The Judeo-Christian portion of the church's early formation was over.

Romans treated Christians as pagans. By imperial law, church meetings represented activities of an unauthorized association. There was a sense of the need to both explain and defend this faith that was often the cause of persecution.

As perhaps the best known of the apologists, Justin Martyr argued that Christians were not guilty of the charge of being atheists. In Justin's view, Christians can not legitimately be labeled as seditionists or anarchists, nor are they criminals. Rather Christians worship the true god, they seek a spiritual rather than earthly kingdom, and they live by strict moral and ethical standards.

Justin made extensive use of the idea of the divine *Logos* as the first born, the spirit and the power from God. His theology represented an initiative to open dialogue between Greek/Roman philosophy and Christianity. These were the beginnings of what might be called a scientific theology.

Justin represented a new breed of Christian – a person steeped in the philosophies of Stoicism, Peripatetics, Platonism and finally Christianity. Specifically, recognition of Christian bravery in the face of martyrdom led to Justin's own conversion.

Paradoxically, this influx of Greek thinkers brought new and diverse ideas, often accompanied by conflict. A century later, Origen would offer this comment on the impact that Greeks of Alexandria would have on Christian teachings:

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[37] *Smyrnaeans* 8:2.

[38] Williston Walker, *op cit.*

> So then, since Christianity appeared to men as something worthy of serious attention, not only to people of the lower classes as Celsus thinks, but also to many scholars among the Greeks, *sects inevitably came to exist*, not at all on account of factions and love of strife, but because several learned men made a serious attempt to understand the doctrines of Christianity. The result of this was that they *interpreted differently* the scriptures universally believed to be divine, and sects arose named after those who, although they admired the origin of the word, were impelled by certain reasons which convinced them to disagree with one another.[39]

At the same time as defenders of the Christian faith were stepping forward, a new counter-movement was taking shape. As with the orthodox faith of the Apologists, this alternative movement also drew from both Greek/Roman and Christian thought – but with very different results.

This alternative to early orthodox Christianity consisted of relatively diverse ideas but with commonalities labeled under the umbrella term of Gnosticism. The term is derived from the Greek word *gnostikos*, meaning "one who knows," in turn based on a word for "knowledge," *gnosis*.

To the Gnostics, knowledge was not derived from ordinary sources; it came from a divine revelation. *Secret knowledge* came only to a select number of people. For Christian Gnostics, Jesus Christ was the main source of revelation.

The spiritual are the Gnostics, those who are open to divine revelation and can receive the special knowledge that conveys salvation. Psychic people possess a soul and can, therefore, exercise free will.

Gnostics can progress upward and become spiritual; if so, they are Christians. Or they can go downward into decay and become flesh centered or material individuals who have no hope of true knowledge or salvation.

Because the material body is inferior and evil, the spirit of each individual is dwelling in an alien atmosphere. This belief led Gnostics to look upon Jesus as a human who received his divinity during his lifetime, probably at baptism. Therefore at his crucifixion he did not necessarily die but rather ascended directly to God from whom he came.

The darkness of the world (or cosmos) did not exist from the beginning but occurred as the result of a tragic fall from the higher realm. One version claims that the lowest and weakest member of the light world, known as the Aeon called Wisdom or Sophia, fell

[39] Origen, *Contra Celsum*, iii. 12 (English translation, H. Chadwick).

into error through the passion and desire to know the unknowable Father. Her redemption required the exiling of passion and evil from the higher world.[40]

The specific origins of Gnosticism are difficult to trace with certainty. Undoubtedly, much of Gnostic thought emerged from a variety of religious and philosophical trends in the Middle East and Greece, extending back to the earlier Greek philosopher Plato.

Some second and third century orthodox critics traced Gnostic thought back through a succession of teachers to Simon Magus, described in the Acts of the Apostles as one who "had previously practiced magic."[41] And writing to the church at Colosse, Paul critiques what may have been an early form of gnosticism.[42] Similarly, Jude's short epistle was written to condemn the libertine indulgence of sexual appetites – another reputed early manifestation of gnostic practice.

The first avid teacher of gnosticism was Basilides at Alexandria (*c.* 132). The most famous of the Alexandrian Gnostics (*flor. c.* 160) was Valentinus. The movement was centered at Alexandria and in Syria, but with second century adherents located in places as removed as southern Gaul, Rome, Carthage, Asia Minor, and throughout Egypt.

Prior to the discovery of 52 books at Nag Hammadi in 1945, it was difficult to obtain a full understanding of Gnostic teachings – as much of the literature was no longer extant. The primary insights into this seemingly obscure sect were provided by (obviously biased) writings of those vehemently opposed to its teachings.

In some respects, Gnosticism does not represent a series of specific teachings as much as it does a spiritual sense of world-rejection combined with a transcendental state of worship and being. As has been made clear by the contents of the Nag Hammadi Library, not all Gnosticism was necessarily Christian. Those who were Christian gnostics identified their saving revelation with Jesus or the Logos.

As a world movement, Gnosticism did not represent a suitable teaching for proselytizing. The teaching was secret, to be imparted only to true believers. As one Nag Hammadi document states: "These revelations are not to be disclosed to anyone in the flesh and are only to be communicated to the brethren who belong to the generation of life."[43]

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[40] In effect, with Gnosticism there are two parallel worlds – the original, divine world (the Fullness) and the inferior, material world (the Void).

[41] Acts 8:9. The New Testament account goes on to indicate that Simon became a Christian believer and was baptized through Philip at Samaria. The 2nd century Christian apologist notes that Simon Magus was widely regarded as a god in places as diverse as Rome and Samaria and was accompanied by "a woman named Helen, who traveled around with him at that time and had previously lived in a brothel…." From the *Defence* by Justin, as quoted by Eusebius, 2.13.

[42] Paul warns: "Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed without cause by a human way of thinking." Colossians 2:18.

[43] From *The Apocalypse of the Great Seth,* cited by W.C.H. Frend, *The Early Church,* Fourth Edition, 1987.

While many of the writings were destroyed because of opposition from the orthodox church, a sizable number have been discovered in recent years. The most notable find occurred in 1945, when a series of 52 presumably Gnostic texts was discovered in a jar by two men digging in the ground in a cemetery near Nag Hammadi, Egypt.[44]

Other early Christian churches rejected Gnosticism as a systematic distortion of the common sense nature of Jesus' ministry and subsequent writings including those of the apostle Paul. They repudiated the notion that sprit is automatically good and flesh automatically evil, and rejected the gnostic dogma of two worlds.

The Gnostic movement reached its zenith under the second century leadership of Marcion, a wealthy ship owner and merchant from the Black Sea area. Specifically, Marcion rejected the linkage of the God of the Hebrews with God the Father of Jesus. Marcion promoted asceticism, rejected marriage, and emphasized individual purity and personal feeling rather than universal salvation.

The earliest vigorous opponent of Marcion and the Gnostics was Irenaeus of Lyons (in present day France). In *Against Heresy* (*c.* 185), Irenaeus reasoned from apostolic texts based on their most simple reading. He argued that even obscure passages are best understood in the light of other parallel passages whose meaning is more obvious.[45]

Polycarp of Smyrna, who characterized Marcion as "first-born of Satan", perhaps best exemplifies the intensity of the orthodox opposition. In his own defense, Marcion wrote *Antitheses* (only fragments of which survive), and was excommunicated *c.* 144. In response, Marcion spent the last 15-20 years of his life organizing communities in opposition to the orthodox, Catholic church.

Despite being branded as heretics, Gnostics sounded ideas that continue to resonate within more orthodox Christian traditions. They questioned the docetic Christ (who only appears to have human form), leading to identification of intermediaries such as the Virgin Mary or Mary Magdalene to communicate Jesus' message and experiences to humans. Gnostics also focused on a question theology that has yet to be fully answered: Why is there evil?

The increasingly hierarchical organization of the orthodox church took its cue from the Gnostic organization of philosophical schools. And the mainstream church essentially co-opted the Gnostic ideal of the "truly rational soul moving irrevocably toward ultimate harmony with God."[46]

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[44] This collection of early Gnostic texts was translated into English and published in 1977 *as The Nag Hammadi Library.*

[45] Irenaeus attacked the Gnostic viewpoint that the true God and the creator of the world are different. He also refuted the gnostic separation of spirit, soul and flesh as inconsistent substances or natures.

[46] W. H. C. Frend, *The Early Church*, Fourth Edition, 1987. In response, early patristics such as Clement and Origen argued that Gnostic methods did not further the ideal of this ultimate God-human harmony.

More than anything else, Gnosticism forced the creation of orthodox, written Christian doctrine. The church's first doctrinal teachings crystallized in response to a sect that was seen as separating Jesus from his humanity.

***Logos vs. Monarchian Theology:*** After a long period of Roman tolerance toward Christians, a less congenial administration took hold under the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180). Between 155-165, both Polycarp and Justin Martyr were executed.

In Smyrna (home of the Christian patriarch Polycarp), a dozen Christians were condemned to the beasts. However, the beasts reportedly appeared reluctant; in one case a confessor dragged an animal toward him in order to be eaten.

In Lyons, mob violence erupted against Christians in 177. Some Christians were consigned to serve as gladiators for the annual Games in Lyons.

Christians were attacked as an unwanted secret society were also documented in written compositions, most notably by Celsus. Christians were particularly unpopular for proselytizing to seek new converts.

The response by Christian apologists was, first, to deny the charges of scandal and insubordination and, second, to take the offensive by attacking paganism. Apologists argued the truth of monotheism, claiming that only Christian worship of a single God was valid.

However, this teaching soon opened a trap. Was Christianity a teaching of one, two or three god-like figures?

Toward the close of the second century, *Logos theology* was formulated as an orthodox response by Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian and other apologists – specifically to distinguish between the Father and the Son. For Justin, the "Son of God" was "another God" who existed alongside the "sole unbegotten," or Father. In this view, the son is not co-eternal with God, but is created and serves as a mediator between god and the cosmos. However, by creating a "second God," the Logos theology appeared to critics as inconsistent with the principle of monotheism, further subordinating the son to the Father.

Irenaeus argued for the position that God was one. Jesus was united with God as both Word and Son. Consistent with this theology, Irenaeus also argued for the principle of apostolic succession (in the line from Polycarp) and for the pre-eminence of the Roman See – reputedly founded by the apostles Peter and Paul.

Tertullian took the logos logic another step further, articulating the earliest systematic theology of the Trinity. Adapting much of his thinking from the apocalyptic Montanists, Tertullian argued that there is a single divine substance which is administered via three distinct but continuous persons – Father, Logos/Son, and Spirit.

Tertullian also was an early advocate of unbending conformism – in opposition to contrary strands of Christianity and to the Roman state. This is evidenced by Tertullian's polemic:

> What have heretics to do with Christians? … Away with all attempts to produce a Stoic, Platonic or dialectic Christianity. We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after receiving the gospel.[47]

Ironically, Tertullian himself separated from the orthodox church, joining the Montanists who preached separation from Roman society and the imminent end of the world.

The reaction to the Logos theology was *monarchianism,* an attempt to restore a more pure form of monotheism. In its initial form, monarhianists asserted that "Christ was a mere man" who was adopted into divinity by his resurrection.[48] A second version (*c*. 200) was that God himself was the subject of the incarnation. The Son and the Father were the same, only the term "Son" was used to mean the human Jesus.[49]

A third version was articulated by Sabellius, who suggested that the Trinity does not require three separate realities of the Godhead. Rather, the Trinity rather represents three different roles (or modes) God takes to make a presence known in this earthly realm.

Rather than a trinity, the early monarchian affirmations were essentially Binitarian, that is, referencing a Father and Son, but no Holy Spirit. However, by about 180, the beginnings of a creed could be detected, as in the *Epistle of the Apostles:*

> [I believe} in [the Father] the ruler of the universe, and in Jesus Christ [our Redeemer} and in the Holy Spirit [the Paraclete] and in the holy Church, and in the forgiveness of sins.[50]

Another who tried to resolve the problems posed by the Monarchians was a prolific writer and Bishop of Rome named Hippolytus. He argued that God was God from eternity, but created the Word who became Christ. His formulation of the trinity: "The Father commands, the Son obeys, the Holy Spirit gives understanding."[51]

Among the later adoptionists was one Paul of Samasota, who believed Jesus was a man inspired by God, but also a man "from below" and therefore not the word of God made flesh. As bishop of Antioch, Paul was condemned for heresy at two separate synods of Antioch, in 264 and again in 268-9.

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[47] *De Fuga in Praescriptione,* 7.

[48] This was the viewpoint of Theodotus, a tanner from Byzantium, ca. 190.

[49] This viewpoint arrived was articulated by Noetus, one expelled from the church at Smyrna and articulated at Rome, ca. 200.

[50] From J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds.* The words in brackets are not found in all manuscripts.

[51] Hippolytus, *Against Noetus.*

The vociferous nature of the debate is indicated by the proceedings orchestrated by Malchion, the principal of a school of rhetoric. According to Eusebius: "He (Malchion) actually arranged for shorthand writers to take notes as he embarked on an argument with Paul which we know to be extant to this day; he and he alone succeeded in exposing *this crafty dissembler.*"[52]

### *Giants of Orthodoxy & Heresy*

During the second and third centuries, three individuals are notable as exemplars both of orthodoxy and heresy. They impacted orthodox Christianity but – despite their importance – would become viewed as heretics.

***Tertullian:*** Tertullian burst on the scene as an outspoken defender of orthodoxy; he was the one that first coined the term New Testament. However, in later life he joined the heretical Montanists.

Like Hippolytus, Tertullian opposed the Bishop of Rome, Callistus, who viewed the church as a refuge for sinners including restoration of those who had committed acts of adultery, second marriages (even among clergy), even homicide. As an Alexandrian, Tertullian also favored martyrdom and, as such, posed a significant counterforce to Rome.

***Clement:*** Another notable Alexandrian gaining notice at the start of the third century was Clement, originally a Greek. Over time, Clement gravitated toward a version of Gnosticism without determinism, an eclectic theology proclaiming: "there is but one river of truth, but many streams pour into it from this side and from that.

For Clement, the law is for the Jew what philosophy is for the Greek, a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ."[53] Clement's Jesus was a disembodied Saviour: "He himself was wholly without passion and into him there entered no emotional movement, neither pleasure nor pain."[54]

***Origen:*** Third in line was Origen, described by some as the greatest Christian thinker between the apostle Paul and Saint Augustine. Born in Alexandria about 185, Origen was a student of Clement. He came to dislike both Gnosticism and Monarchianism.

However, he also found it difficult to accept some supposedly canonical texts at face value.[55] Overall, his theology was one of gradual spiritual perfection, without heaven or hell, but successive reincarnation of the soul.

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[52] Eusebius, *The History of the Church,* 7.29.

[53] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromates,* 1.7.3.

[54] *Stromates,* op cit., vi. 13.

[55] An example of a New Testament text troublesome to Origen was Jesus' remark from Luke 9:60: "Let the dead bury their dead."

Origen took the Bible literally, including the remark from Jesus about "eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can."[56] About a century later, historian Eusebius would write with a mix of apparent condemnation and admiration about one who would follow Christ so far as to self-castration:

> … while responsible for the instruction at Alexandria, Origen did a thing that provided the fullest proof of a *mind youthful and immature*, but at the same time of faith and self-mastery. The saying 'there are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake' he took in an absolute literal sense, and he was eager both to fulfil the Saviour's words and at the same time to rule out any suspicion of vile imputations on the part of unbelievers. For in spite of his youth he discussed religious problems before a mixed audience. So he lost no time in carrying out the Saviour's words, endeavouring to do it unnoticed by the bulk of his pupils. But however much he might wish it, he could not possibly conceal such an act, and it was not long before it came to the knowledge of Demetrius, as head of the diocese. He was amazed at Origen's headstrong act, but approving his enthusiasm and the genuineness of his faith he told him not to worry, and urged him to devote himself more keenly than ever to the work of instruction.[57]

Eusebius had a special reason for this interest in Origen. He had inherited authority over a school in Caesarea in Palestine at which Origen had previously taught. Eusebius also appears to have inherited Origen's voluminous library. This library would be the source of Eusebius' fourth century history of the Christian Church – the best contemporaneous history available of the early church from the time of the apostles to persecution and theological conflicts to wedding of church and state under emperor Constantine.

In many respects, Origen represents the *cutting edge* of pre-Constantine Christian theology and practice. His work was and used respected by many, but he became subject to unrelenting criticism – both during his life and after.

Within less than two centuries of his death, Augustine would support the condemnation of Origen for his lenient views regarding topics such as eternal damnation and hell, writing:

> …Origen was even more indulgent; for he believed that even the devil himself and his angels, after suffering these more severe and prolonged pains which their sins deserved, should be delivered from their torments, and associated with the

[56] Matthew 19:12.

[57] Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, 6.8. Eusebius goes on to note that after Origen achieved greater fame, Demetrius wrote to bishops "throughout the world in an attempt to make Origen's action appear outrageous …"

> holy angels. But the Church, not without reason, condemned him for this and other errors…"[58]

As Augustine noted, the list of heretical ideas went well beyond Origen's views regarding hell. Written nearly 16 centuries later at the close of the 20th century, an internet web site contains this observation:

> In his lifetime he was often attacked, suspected of adulterating the Gospel with pagan philosophy. After his death, opposition steadily mounted. The chief accusations against Origen's teaching are the following: making the Son inferior to the Father and thus being a precursor of Arianism, a 4th-century heresy that denied that the Father and the Son were of the same substance; spiritualizing away the resurrection of the body; denying hell, a morally enervating universalism; speculating about pre-existent souls and world cycles; dissolving redemptive history into timeless myth by using allegorical interpretation, thus turning Christianity into a kind of Gnosticism, a heretical movement that held that matter was evil and the spirit good. None of these charges is altogether groundless.[59]

Interestingly, both Augustine and the modern author offer similar concluding remarks – en effect saying that Origen was reasonably attacked for charges that countered Christian orthodoxy. However, the question was and is: Should orthodoxy of any particular time necessarily be viewed as the correct or only interpretation of the real, historical Jesus?

### *Imperial Persecution & Christian Reaction*

From 249 – 259, two imperial persecutions jolted what had been an increasingly comfortable world for Christians in the Roman Empire. The first persecution under emperor Decius from December 249 to late 250 was relatively brief. Christians could get off the hook by sacrificing to the gods of Rome.

However, the effect was felt. Origen was one who was imprisoned and tortured during the Decian persecution.

Persecution affected Christians in other ways as well. The aftermath created a new dilemma for churches – whether and how to readmit those who had lapsed, particularly members of the clergy. A particular hard-liner, following in the footsteps of Tertullian, was Cyprian of Carthage. According to Cyprian, lay members could be re-admitted through re-baptism; for lapsed clergy, there was no readmittance till the repentant lay on the deathbed.

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[58] Augustine, *The City of God*, XXI.17.

[59] Source is Glenn Davis, from world wide web site www.best.com/~gdavis/ntcanon, 1997.

A second persecution ensued in 258 under emperor Valerian. This time, Cyprian himself was martyred for refusing to recant his faith.

This would be the last of the imperial persecutions against Christians until after 300 AD. Despite periodic and intense pressure against the church, the influence of Christianity gained an even stronger foothold throughout the empire.

From its inception, Christianity had been manifest primarily as an urban phenomenon. However, in the latter decades of the third century, the empire came under increasing attack from outside forces. Inflation was rampant; the city-state was being replaced by the fortified villa and dependent village.

Regional languages such as Coptic (a descendant of ancient Egyptian) and Syrian emerged. And a rural apocalyptic Christianity emerged, particularly in Egypt.

Patriarchal privileges had devolved on Rome, Antioch, Alexandrian and Jerusalem. More intense debates again occurred over the relationship of God the Father to Son and Holy Spirit.

In Antioch, this came to a head with the new bishop Paul of Samosata, the first to be deposed by a church convened council. The debate revolved around the view of Christ as descended from on high versus a man "sprung from beneath." The former view of Alexandrian church prevailed against the latter view of the Antiochene.

No less eminent an historian than Eusebius would look back on this time and write:

> But as the result of greater freedom a change to pride and sloth came over our affairs, we fell to envy and fierce railing one against the other, warring upon ourselves so to speak as occasion offered with weapons and spears formed of words, and ruler attacked ruler and laity formed factions against laity, while unspeakable hypocrisy and pretense pursued their evil course to the furthest end.[60]

The final so-called Great Persecution of Christians was launched on February 23, 303 in Nicomedia during the 19th year of rule by the Emperor Diocletian. The leading pagan proponent of this persecution was the Neo-Platonist Porphyry of Gaza. Porphyry actually Jesus in some esteem, but pointed to inconsistencies in gospel accounts of Jesus' life, and to less desirable attributes of Peter and Paul.

Scriptural documents were to be surrendered and burned, churches to be dismantled, and no further worship meetings held. In 304, governmental authority effectively passed from Diocletian to Galerius and the level of intimidation increased. Diocletian had begun to train a young Constantine (son of Constantius as Caesar of the West), and Galerius instructed Constantine to remain at court in Nicomedia.

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[60] Eusebius, *H.E.*, viii. 1.7.

In 306, Constantine traveled to Britain and arrived just in time to be on hand when his father died on July 25. That same day, the army in Britain proclaimed Constantine as Augustus. The events of that day and Constantine's subsequent rise to power mark what one historian describes as:

> … a lust for power, a strong element of cruelty, a capacity for quick thinking and acting, and a religious sense which allowed him (Constantine) to attribute his success to the intervention of higher powers.[61]

In 311, Galerius became ill (possibly with cancer of the bowels). In an act of moderation, he issued an edict of amnesty, stating that: "Christians may exist again, and may establish their meeting houses provided that they do nothing contrary to good order."[62]

### *Effects of Roman Persecution*

Prior to the conversion of Constantine, the Roman empire engaged in periodic, but often intense, persecutions of Christians. The effects of these persecutions can not be overstated – both for orthodox and heretical Christians.

Significant hostility toward Christianity occurred during the reigns of eleven emperors. At least 10 Roman emperors authorized the full weight of imperial authority in specific acts to harass, intimidate, imprison and/or execute Christians.

[61] W. H. C. Frend, *The Early Church*, Fourth Printing, 1987.

[62] Lactantius, *On the Death of the Persecutors,* 34, Stevenson.

## Major Roman Persecutions of Christians

| Time of Peak Persecution | Roman Emperor (Period of Reign) | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| | Caligula (37-41) | Required universal homage to the emperor's statue. Called Gaius by Eusebius. Described by many historians as insanely cruel, Caligua's terror was directed broadly – with collateral damage to the nascent Christian community.[63] |
| 64 AD (after fire) | Nero (54-68) | First direct clash with Christians who were blamed for the fire that destroyed much of Rome. Executed Christians in Roman spectacles. |
| 91-96 | Domitian (91-96) | First to use consistent imperial force as the law proscribed Christianity. Persecution was most fierce in Asia Minor. |
| 115-117 | Trajan (98-117) | Ignites (Ignatius), Bishop of Antioch, was executed. |
| 151 | Antonius Pius (138-161) | Resulted in death of patriarch Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, at age 86. |
| 180 | Marcus Aurelius (161-180) | Instigated a more intense period of persecution against both men and women. The Christian apologist Justin was put to death. |
| 202 | Septimius Severus (193-211) | The emperor showed some sympathy early in his reign. Persecution intensified with an edict while sojourning in Palestine in 202, apparently alarmed by growth of the Christian church. Applied a wide variety of inhumane torture and capital punishments. Particularly severe for Alexandria and Carthage. For example, Clement fled Alexandria and Origen's father lost his life. |
| 235-237 | Maximin (235-238) | A brief flurry of persecution aimed at Christian leaders, occasioned by alarm at the number of Christians in the imperial household. Resulted in imprisonment and death of Hippolytus, Bishop of Portus. |
| 249-250 | Decius (249-253) | Came to power through overthrow of Philip who was viewed as too partial toward Christians. Decius viewed Christianity as "an empire within an empire." Required Christians to offer sacrifices. Persecution was more organized, systematic and universal than earlier events. Origen was imprisoned and tortured. Fabian, Bishop of Rome, was martyred just 3 months after Decius ascended to the throne. |
| 257-258 | Valerian (253-260) | Designated the sun as the supreme god of Rome. Early on, this emperor showed favor to Christians, including those of his household. Persecution stimulated by growing financial position and influence of Christian churches. Did not require denial of Christian faith but did require sacrificing to the gods of the empire. Was aimed at bishops, presbyters and deacons. Resulted in martyrdom of Cyprian. |

[63] Early persecution of Christians occurred at Damascus, led by Saul. According to Luke, Christianity came to Antioch by persons scattered by persecution. This other persecution came at the hands primarily of other Jews, but would doubtless have required Roman sanction or indifference. Pontius Pilate escaped the wrath of Emperor Tiberius (for undue brutality toward rebellious Judean subjects including Samaritans) only by the death of Tiberius and ascension of Gaius Caesar (Caligula).

| Time of Peak Persecution | Roman Emperor (Period of Reign) | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| 303-305 | Diocletian (284-304) | Last of the major persecutions during which churches and copies of scripture were burned. Early on, Diocletian favored Christians; his wife and daughter either were Christian or catechumens. Many Christians also held positions in the imperial household. Persecution may have first been initiated by Galerius, Caesar to Diocletian. |
| 311-313 | Maximin and Galerius (304-311) | Galerius issued an edict of amnesty promulgated in 311. However, some persecution continued in the eastern provinces of the Roman empire, including after the death of Galerius in 311. Maximin issued an edict of toleration and died as a fugitive in 313. |

Official Roman sanction of the persecution of Christians came to an end in 313 when Constantine and Licinius issued the Edict of Milan establishing freedom of religion.

Not all Roman emperors – even prior to Constantine – were hostile to Christianity. Philip who reigned from 242-249 – just before Decius – was viewed as "the first Christian emperor." Before Philip's reign, the Empress Otacilia Severa (wife of Alexander Severus) made no mystery of her faith. She corresponded, for example, with the well-known Christian theologian Origen.

And despite periods of intense and life-threatening imperial disfavor, much of this 300 years was spent with Christians able to live relatively normal lives. Only about 1/10$^{th}$ of this time involved periods of intense persecution. In effect, it was possible for many Christians to live all or most of their life without suffering through a period of imperial persecution.

Major periods of relative calm included much of the last third of the first century, most of the first half of the second century, and all but a couple of years during the second half of the second century. The first half of the third century (after 203), and the last part of this century (from about 260-303) also were periods of comparative religious toleration.

In the third century, more converts came from the upper classes of Roman society. So the subsequent persecutions – particularly of Decius and Diocletian – were particularly unexpected and unwelcome.

Patterns and intensities of persecution could also be somewhat localized. In some parts of the empire (particularly Asia Minor), Christians got off easier because they represented a larger part of the community and/or their neighbors were more tolerant.

In other communities, the anti-Christian sentiment was particularly harsh. Particularly fierce were the anti-Christian sentiments observed in the North African areas of Numidia and Carthage with the Diocletian persecution of 303-305.

***The Easter Debate:*** Hostility was not only experienced from pagan society and Roman governmental authorities. There were numerous conflicts still at work within the church itself.

Perhaps no debate better illustrates the difference in an adversarial versus conciliatory approach than the question of when and how Easter should be celebrated. While the issue was multi-faceted, the primary question was whether Easter was to be celebrated at the same time as the Jewish Passover (the position of the eastern church) or always on a Sunday (favored by the western church).

The issue aroused strong emotions. Some argued that all churches should celebrate the on the same day. At the end of the second century, Victor, the Bishop of Rome attempted to exercise control over other bishoprics – the most significant exercise of the Roman bishopric over other sees to date.

Victor strongly supported the western view of Easter, in effect excommunicating all the churches of Asia. For this he was strongly rebuked by those who desired peace between dioceses. For example, among those asking for a more conciliatory approach was Irenaeus, who wrote:

> The dispute is not only about the day, but also about the actual character of the fast. Some think that they ought to make the fast for one day, some for two, others for still more; some make their 'day' last forty hours on end. Such variation in the observance did not originate in our own day, but very *much earlier*, in the time of our forefathers, who – apparently disregarding strict accuracy – in their naïve simplicity kept up a practice which they fixed for the time to come. In spite of that, they all lived in peace with one another, and so de we*: the divergency in the fast emphasize the unanimity of our faith.*[64]

Unfortunately, the position of Irenaeus was not to stand the test of time. True to past practice, the Roman Catholic church enforced the always on Sunday approach, while the eastern Orthodox church was to retain a date in keeping with the Jewish calendar.

### *The Constantine Conversion – And Its Lasting Legacy*

In 312/313, Constantine became the first Roman emperor to openly convert to Christianity. And the world changed with this Christian emperor.

When Constantine made the decision to follow a religious sect exported from a remote region of the empire, Christianity emerged from the shadows as a suspect minority sect to the dominant religion of the civilized western world. This transition in the ruling religion of the entire Roman world occurred not gradually, but almost overnight.

Born in 274 AD, the emperor convert was the son of Emperor Constantius Chlorus and Helena. In 306, Constantine was declared as Augustus by his troops in Britain upon hearing of the death of his father.

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[64] Irenaeus, as quoted by Eusebius, *The History of the Church,* 5.24.

Constantine's reputed conversion occurred at the age of nearly 40 as he fought to gain sole control of the western empire. The night before battle, the legend is he dreamed, seeing the Greek initials of Christ – Chi/Rho. And in this dream was the message. "By this sign you will conquer." The next day, at the Battle of Mulvian Bridge, Constantine prevailed over his rival Maxentius and marched with his army triumphant into Rome.

With the 313 Edict of Milan, emperor Constantine decreed full toleration of the Christian Church. Officially sanctioned persecution of Christians was now ended.

Three distinct phases of church-state relations during the approximately 24-year reign of Constantine as emperor can be identified:

- 313-324 – A period of general religious tolerance, with limited favoritism exhibited toward Christianity.
- 324-330 – A shift toward clearer Christian favoritism, as other religions fell into definite imperial disfavor.
- 330-337 (& death) – Culminating the transition with vigorous imperial opposition exhibited both to paganism and what were viewed to be heretical forms of Christianity.

Starting in 330, the emperor also began the building of the New Rome (Constantinople) – as a planned Christian City. During this period, the remaining eastern empire vestiges of paganism were systematically removed. Pagan temples were demolished and treasures removed.

According to the historian Eusebius, about the year 322 Constantine also ordered the preparation of 50 elaborately styled New Testaments. Unfortunately, no copies have survived; there is not even an extant listing of the books included in this imperially ordered New Testament document. The earliest listing that we have for the current 27 books of the NT that we have today would have to wait for another generation – to the great Nicene advocate Athanasius.

***Donatism:*** As emperor and Christian convert, Constantine quickly found himself embroiled in the internal conflicts of the church. A major focus of his reign was to attempt and sort his way through two particularly knotty conflicts – the movements known as Donatism and Arianism.

Less than a decade prior to Constantine's triumph at Milvian Bridge, a new schism took root in the North African church. The controversy was the direct result of the Diocletian persecution. Eventually, the resolution would involve the direct intervention of the new emperor.

Donatism along with the Meletian and resulting Arian controversies all originated in the events of the 304-5 period. Once again, conflict arose between different factions in the recovering church – after the persecution had ended. The question was how those who

had recanted their faith in the face of governmentally sponsored terror were to be treated now that the persecution was over.

There were differences of opinion rooted both in geography and emphasis. For starters, the Donatist movement was primarily focused on Africa, whereas the origins of the Meletian and Arian events can be traced primarily to the Latin (including Egyptian) portions of the empire.

Donatus came to be regarded as chief spokesman and long-term leader of the movement that took his name. Known as Donatus of Carthage, he ruled the North African church for 42 years – despite efforts of others including the emperor to unseat him or diminish his power. Donatus' ecclesiastical foe throughout was Caecilian, the Roman church designated bishop of Carthage.[65]

The first ecclesiastical tribunal convened through imperial authority occurred on September 30, 313, at the home of Constantine's then wife Fausta. Bishop Miltiades ran the tribunal and on October 5 declared Caecilian vindicated, while condemning Donatus for disturbing established disciplinary procedures, the unauthorized act of rebaptizing (lapsed) clergy and creating schism within the church.

Writing to the chief civil administrator in Roman Africa, Emperor Constantine himself mentions that he has heard of attempts by "some irresponsible individuals to corrupt the congregation of the holy and Catholic Church with vain and base falsifications." Constantine further orders that "any found suffering under this vain and bastard delusion should be hauled before the magistrates."[66]

Emperor Constantine initially ruled against the conservative Donatus in favor of Caecilian, in 317 ordering the property of Donatist churches confiscated and leaders sent into exile. In this regard, the civil emperor was clearly acting in the role of supreme religious as well as civil authority.

Constantine actually kept both Caecillian and Donatus in Rome and agreed to another hearing. This new emperor was having trouble understanding how this new Christian faith of his could involve such nasty debates between its adherents. In an early 314 letter to the Bishop of Syracuse, the emperor expressed his surprise and dismay:

> … that even those very persons who ought to be of one mind in brotherly love are separate from each other in a disgraceful nay, rather, in an abominable manner,

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[65] The first recorded action of the church engaging in violent action toward dissident members occurs in 304 when the (Catholic) bishop of Carthage and his deacon placed guards at the gates of a Roman prison to prevent supporters of the Donatist Abitinians from entering the prison with food and other supplies for the imprisoned Donatist Christian confessors. As recounted by Maureen A. Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press), 1996.

[66] As recorded by Eusebius.

> and give to those men whose souls are strangers to the this most holy religion to scoff.[67]

The following year, Donatus asked to be returned to Africa. The request was refused, so he escaped and made his way back to Carthage. Rival Caecillian followed, despite riots against him.

Again, the emperor responded, this time with full intent to usurp ecclesiastical in favor of imperial authority. Constantine announced that: "…with the favor of the divine piety I shall come to Africa and shall most fully demonstrate with an unequivocal verdict as much to Caecilian as to those who seem to be against him just how the Supreme Deity *should be worshipped*…."[68]

Constantine never made the promised trip to Africa, but did again pronounce Caecilian innocent on November 10, 316. In 317, the exile of Donatist church leaders and confiscation of church property was ordered.

Despite all this, the African church resisted both imperial and orthodox church authority. As a church historian has noted: "His (Caecilian's) use of troops against his opponents in Carthage merely confirmed the view of the majority of African Christians that the Emperor's friendship toward the Church was one of the devil's tricks. The society of Christ and the society of the world would always be at enmity."[69]

It was not until May 5, 321, that the emperor finally *reversed his prior decision* and offered the Donatists toleration. Constantine had been worn down; his attention was also being diverted to a new and even more serious religious controversy arising elsewhere from the east – that of Arius.

In summary, the Donatist controversy had the effect of consolidating the power of the western church (including North Africa) in the see at Rome (with the exception of the Donatists). The Roman See emerged from the shadows to represent the views of western Christianity – except for the Donatists of northern Africa. In the East, primary centers of Christian activity were Alexandria, Antioch and, with this acknowledged Christian Caesar, the newly founded imperial city of Constantinople.

***Arianism:*** This is the most famous of the controversies of the early church and was also the cause of Constantine's decision to call the legendary Council of Nicaea. The roots of the movement can be traced to Meletius, an Egyptian Bishop imprisoned through the 304-05 persecution under Diocletian. Like Donatus, Meletius subsequently favored a rigorous policy toward re-admittance of clergy who had lapsed during the persecution of Diocletian.

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[67] Eusebius, *H.E.*, ix.5.21-2.

[68] Constantine, letter to Domitius Celcus, preserved in Optatus of Milevis, App. Vii (Ziwsa, 210-211).

[69] W.H.C. Frend, op cit.

Meletius opposed Peter of Alexandria who issued a milder series of rulings on Easter 306.[70] Peter ruled that those who had succumbed to torture could be readmitted to the church after fasting 40 days; those who had bribed pagans or officials to impersonate them were subjected to penances.

Meletius initially had a friend and follower in the form of an educated and ascetic layman named Arius. However, Arius switched positions. Peter was martyred on November 25, 311 after making peace with Arius, a move that caused Meletius to view Arius as a traitor.

Around 318, Arius began to expound a view that would create ripples in a much bigger pond. He argued that the Logos (the "Word") is a creature called into being by God "out of nonexistence," meaning there was a time when the Logos did not exist. Since there can not be two Gods, it follows that the son is a creature. As a *created being,* the Logos could change and was capable of either virtue or vice.

Arius stood in opposition to the Monarchian view that there was no distinction between Father and Son. The views of Arius were well aligned with those of Origen (of an earlier era) and, at the urging of Meletians, became increasingly opposed by Alexander, pope of Alexandria. In 318-319, Alexander convened a council of 100 bishops to address the matter; Arius was condemned and exiled.

A synod convened by Eusebius of Nicomedia (not the church historian) urged Alexander to take Arius back. At this point, the exigencies of politics intervened. Co-emperor Licenius imposed new civil restrictions on Christians (including dismissal from imperial service and injunctions against holding services within city walls). In 324, Constantine prevailed and finally became sole ruler of the Roman empire.

As sole emperor, Constantine once again turned to matters of religion and found a simmering dispute between Arius and Alexander. He initially attempted to get the competing sides to mediate, suggesting that the issue being debated was "unprofitable".

### *Council of Nicaea – A Seminal Event*

Mediation proved to be just as unprofitable, so Constantine decided to call a universal council of the church at Nicaea (in what is now Turkey), about 30 miles from the emperor's capital at Nicomedia. About 250-300 bishops and staff attended, mostly from the East but with some representation (including Caecilian) from the West.

[70] Meletius and Peter had been imprisoned together in Alexandria during the great persecution. Their disagreement over future treatment of the lapsed became so severe that Peter stretched a curtain across the middle of the room so that he would not have to see or interact with Meletius.

Convened on May 20, 325, the conclave was presided over by none other than the emperor himself. The Council had about evenly split minorities supportive of and opposed to Arius; the vast majority were positioned somewhere in the middle

On its face, the central question at Nicaea was theological – ostensibly about the nature of the divine essence of Christ as Son of God. However, both to the bishops and imperial officials attending, the conflict had also become intensely political. Out of this debate came a creed that would be adopted as a universal statement of what Christian faith was to henceforth represent.

***Rationale for to a Creed:*** The notion of a credal statement had been around for some time – with primitive formulations dating back as early as Paul's New Testament epistles.[71] A late second century (*c.* 180) credal formulation from the *Epistles of the Apostles* was relatively short, essentially a one-liner:

> "[I believe} in [the Father] the ruler of the universe, and in Jesus Christ [our Redeemer} and in the Holy Spirit [the Paraclete] and in the holy Church, and in the forgiveness of sins."[72]

Some theologians had suggested their own creeds. For example, the Bishop of Portus, Hippolytus (*c.* 155-235/236) argued that God was God from eternity, but created the Word who became Christ. His formula was both simple and elegant:

> "The Father commands, the Son obeys, the Holy Spirit gives understanding."[73]

***The Nicene Theological Issue:*** At least four viewpoints were represented in the Nicene debate. Each is linked with a specific Greek term to delineate the essence of God the Father versus Jesus as the Son:

- *Anomoios* – In this view, the Son is "unlike" the Father. This was the extreme Arian viewpoint.
- *Homois* – For these advocates, the Son is conceived as being "like" the Father. This alternative parallels considerable New Testament verbiage, but the formulation was strongly opposed by Athanasius.
- *Homoiousios* -- The Son is "of like essence" with the Father, reflecting a more moderate Arian viewpoint.
- *Homoousios* – With this alternative, the Son is "of the same essence" as the Father. This became the credal formulation that prevailed at Nicaea.

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[71] An example would be Paul's closing words in his second letter to the Corinthians: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." From II Corinthians 13:12.

[72] From J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds.* The words in brackets are not found in all manuscripts.

[73] Hippolytus, *Against Noetus.*

***A Trial Balloon:*** Early in the Nicene Council's deliberation, Eusebius of Caesarea (the historian) offered a baptismal creed from his church for consideration. Later reporting on the events of the Council to his church at Caesarea, Eusebius recounts offering a Palestinian baptismal creed – as a first *trial balloon* – to the Emperor and Council as follows:

> "We believe in One God, Father Almighty, the Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in One Lord Jesus Christ, *the Word of God*, God from God, Light from Light, *Life from Life*, Only-begotten Son, *first-born of all creation, before all the ages* begotten from the Father, by Whom also all things were made; suffered, and rose again the third day, and ascended to *the Father*, and will come again *in glory* to judge living and dead. And we believe also in One Holy Spirit."[74] (Note: *italics* indicate substantive differences with adopted Nicene creed).

However, this was not strong enough for those opposed to Arius. The opponents wanted a creed that more strongly affirmed the *consubstantiality* of the Father with the Son.

***The Nicene Formulation:*** To resolve the dispute, it was proposed that the term *homoiousios* (of like essence) be replaced by *homoousios* (meaning "consubstantial" or of the same essence). The presiding officer, Constantine, proposed this replacement wording. The credal statement was further modified to include anathemas explicitly condemning the propositions that had been advanced by the Arians.[75]

The result was the first statement of (what would later become known and modified as) the Nicene Creed:

> "We believe in One God, the Father, Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible:
>
> "And in One Lord Jesus Christ, the *Son of God, begotten of the Father*, Only-begotten, that is, *from the substance of the Father*, God from God, Light from Light, *Very* God from *very* God, begotten *not made, Consubstantial (of one substance) with the Father*, by Whom all things were made, *both things in heaven and things in earth: Who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate, was made man*, suffered, and rose again the third day, *ascended into heaven*, and is coming to judge living and dead.
>
> "And in the Holy Ghost.

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[74] Eusebius of Caesarea, to his church on the creed of Nicaea, as recorded in *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church to AD 337*,edited by J. Stevenson, 1957, #301.

[75] Why Constantine chose this solution is unknown; there is no clear basis for this credal formulation in the New Testament.

> *"And those who say, 'There was when he was not,' and 'Before His generation he was not,' and 'He came to be from nothing,' or those who pretend that the Son of God is 'Of other hypostasis or substance,' or 'created,' or 'changeable,' or 'alterable,' or 'mutable,' the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes."*[76]
> (Note: *italics* indicate major changes from the earlier proposal made by Eusebius).

The resulting Nicene Creed answered the argument. From henceforth, the Son was to be considered "of the same essence" as God the Father.

***Other Nicene Outcomes:*** The relationship of Jesus the Son to God the Father was not the only issue up for grabs at this most famous of church councils. In addition to dealing with Arianism, the council, for the first time, passed canons to define a formal church structure above the local level.

This ecclesiastical order was to be modeled on provincial divisions of the civil government. In this way, the authority of local churches was intentionally thereby constrained.

Special ecclesiastical status was confirmed for the sees of Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch (in Syria). And the Council established Easter using the Roman rather than Jewish calendar.

Results of these discussions tended to be of a more immediate and practical nature. In summary, they included:

- Settling the date of Easter as Sunday – to avoid "any division".
- Immediate exiling of dissenters – including Arius & three others.
- Extension of exile to include quiet dissenters – notably Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis, Bishop of Nicaea.
- Imperial trumping of ecclesiastical decision-making.
- Confiscation of property of dissenting assemblies – accompanied by the imperial order calling for the burning of Arian books.
- Imperial directive that these ecclesiastical decisions be considered as the "judgment of God".

God's judgement was rendered at Nicaea. The judgement ostensibly was that of a church-wide body, albeit presided over by the supreme civil official of the secular Roman empire. The critical terms of the Nicene formulation were not those of the ecclesiastical tribunal, but were crafted by the emperor.

[76] Eusebius, *op cit.*

Politics had trumped church authority – a pattern of church-state intermingling that would continue for another 1,200 years.

***Home life of the Emperor:*** Despite his role as both imperial and ecclesiastical leader, Constantine's domestic life proved to be tumultuous – marked both by tragedy and legacy:

- In 326, the emperor had his oldest son Crispus and then his wife Fausta executed.[77]
- His mother Helena served a key role in the historic preservation and new church building amid the desolation of Jerusalem – including the reputed sites of Jesus birth, death and resurrection.
- Three sons of Constantine and Fausta emerged as heirs to the Empire -- Constantine II, Constantius & Constans. Only one would survive the sibling struggle to reign as sole emperor after the death of their father.

***Imperial Theological Flip-Flops:*** Though Arianism was formally defeated at Nicaea, informally the Arian movement regrouped and regained lost ground over the next 35 +/- years. The noted historian Eusebius of Caesarea went on record with concerns that the Nicene formulation was essentially non-scriptural and had a dubious theological history.

Eusebius of Nicomedia was one of two bishops who refused to sign the condemnation of Arius. This second Eusebius later became bishop of the imperial capital and an advisor to Constantine – applying his political as well as theological skills to temporarily overcome the vocal opponents of Arianism. In the process, this Eusebius also served to preserve the traditional theology of the east.

For the defenders of Nicaea, this reversal proved to be of temporary duration. The anti-Arian side of the controversy found a new champion in the great defender of orthodox faith, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria. From 325 to the ascension of Julian as Emperor in 360, Athanasius worked vigorously to defend and, whenever possible, enforce the creed of Nicaea. In this effort, he was supported by the majority of Western bishops plus those in Egypt.

The viewpoint of Athanasius was undergirded by support directly from the Emperor who wrote to the church of Alexandria: "For the decision of three hundred bishops must be considered no other than the judgement of God."[78]

During this period, the power of the Roman See was consolidated. The views of western Christians – similar to those of Athanasius – became more dominant.

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[77] Fausta was reportedly boiled in her bath at the order of her husband, the emperor.

[78] Socrates, *Hist. Eccl.,* 1.9.

However, the emperor was aging and would *flip-flop* in his desire to secure ecclesiastical unity. The Arians had a renewed chance. In part, this was brought on by a more conciliatory attitude from Arius toward the emperor than from Athanasius. In 327, the Council at Nicaea was reconvened and Arius was readmitted.

However, the emperor again switched course, by 332-333 ordering the works of Arius to be burned. Those who would not surrender Arian books were to be executed. The words of the emperor, quoted more fully, follow:

> … if any treatise composed by Arius should be discovered, let it be consigned to flames, in order than not only his depraved doctrine may be suppresses, but also than no memorial of him may be by any means left. This therefore I (Constantine) decree, that if any one shall be detected in concealing a book by Arius, and shall not instantly bring it forward and burn it, the penalty for this office *shall be death;* for immediately after conviction the criminal shall suffer capital punishment. May God preserve you![79]

But subsequently, stimulated by the Meletian ascetics, charges were brought against Athanasius who was summoned before the Constantine's court.[80] He was actually deposed on the grounds of sacrilege and irregularity of election in 335. Despite a personal appeal to the Emperor, Athanasius was banished to the Rhine frontier.

Constantine was reportedly desirous of restoring Arius. But on the day before his full restoration was to occur in 336, Arius died (possibly by poison). The next year, on May 22, 337, Constantine died after receiving baptismal rites at the hands of Eusebius of Nicomedia.

***Constantine's Legacy – Monolithic Christianity:*** Constantine passed from emperor to dust in 337, about 12 years after the fateful Council of Nicaea. He had hoped to be baptized in the Jordan River. However, due to rapidly deteriorating health, he was baptized before death by the Arian Eusebius of Nicomedia. Prior to death, he had designed his own mausoleum with 13 coffins – one for each of the apostles and one for Constantine.

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[79] From letter of emperor Constantine *To the Bishops and People,* as quoted in J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius.*

[80] Athanasius had attempted to levy a tax on Egypt to provide clergy with linen vestments. He was reportedly also implicated in attempted bribery, the defiling of a Meletian church and the reputed murder of a Meletian bishop. However, Athanasius staved off immediate danger by producing the bishop in question alive. At one point, Athanasius also threatened to withhold the shipment of grain from Alexandria to the rest of the empire.

In retrospect, emperor Constantine's legacy is one of *monolithic Christianity.* The empire was approaching dissolution and the ensuing dark ages.[81]

*Benefits* resulting from this imperial wedding of Church & state were not insubstantial:

- Christianity emerged from minority to majority status – with the Christian world view changing almost overnight from one of persecution to domination.
- There would be no more systematic persecution of Christians as a distinct socioeconomic grouping – at least for members of an orthodox church.
- Greater ability to formulate and maintain coherent doctrine became apparent – with imperial authority driving ecclesiastical decisions.
- A seemingly unified church resulted – achieving Tertullian's goal of a true *catholic* or universal expression of faith.

However, these benefits were offset by what would prove to be substantial *limitations*:

- Diversity of Christian belief and expression diminished – as the catholic and orthodox faiths now overwhelmed the non-orthodox (or heterodox).
- Ecclesiastical was placed subservient to imperial authority – so that faith and practice increasingly became pawns of political expediency.
- It would be only a small leap to the new Christian precedent of persecuting all but the orthodox – including non-Christians, Jews, and heretics.

### *From Constantine To a Catholic Church*

Following Constantine's death, the empire was divided between the emperor's three surviving sons – all of whom followed their father's Christian beliefs. His heirs stepped up their father's attacks on paganism and continued to intervene at will in affairs of the church.

***In Their Father's Footsteps:*** As the oldest surviving son, Constantine II ruled the western empire including Britain, Spain and Gaul. As the youngest, Constans ruled the rest of the west as far east as Thrace. Constantius II ruled the east. In 342, Constantine II charged Constans with flouting his authority, invaded Italy and was killed, leaving two thirds of the empire in the hands of the youngest.

Then in 350, a German officer named Magnentius overthrew Constans but was then himself defeated by Constantius in 351 – reuniting the empire under the rule of a single Augustus. As a western ruler, the younger Constans had leaned toward the Nicaeans but the eastern Constantius was more of Arian persuasion.

[81] A more complete description of Constantine's role in the shaping of Christianity is found in a companion document, *Twelve Heresies of Christianity.*

In 341, bishops at Antioch reaffirmed the Nicene credal formula but deposed Nicaea's chief protagonist Athanasius. Prior to his death, Constans had prevailed upon Constantius to reinstate Athanasius after his second exile – consistent with results of the Council of Sardica in 342/343.

With no brother around, Constantius convened the Council of Milan in 355 – to force the bishops to choose between their own exile and the condemnation of Athanasius.[82] The bishops resisted, causing the emperor to appeal for Arian support, further declaring: "My will is the canon." In 356, Constantius ordered the closing of pagan temples and cessation of sacrifices under penalty of death.

It was to be 35 years from the Council at Nicaea before the Arian theology would formally emerge ascendant – briefly – at the Council of Nice on New Years Day, 360 AD. As the fourth century Catholic theologian Jerome would later write, the "whole world groaned in astonishment to find itself Arian."

But within just three years, Arianism was again discredited. By the beginning of the fifth century, orthodoxy again had fully prevailed – up to this present era of the 21st century.

***Toward a Fully Christian State:*** Upon the death of Constantius in 361, Julian ascended to the throne. His reign was marked by the last official resurgence of paganism. For example, Julian ordered reopening of pagan temples and sacrifices.

As emperor, he did not directly attack Christianity but certainly did promote greater diversity of religious expression. Julian recalled the Nicaeans exiled by Constantius including Athanasius (together with some semi-Arians and Sabellians).[83]

Julian also banned Christians from teaching pagan literature, in effect, barring them from schools (saying they could not teach this literature honestly). And this emperor wrote his own treatise *Against the Galileans* – attacking Christianity for abandonment of Judaism, Old and New Testament discrepancies, superiority of pagan gods to Jesus, and persecutions carried out by Christians.

Julian's reign lasted but two years. Killed in battle, his generals elected Jovian in 363 as the replacement emperor. Jovian protested that he might not be a suitable candidate for emperor because he was a Christian. To this, the general reportedly replied: "We are all Christians here." Jovian reinstituted a policy of religious toleration, continued by his successor Valentinian from 364-379.

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[82] Other synods including those at Sirmium (341, 357, 358), Arles (353), Antioch (358) Acyra (358), Nice/Constantinople (360) and Alexandria (362) also favored the Arian position. Arianism may have reached its peak at the Sirmium council, with adopted denials of the true divinity of the Son, Jesus.

[83] Shortly after Athanasius returned to Alexandria, Julian exiled him again, leading to Alexandrian protests.

Gratian began joint rule with Valentinian in 367. He generally continued the policy of religious non-interference, albeit authorizing confiscation of Donatist property in North Africa in 376 and banning of certain sects including Manichaeism.

Theodosius was invited to share rule with Gratian in 379. Theodosius become the emperor who went on to complete the process of transforming the empire into a fully Christian state. This was accomplished by the *Cunctos populos*, an edict of February 380 requiring people throughout the empire to follow the religion handed down by the apostle Peter and his successors – including "the doctrine of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one deity of equal majesty and pious trinity."

As a Spaniard, Theodosius was Nicaean by inclination and practice. During his reign, Arian bishops were replaced with adherents to the Nicene Creed.[84] The resulting ecclesiastical controversy was quelled only via military protection of Gregory of Nazianzus (a Nicaean) as replacement for Demophilus.

On January 381, Theodosius denied heretics the right to celebrate the mysteries of Christ and prohibited their further assembly. During this same year, capital punishment was invoked for the first time as the penalty for certain heretical groups (including the sect of the Encratites or Christian Essenes).

Theodosius also moved to prohibit non-Christian worship, closed remaining pagan temples, abolished the Olympic games and recognized orthodox Roman Catholicism.

***Nicaea Confirmed:*** As this brief review indicates, the theological debate between the Nicaeans and Arians continued for some time after the death of Constantius, albeit with increased complexity. However, there were efforts to reconcile these divergent theological viewpoints. Some who favored the Nicene formulation of *homoousios* were nonetheless still put off because this definition obscured the distinctiveness of the persons of the Trinity.[85]

As one of the Cappadocians, Basil of Neocaesarea tried out a compromise – by way of analogy. For Athanasius, Father, Son and Spirit essentially represented *one being* living in a threefold form, much as one person might be a father, son and brother at the same time. For Basil, the three entities could be described as three like or equal beings sharing a common nature, much as different persons share in the common nature of humanity.

As an ardent Nicene, Theodosius I convened the second ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381. An estimated 150 Nicene and 36 Arian bishops, all from the eastern portion of the empire attended. The earlier Nicene Creed had been lost and was

[84] Despite imperial opposition, Arianism continued as the preference for converted Gauls, Vandals, Lombards and Burgundians over the next couple of centuries.

[85] Much of this discussion is adapted from E. Glenn Hinson, *The Early Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 1996, pages 236-239.

reformulated as we know it today – with *homoousios* as the centerpiece. The Arians lost the battle for orthodoxy for the final time; they and other "heretics" were condemned.

The die was cast. The Western (Roman Catholic) church would stay with Athanasius; the Eastern (Orthodox) would subsequently choose to follow the route of the more moderate Cappadocians.

Thus, the supremacy of the Catholic movement was sealed by the dawning of the 5th century. At the request of Pope Damascus, Jerome translated the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and New Testament from the Hebrew and Greek respectively to form the Latin Vulgate – further emphasizing the primacy of the Roman see. He also wrote numerous biblical commentaries.

Saint Jerome also exhibited the capacity for *ad hominem* attacks on his opponents, characterizing them as "little asses with little pointed hooves."[86] In this respect, he carried on the tradition for theological invective, which his Nicene predecessor Athanasius had found so useful.

During this same period, Saint Augustine of Hippo would rise to lend the weight of his theological authority – refuting the Manichaean belief in a fundamental conflict between darkness and light. Augustine saw that God's creation was all good and that evil was merely the absence of good.

Augustine also supported the authority of a state religion. Those who believed otherwise were not to be tolerated. And so Augustine also authored the theology of persecuting religious minorities and dissenters. As support for his position, Augustine quoted the Gospel of Luke's injunction to: "Compel the people to come in."[87]

Augustine turned much of his ire toward his northern African Donatist brethren. In AD 405, Donatism was officially declared a heresy. From this time on, Augustine was active in disposing of property confiscated from Donatist churches as well as receiving Donatist converts.

In 411, he headed a delegation of Catholic bishops at the Council of Carthage in a final confrontation with Donatist bishops. The Council officially condemned the Donatist heresy. In 412 and again in 428 civil laws prescribed fines, beatings, and exile for those heretics who persisted.

From 411 forward, both church and governmental action vigorously repressed Donatism. However, this church sect managed to survive in some form until the Islamic incursions into North Africa of the 7th century.

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[86] As cited by John Romer in *Testament,* (New York: Henry Holt & Company), 1993, p. 241.

[87] Luke 14:23.

Augustine also used this controversy as a means to solidify the primacy of Catholic church authority over matters both spiritual and temporal. For example, in Caesarea, the bishop Emeritus had persisted in his Donatist beliefs even though the majority of Emeritus' congregation had returned to the church. St. Augustine pleaded with the bishop: "Outside the church you may have everything except salvation. You may have offices, Sacraments, Liturgy, Gospel, belief, and preaching, in the name of the Trinity; but you can only find salvation in the Catholic Church."

While condemned for heresy, Montanism and Donatism both represented attempts to create a pure church untarnished by compromise with the world. The conflict between such *pure sects* and the more open, compromising Roman Catholic church were to find outlets in other arenas – both short and long-term.

Tensions between the Greek speaking eastern churches based around Constantinople and the Latin speaking western churches based around Rome culminated in the 11th century. The most apparent issue was over the relative importance of Rome and Constantinople within the Christian world.

At this time, the church in Rome claimed seniority over the church at Constantinople. The Constantinople church, however, refused to acknowledge the authority of Rome, a decision that led both churches to excommunicate one another in 1054. This schism has never been healed.

Augustine and Jerome had lived through a time of the final disintegration of the Roman empire. Augustine's *City of God* was written to argue that the fall of Rome was not the result of the Christianization of the empire. This defense prevailed and the imperial religion survived even as the empire itself collapsed.

Imperial rule was supplanted and trumped by the will of ecclesiastical authority. And so it would be for another millennium.

## *Historical Supplement A: Post-New Testament Church Personalities*

For reference purposes, it is useful to identify notable personalities of the early church to and through the era of Constantine. The listing on the following pages offers *thumbnail sketches* of those who range from friends to foes of Christianity. This listing is provided by name, in *alphabetical* order.

Of the friends, some fall clearly into the orthodox camp, others were branded as heretics. A few have filled both sets of shoes.

A key figure in recording the event of the post-New Testament church is Eusebius of Caesarea. Often called the Father of Church History, he wrote the first complete history of the Christian Church and a biography of the emperor Constantine.

Eusebius figured prominently both as a participant and subsequent writer regarding the events at the Council of Nicaea . Without Eusebius and his antecedent Origen, much of what little history we have would not have been preserved.

Other notable Christian writers, whose works have survived (or been recovered) in some form, include Clement, Hippolytus, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, and Tertullian. Key non-Christian writers of this early era include Jewish writer Josephus and Roman historians Pliny, Seutonius, and Tacitus.

## Post Apostolic Figures of the Early Church (to Constantine)

| Time Period | Early Church Leader | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| *c.* 50-135 | Akiva (Rabbi Akiba) | Often credited as the compiler of a canon of Hebrew scripture (the Old Testament). Reputedly studied at Jamnia under the great teacher Gamaliel. Starting about 130 AD, Rabbi Akiva foretold of an impending apocalypse and hand-picked the leader of the Jewish revolt that led to the final destruction of Jerusalem – Bar Kokhba. Even after Jerusalem's destruction, continued to teach the Jewish law and was executed by the Romans who flayed his skin with a comb of iron. While being skinned alive, Akiva recited the Jewish *Shema:* "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God ..."[88] |
| *c.* late 1st century | Aristion | Mentioned alongside John the presbyter (or elder) by early patriarch Papias. An Armenian manuscript of the Gospels, dated 986, attributes the longer ending of Mark (16:9-20) to the 'elder Aristion.' |
| *c.* 250 - 335/6 | Arius | Born in Libya and possible pupil of Lucian of Antioch. Became presbyter and pastor of the church at Baucalis in Alexandria, where the remains of John Mark were believed interred. Rejected the authority of the Bishop of Alexandria and was condemned by the synod in 321. Teachings gave rise to Arianism, the belief that Jesus as Logos was created by God. Arius insisted that "There was a time when he (Christ) was not." Christ was capable of either virtue or vice but, since the Logos united with the flesh, Christ did not have a human soul and therefore did not sin. Left Egypt to rally support in Bithynia and Palestine, leading the emperor Constantine to convene the Council of Nicaea in 325. Constantine later sought reconciliation. |
| *c.* 295 - 373 | Athanasius | A deacon and secretary to Alexander and delegate to the Council of Nicaea in 325. Elected Bishop of Alexandria from 328, became the most ardent and controversial proponent of the Nicene faith and creed. Chief defender of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity against Arianism after Nicaea. Represented many of the aspirations of Coptic Christians in Egypt. Largely responsible for fixing the New Testament canon in the east. Exiled five times totaling 17 years under several Roman emperors. |
| 354 - 430 | Augustine of Hippo | Born in Tagaste, North Africa to a pagan father and Christian mother, Augustine is generally acknowledged as the major theologian of the first four centuries after Christ. Educated at the University of Carthage, he abandoned his Christian faith, took a mistress and fathered a child. He became a Manichaean *c.* 374, but was baptized in 387 and consecrated Bishop of Hippo in 395. Defending Christian orthodoxy against Manichaeans who believed in a fundamental conflict between darkness and light, Augustine argued God's creation was all good. He also advocated and participated in suppression of Donatists. |
| Early 2nd century | Bar Cochba (Kochba) | Leader of the 2nd and last Jewish rebellion against Rome at Jerusalem in 132 AD. Was hailed as messiah by Rabbi Akiva (Akiba) who had begun the canonization of Hebrew scripture (Old Testament). |
| *c.* 140 | Basileides | An Alexandrian gnostic teacher. First recorded person to go on record stating that New Testament writings should be viewed as scriptural. |
| *c.* 300 | Caecilian | Bishop of Carthage who was opposed by Donatus but recognized by |

[88] Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

| Time Period | Early Church Leader | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| | | Constantine. Was also opposed to the cult of the martyrs. |
| 1st century | Carpocrates | Cited by Eusebius as the "father of another heresy known as that of the Gnostics." |
| *c.* 100 | Cerinthus | Jewish-Gnostic prominent in Asia Minor. Combined Jewish thought with millenarianism. Believed in restoration of Jewish sacrifices and practiced baptism of the dead. Viewed by some (e.g. the Alogi) as the author of the Gospel of John and Revelation. |
| *c.* 160-post 229 | Celsus | A vocal Roman opponent of Christianity in the period 114-122. His work *The True Word* is no longer extant but was refuted by Origen. |
| *c.*150 - 211/216 | Clement of Alexandria | Born in Athens and converted to Christianity late in life, became head of the Catechical School. Regarded Greek literature as a forerunner of Christianity. Was supportive of an ecclesiastical Gnosticism but rejected dualistic separation of the material from spiritual realms, but opposed extreme Gnostic lifestyles ranging from libertinism to asceticism. A major figure in identifying written works of authority who referred to early Christian writings (including his own) as "sacred." Also identified as the author of a letter containing the Secret Gospel of Mark, reputedly discovered by Morton Smith at the Mar Saba monastery near Jerusalem in 1958. |
| d. *c.* post 100 | Clement of Rome | An early presbyter or possibly bishop of Rome and reputed author of the *First Epistle of Rome* sent to the Church of Corinth to settle a violent dispute, *c.* 95-96. Cited by Irenaeus as the third bishop of Rome after Peter. Identified later by Origen and Eusebius as the Clement of Philippians 4.3. Eusebius also believed that Clement translated Hebrews into Greek from a manuscript in Hebrew originally composed by the apostle Paul. |
| *c.* early 1st century | Clopas | Disciple mentioned in Luke 24:18 (on the road to Emmaus) and John 19:25 (as wife of one Mary). According to Hegesippus, Clopas was brother of Joseph, foster father of Jesus. Clopas' son, Symeon (i.e. Jesus' cousin) would succeed James the Just as bishop of Jerusalem. |
| *c.* 200-258 | Cyprianus (Cyprian) | Converted *c.* 246 and served as Bishop of Carthage. Promoted giving for social needs as a means of grace and ministered to sick and dying during a plague. Went into hiding during the persecutions of Decius and Valerian, and the presided over the re-baptism of heretics. Promoted Catholic unity of the church, declaring: "There is no salvation outside the church." Gave primacy of apostleship to Peter but later revised to say the rock of Peter is faith. Was beheaded as the first bishop-martyr of Africa during the reign of Valerian. |
| d. 264-265 | Dionysius (the Great) | Head of the Catechical School of Alexandria, a moderate. Went into hiding with Cyprian during the Decian persecution. |
| *c.* 300 | Donatus | Ruled 42 years over the church at Carthage. Strong advocate of rebaptism of heretics and apostates during the Diocletian persecution of 303-304. Appointed by opponents of Caecilian as rival Bishop of Carthage. Appealed Caecilian's appointment to Constantine on multiple occasions and lost. |
| *c.* 260 - *c.* 339 | Eusebius of Caesarea (in Palestine) | Bishop of Caesarea from *c.*313-339 and author of the *Ecclesiastical History* – the primary source for the history of the early church to *c.* 300 including reference to many early works no longer extant. Possible heir to Origen's library. Also wrote a flattering *Life of Constantine.* A friend and at least partial supporter of Arius prior to the Council of Nicaea. Provided a listing of New Testament books – including works cited as of uncertain authority. |
| d. 341-342 | Eusebius of Nicomedia | Bishop successively of Berytus, Nicomedia and Constantinople. A supporter at Nicaea of Arius. Became a leading advisor to Constantine and led the subsequent reaction against bishops who had been active supporters of the Nicene formulation. |

| Time Period | Early Church Leader | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| d. 268 | Firmilian | Bishop of Caesarea (in Cappadocia), a friend of Origen and supporter of Cyprian with an "ecclesiastical rule" on the needs of instruction for baptism. |
| *c.* 120-180 | Hegesippus | Of Jewish origin, wrote five books of *Hypomnemata*, the principal source of information for Eusebius of Caesarea on the early Church of Jerusalem. Reputed to be in some libraries till the 16th/17th centuries, now preserved only in fragments (mostly by Eusebius). Writings directed against Gnosticism. |
| *c.* 110-150 | Hermas | A Roman freedman, prophet, moral reformer and author of *The Shepherd* – regarded as scripture by Irenaeus, Origen and Tertullian but not by the *Muratorian Fragment.* Possibly a brother of Pius, bishop of Rome *c.* 140-155. |
| *c.* 155-235/236 | Hippolytus | Born in the Greek east, became presbyter and later schismatic bishop (the first anti-pope) at Rome. Defended Logos theology against Gnostics, Monarchians and modalists (including Sabellius) and championed apostolic tradition. Opposed to laxity of Church discipline. Split from the Roman church in 217 and was accused of ditheism, though he subordinated the Logos to the Father. Was exiled to Sardinia and has been revered as a martyr. Wrote *Refutation of All Heresies* and *Apostolic Tradition,* most of which have been recovered (though not necessarily in original form). |
| d. *c.* 115/117 | Ignatius | Bishop of Antioch (succeeding Peter) who wrote seven letters (*c.* 113) on his way to martyrdom at Rome (under Trajan as emperor). Concerned with split of Greek from Jewish Christians but came down on the side of a faith free from Judaism. |
| *c.* 130-*c.* 202 | Irenaeus | Originally from Smyrna in Asia, student of Polycarp, subsequent Bishop of Lugdunum (Lyons) and survivor of the Roman persecution of 177. Wrote *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (first published in the 20th century) and *Against Heresies* directed at Gnostics, Sabellians, Valentinianism and Marcion. Affirmed Jewish monotheism, identifying the God of the Old and New Testaments as one and the same. One of the proponents of the preeminence of the church at Rome. First to identify the current four gospels and 13 Pauline letters as accepted written works (and subsequent basis for the New Testament). May have been martyred. |
| *c.* 342 - 420 | Jerome | Born Eusebius Hieronymus of a Christian family in Stridon, Italy, Jerome is best known for translation of the Bible into Latin (as the Vulgate) – including distinguishing the Apocrypha from the Hebrew canon. Educated in Rome and for a time an ascetic, served as secretary to Pope Damascus, then settled in Bethlehem in 386, supervising a monastery. Translated the works of Eusebius and Origen to Latin; wrote in opposition to the ideas of Arius and Origen among others. |
| Late 1st century? | John the Elder | The writer of II and III John identifies himself as "the Elder" or "the Presbyter." Eusebius believes this is a person distinct from John the apostle, though even this is not entirely clear from an earlier passage quoted by Eusebius from Papias. Viewed by some as an important, though shadowy, figure in the early church of Asia Minor. |
| *c.* 37-post 100 | Flavius Josephus | Descended from a priestly family, Jewish historian and commander of Jewish forces in Galilee in 66-67 against Roman forces, imprisoned and then befriended by Vespasian and Titus, both Roman generals and subsequent emperors. Authored the *Jewish War* as a history of the Jewish revolt against Rome, followed by *Antiquities of the Jews.* His writings include references to John the Baptist, Jesus and James the brother of Jesus. |
| *c.* 240-*c.*320 | Caelius Firmianus | African native, teacher in Nicomedia and then in Gaul as tutor to Crispus, eldest son of Constantine. Wrote the *Divine Institutes,* a vindication of |

| Time Period | Early Church Leader | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| | Lactantius | Christianity over paganism. |
| *c.* 35 | Simon Magus | Believed by some to be the founder of Gnosticism. A Samaritan who practiced "magic" and was converted to Christianity (in Samaria) by Philip the evangelist, then baptized. Later attempted to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit from the apostles Peter and John for which he was rebuked and for which he asked for prayer.[89] Regarded himself as a savior figure. Consorted with a woman he had rescued from prostitution, named her Helen and regarded as Ennoia or "thought" whose downfall led to the creation of the world. Known as "Helen the Harlot" to Christians. This sect of Simonians may have endured to about the end of the 2nd century. |
| 216-276/277 | Mani | Born into an aristocratic family in South Babylon. Founder of the Manichaean sect of Africa and author of seven books, fragments of which survive. An extremely dualistic form of Gnosticism, preached by Mani in Persia from about 240 on. Two forces of light and dark, God and matter, were eternal. May have combined Christian, Gnostic and Buddhist thought. Though viewed as a heretic and exiled to India, Mani provided a significant missionary influence and was eventually martyred via a long and excruciating death at Ctesiphon. |
| *c.* 85 – *c.* 160/164 | Marcion | From Sinope on the Black Sea in Asia Minor, a wealthy Christian ship owner who came to Rome *c.* 139 AD. Excommunicated by his father, a bishop, for "defiling a virgin." Adopted Gnostic thought emphasizing a strict dualism between spiritual and material realms. Ardent proponent of separating Christianity from its Jewish moorings and opponent of legalism. Authored the *Antitheses* identifying the God of the Mosaic covenant as tyrannical versus the Father of Jesus as a God of love and mercy. Advocated vegetarianism and sexual abstinence even in marriage. Widely identified as a leading Gnostic heretic and was excommunicated *c.* 144. Accepted only the writings of Luke and Paul (albeit with changes) as authoritative. |
| 2nd century | Marcus | A follower of the gnostic leader Valentinus. According to Irenaeus, Marcus used magic to deceive women. Founded an independent sect in the Rhone Valley with its own baptismal rites. Taught that esoteric wisdom could be found by calculating the numerical value of God's names and accepted the Gospel of Thomas as canonical. The sect survived into the 4th century. |
| *c.* 100 - 165 | Justin Martyr | Originally of Flavia Neapolis (Shechem) in Palestine, operated a school of Christian instruction at Rome. Considered the most important apologist of the second century and author of at least eight works (only three still extant. Authored the A*pology* after taking up residence in Rome, about 153. Advocate of Logos christology as means to reconcile Christian thought with Greek philosophy. Opposed to Gnosticism and Marcion. Executed in reign of Marcus Aurelius at Rome. |
| *c.* 300s | Melitius | Alexandrian bishop imprisoned in reign of Diocletian through about 304-05; opposed liberal treatment of Christians who had lapsed and later opposed Arius. Ordained his own bishops in Palestine and Egypt. |
| fl. 179 | Montanus | A convert to Christianity and subsequent prophet from Phrygia in Asia Minor. Proclaimed the imminent end of the world. Two women Priscilla and Maximilla, who delivered ecstatic oracles, aided Montanus. |
| *c.* 250 | Novatian | Second important theologian after Tertullian to write in Latin. A resident of |

[89] Acts 8:9-24.

| Time Period | Early Church Leader | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| | | Rome, repudiated Marcion and modalists in a treatise on the Trinity by arguing for the unity of God and Son (as true God and true man). Separated from the Catholic (or orthodox) Church in 251 with the Novatianist schism. This split occurred because of opposition to Cyprian of Carthage for supporting Novatian's rival to succeed as Bishop of Rome after the martyrdom of Bishop Fabian in 250. A rigorist toward those who lapsed in persecution. Martyred in the Valerian persecution. |
| *c.* 185-254/255 | Origen | From Alexandria, a student of Clement. His father martyred in 202. Became headmaster of the Catechal School at Alexandria. Following ordination in Palestine, was expelled from Alexandria and moved to Caesarea. Imprisoned and tortured in Tyre during the persecution of Emperor Decius. Laid foundations for asceticism and mysticism, distinguishing the gnostic from the ordinary Christian. Stressed symbolic as well as literal interpretation of scripture. In addition to homilies and commentaries, wrote a treatise on *Prayer*, an *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, *Dialogue with Heraclides*, and a reply to the *True Discourse* of the pagan writer Celsus. Regarded by some as the greatest scholar, teacher and writer in the Christian church between Paul and Augustine. However, was condemned by the fifth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 553 for advocating subordination of the Son to the Father. |
| *c.* 60 – 130 | Papias | Bishop of Hierapolis at the beginning of the 2nd century, author of the five book *Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*, no longer extant (but quoted by Ironies and Eusebius of Caesarea). One of the earliest patriarchs, attested to the Gospel of Matthew and to authorship of Mark by John Mark. According to Irenaeus, was a disciple of John the apostle and companion of Polycarp. |
| Third Century | Paul of Samosata | Bishop of Antioch from 261-272. Asserted that the Virgin Mary gave birth to a man, and that the Spirit anointed and inspired Jesus. Opposed Logos christology, arguing that "Jesus Christ is from below" rather than above, thereby moving toward the monarchian position. Condemned in 264 and 268/9 as the first church imposed test of orthodoxy (after three councils), then deposed after the Antioch church appealed to the (pagan) Roman emperor. |
| *c.* 61-114 | Plinius (Pliny) Caecilius Secundus | Known as the *younger Pliny*, friend of Roman historians Tacitus and Seutonius, sent as special commissioner to reorganize and govern the disorderly province of Bithynia. One of the issues of governance about which he wrote to the emperor regarded treatment of Christians. |
| *c.* 69 – 155 | Polycarp | Reputed disciple of John the apostle in Asia and Bishop of Smyrna.[90] Taught Irenaeus. An important witness to the Apostolic tradition and vigorous opponent of heresy. Martyred at the age of 86 in reign of Antonius Pius after refusing to submit to Caesar and repudiate Christ. |
| *c.* 230-*c.*305 | Porphyry | From Tyre, perhaps the most serious literary opponent of Christianity, despite close association with Christians (including Origen) in his youth. Author of a work in 15 books *Against the Christians*, which was ordered burned by the Church in 448, surviving today only in fragments. |
| *c.* 200s | Sabellius | From the east, provided the most articulate and persuasive form of the monarchian viewpoint emphasizing the single rule of God. Emphasized separate modes of the Godhead. Was excommunicated by Callistus, Bishop of Rome. Little else is known of Sabellius' person or career. |
| *c.* 75- | Seutonius | Friend of Pliny the Younger and private secretary to emperor Hadrian. |

[90] It is unclear whether the John known by Polycarp was the apostle or the Elder.

| Time Period | Early Church Leader | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| *c.*140 | Tranquillus | Roman author of *Lives of the Caesars* and *On Famous Men.* |
| *c.* 4/5-106/7 | Symeon | Called a cousin of Jesus as his father Clopas was the brother of Joseph. Served as 2nd Bishop of Jerusalem after James, "the Lord's brother." Was martyred at the reputed age of 120. |
| *c.* 58-*c.*116 | P. Cornelius Tacitus | Roman historian, consul and governor of Asia under Trajan, friend of Pliny the Younger. Wrote *Histories* and the *Annals* – including coverage of the Neronian persecution of first century Christians. |
| *c.* 120-post 174 | Tatian | Born in Assyria, converted to Christianity by reading the scriptures and a subsequent disciple of Justin Martyr. Gravitated to ascetic Gnosticism and composed the earliest known Harmony of the Gospels (the *Diatessaron).* Founder of the Encratic sect of Jewish Gnosticism in Syria. |
| *c.* 160-220/225 | Q. Septimius Florens Tertullianus (Tertullian) | From Carthage, a convert with Roman rhetorical training. Tertullian was a vigorous and polemical writer attacking heretics, Jews and pagans. Joined the Montatist sect in 206, critical of Callistus, the Bishop of Rome for his liberal views on sin and penitence. Separated from Roman church in 222 and advocated Christian separation from Roman society. Together with Novatian (*c.* 250) wrote the treatise *On the Trinity* to reconcile the Logos theology of the Trinity with monotheism. Other books include *On Repentance, Against Marcion, Against the Valentinians,* and *Against Praxeas* (a monarchian). First theologian to write extensively in Latin and first to coin the term *New Testament.* Also developed the first formulation of the Trinity as a basis for later Latin and western theology. Distinguished between forgivable and unforgivable sins. |
| *c.* 190 | Theodotus the Tanner | Well educated Christian from Byzantium. Influenced by the Alogi, founded a party of adoptionist Monarchians. Believed Jesus was born of a virgin, lived "promiscuously", became "preeminently religious," then received the Spirit to fulfill his mission at baptism. Excommunicated by Bishop Victor of Rome for christological errors. |
| *c.*2nd century, fl. 130 – 160 | Valentinus | A leading religious philosopher and teacher (together with Basilides) of Gnosticism, a system of belief in rival deities of good and evil. Most famous of the Alexandrian Gnostics, the Rome-based Valentinus taught that there are three types of human beings: spiritual, psychic, and fleshly. Much of the inspiration for Valentinus and his followers comes from Pauline epistles, for example the reference in Colossians to "the Fullness" of God. Possible author of the Gospel of Truth, found with the Nag Hammadi library in 1945. Advocated treatment of NT writings as scriptural. |
| *d.* 198 | Victor | First highly authoritarian bishop (and pope) of Rome from 189-199. Responsible for excommunicating the churches of Asia Minor for refusing to use the Roman rather than the Jewish calendar date for Easter, also excommunicated Theodotus the Tanner for Monarchian beliefs. For this, Irenaeus sternly rebuked Victor. |

## *Supplement B. New Testament References – Relationship of Father & Son*

This supplement provides selected NT scriptures that explicate the relationship of the God the Father versus Jesus the Son. Examples are drawn from the gospels, followed by writings attributed to Paul, James and Peter.

***Gospel Accounts:*** All three of the synoptics (Matthew, Mark, Luke) clearly identify Jesus as the Son of God; however, nowhere do they directly proclaim Jesus as God. On the surface, John appears at some points to more directly link Jesus with God. However, closer inspection reveals the possibility for multiple interpretations. Some examples from the four gospels:

> *Matthew:* "This is *my Son,* the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' "[91]
>
> "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name *of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* …."[92]
>
> *Mark:* "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the *Son of God*."[93]
>
> "I know who you are, the *Holy One of God*."[94] (called out by man with unclean spirit)
>
> *Luke:* "He (Jesus) will be great, and will be called the *Son of the Most High*, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David."[95]
>
> *John:* "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God.* He was *in the beginning* with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being."[96]
>
> "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become *children of God* …"[97]
>
> "For God so loved the world, that he gave his *only begotten Son*…"[98]
>
> "The Father and I *are one*."[99]

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[91] Matthew 3:17. All references are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.
[92] Matthew 28:19.
[93] Mark 1:1.
[94] Mark 1:24, also recorded at Luke 4:34.
[95] Luke 1:32.
[96] John 1:1-3.
[97] John 1:12-13.
[98] John 3:16, King James Version. The Greek word "begotten" can be translated as either only-born or chief.
[99] John 10:30.

***Paul, James & Peter:*** While these three may disagree on other matters, they consistently picture Jesus the Son both as a creature of and subservient to God the Father.

> *Paul:* "When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that *we are children of God*, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him."[100]
>
> "When all things are subjected to him (Jesus), then the Son himself *will also be subjected* to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all."[101]
>
> "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, *according to the will of our God and Father*, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."[102]
>
> *James:* "James, a servant of God *and of* the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings."[103] (Note: only one other reference is provided by this epistle to Jesus).
>
> *Peter:* "Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that *God has made him* both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified."[104]
>
> "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified *his servant* Jesus …"[105]
>
> We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors *raised up* Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as *Leader and Savior* that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, *and so is the Holy Spirit* whom God has given to those who obey him.[106]

[100] Romans 8:14-17.
[101] I Corinthians 15:26.
[102] Galatians 1:3-4.
[103] James 1:1.
[104] Acts 2:36.
[105] Acts 3:13.
[106] Acts 5:29-32.

# II. Canonization of the New Testament

We now shift to the central purpose of this book – describing the process by which the New Testament as known today came to be. There are three distinct questions that this discussion addresses:

- When was the New Testament written?
- What are the earliest known extant (or existing) manuscripts available today?
- How were early writings assembled into a New Testament canon? In other words, why were some writings included and others excluded?

In the last chapter of this manuscript, we consider a fourth – and perhaps provocative – set of related questions. Most simply stated, that question is whether we should consider the New Testament canon as closed.

Or is the canon still open for discussion and debate? If so, under what circumstances might reconsideration be warranted?

### *Canonization Themes*

Three major themes emerge from this review of the formation of the New Testament as it has been known for most of the past 1500+ years:

> *1. The 27 books today recognized as the New Testament (NT) canon emerged as the result not of any single event, but gradually over a 3-4 century process of accumulated tradition, advocacy and widening acceptance.* Critical criteria or tests increasingly applied to assess which books belonged were: (a) authorship by an apostle or immediate follower (as inspired scripture); (b) regular church usage; and (c) consistency with then prevailing orthodox belief.
>
> *2. Perhaps paradoxically, the existence of a canon can be credited to Christian heretics*. Individuals and doctrines who became viewed as outside the mainstream essentially forced the orthodox church to decide which written works should be presented as authentic.
>
> *3. While the current list of 27 books has been in place since the 4th century, there is reason to suggest that the canon is not necessarily closed.* This viewpoint has been shared down through the last 1,500 years – albeit by a small but distinctive minority. As noted, this line of reasoning is further expanded in the last chapter of this manuscript.

### *When Was the New Testament Written?*

New Testament (NT) books were written beginning about 45-50 AD to perhaps as late as the first decade of the 2nd century. Most of the New Testament's 27 books have involved some level of controversy – as to authorship and date of composition.

The dating and authorship of only two books – Paul's epistle to the Romans and his first epistle to the Corinthians – have been almost universally accepted by scholars and theologians over the last two millennia. Questions have been raised about virtually all of the other 25 writings of the New Testament.

Early theologians and today's more conservative scholars generally view the gospels as having been written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John respectively. Some early non-orthodox theologians and modern scholars have questioned traditional assumptions of authorship – albeit with no clear substantiation to date.

Gospels generally are believed to have been written in the period between about 50-90 – with evangelicals tending to favor earlier dates. Modern scholars tend to favor post-70 dates – after the destruction of Jerusalem – for all of the gospels except perhaps Mark.

Matthew's gospel comes first and was generally believed by early church leaders (such as Papias) to have been composed first. In recent years, considerable scholarly opinion has inclined toward Mark as having been the first gospel composed (especially those that postulate the early formation of a separate sayings or Q gospel).

Pauline epistles generally accepted as actually having been written by Paul are Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, I Thessalonians and Philemon. Writings for which Pauline authorship is questioned are Ephesians, Colossians, II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy and Titus.

With the exception of Romans and the two epistles to the Corinthians, a wide variety of dates have been suggested for composition of the Pauline epistles. Under one scheme, I Thessalonians would be the first epistle and, in fact, perhaps the first New Testament book to be written – in about 50-51 AD. Some argue that Galatians may have been written first, possibly as early as 48-59. However, others suggest that James may have been written as early as 45 AD.

Dating of Revelation is widely debated, ranging from as early as the Neronian persecution (64 AD) to a period as late as the end of the first century. As early as the third century, there was debate as to whether John the apostle or someone named John the Elder wrote Revelation and I, II, and III John.

Perhaps the most uncertain New Testament book – in terms of authorship – is Hebrews. Some early Christians attributed Hebrews to Paul; some to Paul via the hand of fellow traveler Silas; many simply could not ascribe authorship with certainty to any individual.

Authorship and dating of virtually all the remaining New Testament books also has been debated – both by the early church and today. The canonicity of these writings – many of which are placed near the end of the New Testament – was subject to considerable discussion in the first four centuries AD.

The chart on the following page provides a synopsis of viewpoints regarding authorship and dating of what are now 27 books of the New Testament. Traditional views are represented in normal type; alternative viewpoints are indicated in *italics.*

For this review, we have drawn on two primary sources: a) the New International Version (NIV) as representing more traditional viewpoints; and b) the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) with commentary as representing the more modern and critical perspective.

## Authorship & Dating of New Testament (NT) Books

| NT Book | **Author(s):** Conventional *(Alternative(s))* | **Dating:** Conventional *(Alternative(s))* |
|---|---|---|
| **Matthew** | Matthew the apostle; *anonymous or multiple authors (written in the name of Matthew).* | First gospel written early 50s; *modern/more liberal theologians typically support a post-70 date to perhaps 70-80 AD, also suggested by 2nd century theologian Irenaeus* |
| **Mark** | John Mark; *viewed by some modern researchers as enigmatic* | 50-60 AD; *modern scholars support 64-70 period as first of written gospels* |
| **Luke** | Luke the physician; *unknown* | 59-63; *70s-80s.* |
| **John** | John the beloved disciple; *a disciple of John or the gnostic Cerinthus* | 80-90; *some evangelicals argue 50-70* |
| **Acts** | Luke the physician; *unknown* | 63 AD (last recorded event); *c.* 70 or later; *possibly as late as 80-90* |
| **Romans** | Paul (Saul the convert) | 56-57 |
| **I Corinthians** | Paul (Saul the convert) | 54-55 |
| **II Corinthians** | Paul; *possible compilation of multiple letters* | 55-56 |
| **Galatians** | Paul; *questioned by 19th century scholars* | 50-57, *possibly as early as 48-49(which would make Galatians the 1st epistle)* |
| **Ephesians** | Paul; *possible follower after Paul's death* | About 60 AD, *80-95 assuming pseudonymity* |
| **Philippians** | Paul; *possible compilation of 3 letters* | 61 AD from Rome, *possibly 53-55 or 57-59* |
| **Colossians** | Paul; *possible follower after Paul's death* | 57-61 assuming authenticity; *post mid-60s assuming pseudonymity* |
| **I Thessalonians** | Paul; *possible compilation of fragments* | 50-51 (likely the first Pauline epistle) |
| **II Thessalonians** | Paul; *possible forgery* | 50-52 if authentic |
| **I Timothy** | Paul; *authorship challenged* | 63-65, *90-110 assuming pseudonymity* |
| **II Timothy** | Paul; *possible compilation of fragments* | 66-67, *90-110 assuming pseudonymity* |
| **Titus** | Paul; *authorship questioned* | 63-65, *90-110 assuming pseudonymity* |
| **Philemon** | Paul | 60-62, *54-55 assuming during pre-Roman imprisonment* |
| **Hebrews** | Unknown or Paul; *Barnabas, Apollos or Priscilla.* | Pre-70, *before 95 assuming pseudonymity* |
| **James** | James the Just (brother of Jesus); *possible follower of James* | Early 60s, *possibly pre-50* |
| **I Peter** | Peter the apostle (with help from Silas), *possibly pseudonymous* | Early 60s to 67/68, *70-90 assuming pseudonymity* |
| **II Peter** | Peter the apostle; *authorship challenged* | 64-68 before martyrdom, *80-90 if pseudonymous* |
| **I John** | John the beloved disciple; *John the Elder or another disciple of the apostle John* | 85-95, *post 100 if pseudonymous* |
| **II John** | John the beloved disciple; *John the Elder* | 85-95, *c. 100 if written by another* |
| **III John** | John the beloved disciple; *John the Elder* | 85-95, *c. 100 if written by another* |
| **Jude** | Jude the brother of Jesus; *authorship disputed* | 65-80, *possibly one of earliest NT writings* |
| **Revelation** | John the beloved disciple; *John the Elder or the gnostic Cerinthus* | 95, *possibly as early as 54-68 (under Nero) or 81-96 (Domitian)* |

Note: Traditional views are represented in normal type; alternative views are indicated in *italics.*

Sources: *The Harper Collins Study Bible New Revised Standard Version* (New York: Harper Collins), 1993, and *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan), 1985.

### *What Are the Earliest Extant Manuscripts?*

Earliest manuscripts typically were written on papyrus; surviving copies were best preserved in Egypt. Later manuscripts were written on parchment.

What is readily known about the early NT writing can be summarized simply as follows:

- The earliest known existing New Testament manuscript is a fragment from John, dating to *c.* 125 AD; the earliest manuscript of a near complete manuscript is also from John, dated about 200.[107]
- Manuscripts of Greek portions of the heretical Gospel of Thomas (discovered in 1900) date to pre-200.
- Other papyrus documents for Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and the Apocalypse (Revelation) date to the 250 AD period.
- More complete NT manuscripts include the Codex Vaticanus (*c.* 325-350 AD), Codex Sinaiticus (*c.* 350) and the Codex Alexandrinus (*c.* 400).[108]

With the complete codexes of the fourth and fifth centuries, a remarkable consistency as to content also emerges. For example, the Codex Sinaiticus contains the 27 books of the modern New Testament plus the writings of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas. The Codex Alexandrinus contains the 27 works of the present canon together with the two books of I/II Clement. The Codex Vaticanus contains a Septuagint version of the OT and the Greek NT as far as Hebrews 9:14, after which the rest has been lost.[109]

### *How Were Early Writings Assembled into a New Testament Canon?*

> The New Testament books were *separately circulated and gradually collected* together. Their inspiration and apostolic authority guaranteed them a place in the canon of Scripture as they were set apart from other writings in the early church. As these books were copied and distributed throughout the Roman Empire, they were eventually placed in a standard order (more logical than chronological).[110]

This statement is that of an evangelical Christian. There is widespread agreement today that the New Testament did not come together at one time. It did not come out of a *black*

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[107] The fact that Johannine manuscripts are the oldest currently available may be a bit of poetic justice since most scholars believe that John was the last of the four New Testament gospels to have been written.

[108] Of the three, the Codex Sinaiticus (which has resided in the Vatican since the middle ages) is most complete, containing all 27 books of the current New Testament plus The Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas.

[109] Both the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Library are preserved in the British Library; the Vatican holds the Codex Vaticanus in Rome.

[110] Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk thru the Bible [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System,* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1983.

*box* – a deus ex machina. While parts of the canonization process today appear murky, there is general agreement that today's New Testament emerged slowly as a collection of writings that at first were distributed individually, but over time increasingly were bundled and circulated collectively.

### *What Does the New Testament Itself Have to Say?*

There are two known references in the New Testament itself equating its writings to the Old Testament (OT). To Timothy, the apostle Paul wrote that "the scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The laborer deserves to be paid.'"[111]

The first quotation is from Deuteronomy and the latter from Luke, indicating that Luke's gospel is to be regarded as scripture alongside the OT. This is the only place that one book in the New Testament explicity quotes a statement that can be directly attributed to another New Testament writer.

Elsewhere, Paul gives a nod to the importance of scripture, though other references are somewhat ambiguous. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul writes that:

> "… from childhood you have known the *sacred writings* that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All *scripture* is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work."[112]

Paul clearly endorses the sacred and inspired character of "scripture," but it is not entirely clear if the passage can be construed to extend beyond the scripture of the Hebrew Old Testament.

Another NT reference to post-Old Testament writings that also might be viewed as scripture comes from the second epistle of Peter. Writing about his sometimes adversary Paul, Peter has this to say:

> So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this (being at peace) as he does *in all his letters*. There are some

[111] I Timothy 5:18. Paul is quoting from from Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:17, respectively. Interestingly, Paul draws on these references to make the case that church elders are worthy of double honor, for preaching and teaching. The Lukan reference occurs as Jesus is making the appointment of 72 to travel through villages. He says they are to stay "eating and drinking whatever they provide, …"

[112] II Timothy 3:15-17.

> things in them that are *hard to understand*, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.[113]

Despite periods of friction between these two leaders of the early Christian church, Peter speaks approvingly of Paul's letters. Peter also seems to place Paul's letters on a level with "other scriptures", i.e. the Old Testament. However, Peter can not resist a bit of a jab – Paul's writings may contain wisdom, but they are still hard to understand.

Despite these early references and indications of support for scripture that is more than the Old Testament, the notion of a canon (or full collection) of authentic, inspired NT writings did not proceed much further until about the mid-2nd century.

### *What Came before a Written Collection of New Testament Writings?*

For more than a century, oral tradition was favored over written works. This may be because church leaders still had direct connections with apostles who had been in direct contact with apostles and others who had walked and talked with Jesus.

***Papias of Hierapolis:*** This preference for an oral tradition is most clearly indicated by the early church patriarch Papias who stated that he "… did not think what was to be gotten out of books would profit me as much as what came from the *living and abiding voice*."

Living from *c.* 60-130/140 AD, Papias served as Bishop of Hierapolis located at present-day Pamukkale in south central Turkey, part of the tri-city area of Laodicea, Colossae, and Hierapolis. He was the author of the five book *Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*, no longer extant (but quoted by church leader Irenaeus in the 2nd century AD and Eusebius of Caesarea in the 4th).

According to Irenaeus, Papias was a disciple of John the apostle and companion of Polycarp.In his *History of the Church*, church historian Eusebius quotes church leader Irenaeus as commenting on Papias in the following manner:

> To these things Papias, who had listened to John and was later a companion of Polycarp, and who lived at a very early date, bears written testimony in the forth of his books; he composed five.[114]

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[113] II Peter 3:15-16. This statement follows an apocalyptic introduction, with Peter imploring Christians to live at peace and to "regard the patience of our Lord as salvation."

[114] Euseubius, III.39, quoting Irenaeus, *Against Heresites*, V. 33. Eusebius apparently goes on to call into question the assertion of Irenaeus that Papias was a direct disciple of John, saying that "Papias himself in the preface to his work makes it clear that he was never a hearer or eyewitness of the holy apostles, and tells us that he learnt the essentials of the Faith from their former pupils."

Even though Eusebius does not think highly of Papias, especially the views of Papias on Jesus millennial rule, he is forced to rely on him as the earliest quoted source on the precursor to a New Testament canon.[115]

The more complete text of Papias' comments about this preference for what amounts to an oral canon (as quoted directly by Eusebius) is worth noting in its entirety:

> If then any one came, who had been a follower of the elders – what Andrew or what Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other disciples of the Lord, and what things Aristion and the Presbyter John the disciples of the Lord say. For I did not think what was to be gotten out of books would profit me as much as what came from the living and abiding voice.[116]

At a time that well predates a formal written canon, Papias could speak of sources of truth belonging not only to those writers later preserved in the New Testament, but to apostles whose words never found their way into a written canon. These include works of Thomas (who purportedly did author a gospel later rejected as heretical).

Also referenced are the words of Presbyter John (also known as the elder), whose writings may be confused with those of the apostle John. And they include works of disciples such as Andrew and Philip for whom there are no known writings.

Despite the stated preference of Papias for an oral gospel ("a living and abiding voice"), Eusebius indicates that Papias does give "accounts of the Lord's sayings obtained from Aristion or learnt direct from the presbyter John."[117]

Despite his indicated preference for an oral history, Papias also attested to the Gospel of Matthew and to authorship of Mark by John Mark. Eusebius provides a brief excerpt of what Papias has to say about Matthew, noting that:

> Matthew compiled the *Sayings* in the Aramaic language, and everyone translated them as well as he could.

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[115] Eusebius writes that: "He (Papias) says that after the resurrection of the dead there will be a period of a thousand years, when Christ's kingdom will be set here up on this earth in material form. I suppose he got these notions by misinterpreting the apostolic accounts and failing to grasp what they had said in mystic and symbolic language. For he seems to be a man of very small intelligence, to judge from his books." Also known as millenarianism, Chiliasm was the belief that, with the second coming, Christ will reign for 1,000 years. While most orthodox Christians in the 2nd century appear to have been supportive, it was anathema by the 4th century to historian Eusebius and may be a reason Eusebius regarded the early 2nd century church patriarch Papias as simple-minded.

[116] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III.39.4.

[117] Aristion is mentioned alongside John the presbyter (or elder) by early patriarch Papias. An Armenian manuscript of the Gospels, dated 986, attributes the longer ending of Mark (16:9-20) to the 'elder Aristion.'

Regarding Mark's gospel, Eusebius quotes Papias more extensively as saying:

> This, too, the presbyter used to say. "Mark, who had been Peter's interpreter, wrote down carefully, but not in order, all that he remembered of the Lord's sayings and doings. For he had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers, but later, as I said, one of Peter's. Peter used to adapt his teachings to the occasion, without making a systematic arrangement of the Lord's sayings, so that Mark was quite justified writing down things just as he remembered them. For he had one purpose only – to leave out nothing he had heard, and to make no misstatement about it."

Papias is also known to have quoted from the four gospels, the epistles of Paul, Hebrews and I Peter.

Eusebius ends his discussion of Papias by noting the use by Papias "of evidence drawn from I John and I Peter, and reproduces a story about a woman falsely accused before the Lord of many sins. This is to be found in the Gospel of Hebrews."

***Polycarp of Smyrna:*** A contemporary of Papias, Polycarp lived from about 69-155 AD. Polycarp was the reputed disciple of John the apostle in Asia and Bishop of Smyrna (in today's western Turkey).[118] Taught Irenaeus. An important witness to the Apostolic tradition and vigorous opponent of heresy. Martyred at the age of 86 in reign of Antonius Pius after refusing to submit to Caesar and repudiate Christ.

In his letter to the Phillipians, Polycarp comments on the authenticity of Paul's writings:

> These things, brethren, I write to you concerning righteousness, not at my own instance, but because you first invited me. For neither am I, nor is any other like me, able to follow the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul, who when he was among you in the presence of the men of that time taught accurately and stedfastly the word of truth, and also when he was absent wrote letters to you, from the study of which you will be able to build yourselves up into the faith given you; "which is the mother of us all" when faith follows, and love of God and Christ and neighbour goes before. For if one be in this company he has fulfilled the command of righteousness, for he who has love is far from all sin.[119]

**Igantius of Antioch.** On his way to martyrdom at Rome (under Trajan as emperor) this Bishop of Antioch (succeeding Peter) wrote seven letters (*c.* 113) to churches under his care. Ignatius was concerned with the split of Greek from Jewish Christians though he essentially came down on the side of a faith free from Judaism.

In his letter to the Phillipians, Ignatius refers to the primacy of the gospel:

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[118] It is unclear whether the John known by Polycarp was the apostle or the Elder.

[119] Polycarp, *To the Philippians,* III.

> The priests indeed are good, but the High Priest is better; to whom the holy of holies has been committed, and who alone has been trusted with the secrets of God. He is the door of the Father, by which enter in Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the prophets, and the apostles, and the Church. All these have for their object the attaining to the unity of God. But the Gospel possesses something transcendent [above the former dispensation], viz., the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, His passion and resurrection. For the beloved prophets announced Him, but the Gospel is the perfection of immortality. All these things are good together, if ye believe in love.
>
> The priests indeed, and the ministers of the word, are good; but the High Priest is better, to whom the holy of holies has been committed, and who alone has been entrusted with the secrets of God. The ministering powers of God are good. The Comforter is holy, and the Word is holy, the Son of the Father, by whom He made all things, and exercises a providence over them all. This is the Way which leads to the Father, the Rock, the Defence, the Key, the Shepherd the Sacrifice, the Door of knowledge, through which have entered Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and all the company of the prophets, and these pillars of the world, the apostles, and the spouse of Christ, on whose account He poured out His own blood, as her marriage portion, that He might redeem her. All these things tend towards the unity of the one and only true God. But the Gospel possesses something transcendent [above the former dispensation], viz. the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, His passion, and the resurrection itself. For those things which the prophets announced, saying, "Until He come for whom it is reserved, and He shall be the expectation of the Gentiles," have been fulfilled in the Gospel, [our Lord saying,] "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." All then are good together, the law, the prophets, the apostles, the whole company [of others] that have believed through them: only if we love one another.[120]

**Irenaeus of Smyrna:** Following in the footsteps of his mentor Polycarp, Irenaues (*c.* 130-202) was originally from Smyrna in Asia Minor. This was an ancient city (today Izmir in Turkey), founded at a very early period at a central and strategic point on the Aegean coast of Anatolia (Asia Minor).

In a second century letter *To Florinus,* Irenaeus wrote of his association as a student of early church leader Polycarp and, in turn, of Polycarp's even earlier interactions with the apostle John:

> When I was *still a boy* I saw you in Lower Asia in Polycarp's company, when you were cutting a fine figure at the imperial court and wanted to be in favor with him. I have a clearer recollection of events at that time than of recent happenings –

[120] Ignatius, *Epistle to the Philadelphians,* IX.

> what we learn in childhood develops along with the mind and becomes part of it – so that I can describe the place where blessed Polycarp sat and talked, his goings out and comings in, the character of his life, his personal appearance, his addresses to crowded congregations. I remember how he spoke *of his intercourse with John and with the others who had seen the Lord*; how he repeated their words from memory; and how the things he had heard them say about the Lord, His miracles and His teaching, things that he had heard direct from the eye-witnesses of the Word of Life, were proclaimed by Polycarp in complete harmony with Scripture. To these things I listened eagerly at that time, by the mercy of god shown to me, *not committing them to writing but learning them by heart*. By God's grace, I constantly and conscientiously ruminate on them …[121]

Irenaeus became a Bishop of Lugdunum (Lyons) and survived the Roman persecution of 177. His written works include *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (first published in the 20th century) and *Against Heresies* directed at Gnostics and their various strains as represented by Sabellians, Valentinianism and Marcion. He affirmed Jewish monotheism, identifying the God of the Old and New Testaments as one and the same.

Irenaeus was one of the proponents of the preeminence of the church at Rome, also first to identify the current four gospels and 13 Pauline letters as accepted written works (and a subsequent basis for the New Testament). While surviving one period of Roman persecution, this formidable theologian eventually may have been martyred.

### *From Oral Tradition to Written Imperative*

Despite the strength of oral tradition, there were clear indications of a move toward use of written materials by the end of the first century. The patriarchs were quoting from selected writings that would later find their way into a New Testament.

Clement of Rome (*c.* 96) quoted from I Corinthians, Ignatius (*d.* 106-107) referenced primacy of the gospel, and Polycarp (*c.* 115) alluded to the scriptural quality of apostolic writings. Polycarp referred to Paul's epistle to Philippi, the four gospels, I Peter, the Pauline pastoral letters, Hebrews and other Pauline epistles as "being read."

Early patriarchs tended to paraphrase liberally rather than quote rigorously. And it was Justin Martyr who stated that no document represents the new Church covenant.[122]

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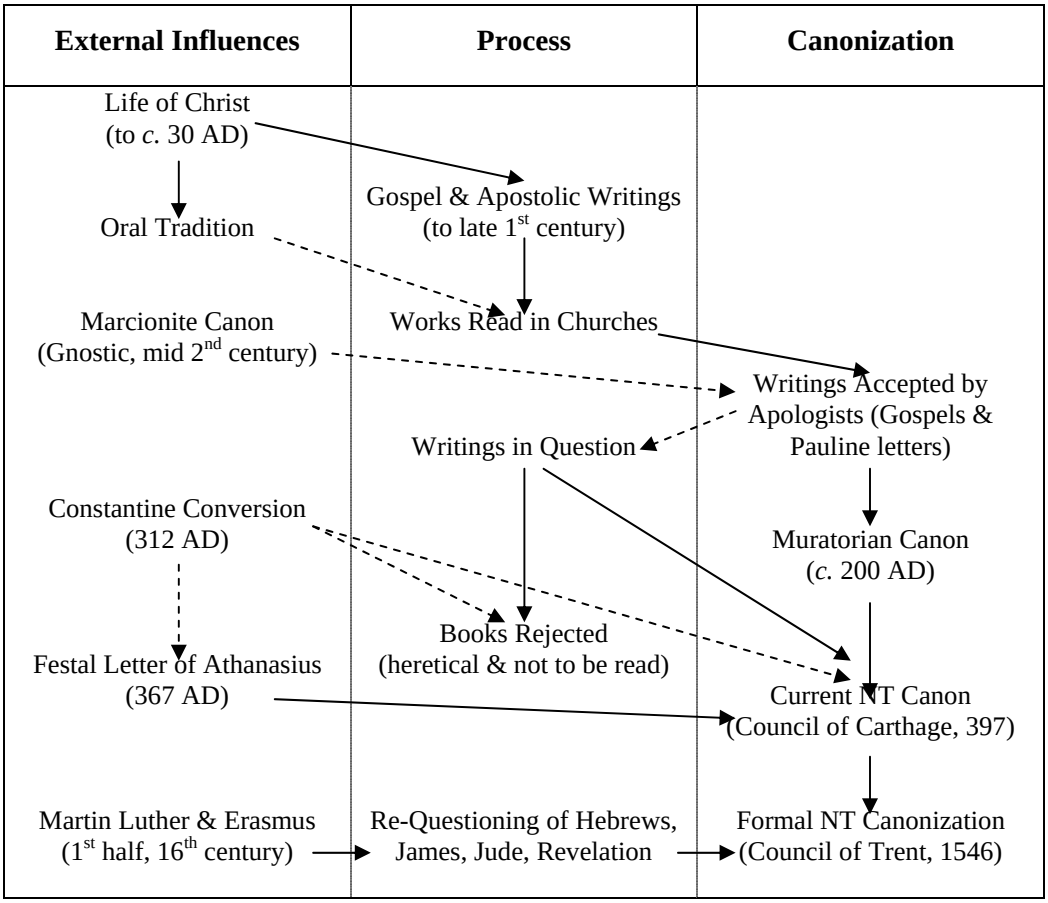
[121] From Irenaeus in his letter *To Florinius,* as cited by Eusebius, *The History of the Church,* 5.20.

[122] Justin quoted freely from the four canonical gospels, Acts, Paul's epistles, Hebrews and I Peter. However, Justin does not speak of a formal canon; he was even apparently unaware of treating the four gospels as a unit. As described by Daniel F. Lieuwen, *The Emergence of the New Testament Canon*, Orthodox Christian Information Center, 1995.

***Movement to a Written Canon:*** The process by which NT canonization occurred is complicated if not convoluted – as illustrated by the chart on the following page. It is a process that begins with the completion of Jesus' earthly ministry and ends with formal Roman Catholic adoption of a canon more than 15 centuries later.

Critical *external* factors leading to the canon include early oral tradition, the second century heresy of Marcion, Constantine's conversion, the vigor of Athanasius (as defender of Nicaea), and the 16th century Lutheran reformation.

**Canonization of the New Testament**




Looking back over two millennia, it is possible to reconstruct how this process most likely occurred. In the words of one 20th century author:

> The formation of the New Testament was a process, extending over at least two centuries, in the course of which the oral teaching and preaching of Jesus and the apostles (1) was recorded in written form and was circulated among the Christian churches, (2) was accepted by these churches in certain formulations and not in others, (3) was regarded first as the key to the Old Testament, then as equal to it in authority, and (4) *came to be regarded as inspired* 'scripture'.[123]

One could make the argument that, once the process of separating orthodoxy from heresy was set in motion, the eventual outcome of canonization was not random, but essentially predetermined. The polemics started with the apostle Paul. If you weren't for him, you

[123] Robert M. Grant, *The Formation of the New Testament,* (New York: Harper & Row), 1965.

were against him. Even further, if you weren't for Paul's version of Christianity, you weren't Christian. It was this process of addressing perceived heresy that would define which writings should be accepted and which rejected.

***Initial NT Impetus:*** Mid-2nd century impetus to begin fashioning an orthodox list of accepted books came from Marcion, a heretic merchant and ship owner. Marcion believed that Paul alone truly understood Christ. He therefore accepted only the written works of Luke and Paul, and then only if they were edited to fit his (Marcion's) viewpoint. Fellow gnostic Basilides was first to state that apostolic writings should be considered as "scriptural."

As bishop of Lyons, Irenaeus is perhaps the last to rely extensively on oral tradition; he also is first to list the current four gospels and 13 Pauline letters as accepted. Irenaeus quoted from Matthew, Mark, Acts, I Corinthians, I Peter, Hebrews and Titus.

However, the pedigree of oral tradition remained strong. Christian leaders would base their authority on that of their predecessors.

For example, in a second century letter *To Florinus,* Irenaeus wrote of his association with the early church leader Polycarp and, in turn, of Polycarp's even earlier interactions with the apostle John:

> When I was *still a boy* I saw you in Lower Asia in Polycarp's company, when you were cutting a fine figure at the imperial court and wanted to be in favor with him. I have a clearer recollection of events at that time than of recent happenings – what we learn in childhood develops along with the mind and becomes part of it – so that I can describe the place where blessed Polycarp sat and talked, his goings out and comings in, the character of his life, his personal appearance, his addresses to crowded congregations. I remember how he spoke *of his intercourse with John and with the others who had seen the Lord*; how he repeated their words from memory; and how the things he had heard them say about the Lord, His miracles and His teaching, things that he had heard direct from the eye-witnesses of the Word of Life, were proclaimed by Polycarp in complete harmony with Scripture. To these things I listened eagerly at that time, by the mercy of god shown to me, *not committing them to writing but learning them by heart*. By God's grace, I constantly and conscientiously ruminate on them …[124]

In this letter, Irenaeus not only invokes this sense of post-apostolic succession, he once again evidences great reluctance to transition from an oral to a written tradition. And Irenaeus is careful to endorse the authenticity of not only the teachings of Jesus, but his miracles as well.

[124] From Irenaeus in his letter *To Florinius,* as cited by Eusebius, *The History of the Church,* 5.20.

Irenaeus was motivated into action by Marcion's notion of a new and updated set of scriptures – extending beyond those of the Hebrews. His interest in a possible scriptural body of Christian teaching occurred not only as a response to Marcion personally but to Marcion's espoused form of gnosticism. At one point, Irenaeus complained that: "… he (Marcion) persuaded his disciples that he was more trustworthy that the apostles who transmitted the gospel."

Another gnostic, Tatian, composed the *Diatessaron,* harmonizing the four gospels into a single account. Unlike most, Tatian rejected "some of the epistles of Paul," but Titus was viewed as canonical.

Initially a follower of the apologist Justin Martyr, Tatian later founded the Encratic sect of Jewish Gnosticism in Syria. The *Diatessaron* was used by Syrian Christians into about the 5th century.

Of the early pre-2nd century patriarchs, Clement of Alexandria offered the most expansive view of approved writings, accepting 22 of 27 NT books *plus* another nine works eventually excluded. Despite the comprehensiveness of this compilation, Clement appeared generally unconcerned about issues of canonicity; he apparently believed that inspiration is what matters.

***Canonicity:*** The earliest known definitive statement of an accepted body of New Testament writings comes from the Muratorian Canon, believed to have been originally composed *c.* 200 AD. All but five of the current 27 NT books were recognized; those excluded were Hebrews, James, I/II Peter and III John.

During the same time period, Tertullian first coined the term "New Testament," writing:

> "How happy is this church [the Christian]! … She blends the law and prophets with the writings of the evangelists and apostles; and it is thence she refreshes her faith…. Woe to them who add or retrench anything to or from that which is written. To wish to believe without the *scriptures of the New Testament* is to wish to believe against them."[125]

For all his brilliance, Tertullian would later divert from orthodox Christianity to the apocalyptic sect of the Montanists. In the process, Tertullian would disassociate himself from the very orthodoxy he had helped to set in place.

In the third century, theologian Origen divided a variety of Christian writings into three categories: (a) widely accepted, (b) questioned or accepted with reservations, and (c) rejected. Origen made a strong case for inclusion of Hebrews. Works he *accepted with*

[125] Rene Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, 1977, indicating that he is quoting Tertullian, *Prescriptions,* chapter 36. However, this appears to be a compilation of disparate passages from Tertullian.

*reservation* were James and the so-called "Catholic epistles" of II Peter, II/III John, and Jude.

Origen also commented on the authorship and order of the four New Testament gospels:

> I accept the traditional view of the four gospels which alone are undeniably authentic in the Church of God on earth. First to be written was that of a one-time exciseman who became an apostle of Jesus Christ – Matthew; it was published for believers of Jewish origin, and was composed *in Aramaic*. Next came that of Mark, who followed *Peters's instructions* in writing it, and who in Peter's general epistle was acknowledged as his son: 'Greetings to you from the church in Babylon, chosen like yourselves, and from my son Mark.' Next came that of Luke, who wrote for *Gentile converts* the gospel praised by Paul. *Last of all* came John's.[126]

From this 3rd century perspective, different gospels were written for different reasons. Of particular note is Origen's assertion that Matthew was "composed in Aramaic" although today the only early manuscripts still available are in Greek. Also noted is that this author gives no specific reason for the writing of John's gospel.

***Disputed Works:*** Like Origen before him, Eusebius of Caesarea (*c.* 325) listed most of the present canon but referred to a few writings as disputed. Eusebius comments that the Roman church continued to deny Hebrews as the work of Paul. As with Origen, writings noted by Eusebius as "disputed" included James, Jude, II Peter, II/III John. Revelation also was questioned.

Throughout this period, works most disputed included II Peter, II/III John, James, Jude, Hebrews and Revelation. Much of the dispute fell along regional east-west lines. Eastern churches saw less need for a canon and were most opposed to the apparent apocalyptic fervor embodied within Revelation (as well as II Peter).

Western churches were most concerned with James and Hebrews. The so-called "Catholic epistles" generally favored by Western churches included I/II Peter, I/II/III John and Jude.

James had not received widespread circulation among western churches. This short epistle was viewed as essentially pro-Jewish both in thought and instruction.

Hebrews was questioned because its authorship (and therefore apostolic authority) were viewed as uncertain. It was for similar reasons that the Shepherd of Hermas eventually was excluded from the Canon. Interestingly, Hebrews eventually made the cut; the Shepherd did not.

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[126] Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, as cited by Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, 6.25.

***Canon Tests:*** Criteria or tests increasingly applied to determine canonicity included:

- Authorship by an apostle or immediate follower – as inspired scripture.
- Regular church usage.
- Consistency with orthodox Christian belief.

The latter test of consistency with orthodox belief came to the fore as the time of formal canonization drew closer. Earlier commentators of the second and third century appealed primarily to apostolic authority and regular church usage. Theologians of the late third and fourth century increasingly said that to be orthodox scripture, the writings must reflect orthodox belief – essentially a *circular argument.*

***Canon Acceptance:*** The Synod of Laodicea (*c.* 363) is the first to take action regarding a New Testament canon, directing that only those books regarded as canonical should be read in church. Unfortunately, a detailed listing of books accepted by Laodicea is no longer available. However, it is known that the Laodicean council did not consider Revelation as canonical.

In 367, Athanasius (bishop of Alexandria and chief defender of the Nicene Creed) compiled a list covering all 27 books of the present New Testament canon.[127] In his annual Easter (or Festal) letter of 367 AD, identifies what should be included and not included in the New Testament.

The purpose of these recommendations is outlined early in the letter:

> … I also, having been urged by true brethren and having investigated the matter from the beginning, have decided to set forth in order the writings that have been *put in the canon*, that have been handed down and confirmed as divine, in order that every one who has been led astray may condemn his seducers, and that everyone who has remained stainless may rejoice, being again reminded of that.

Athanasius then proceeds to enumerate the scriptures of the Old Testament. Following this, he turns to the New Testament, which we recount in detail:

> Continuing, I must without hesitation mention the scriptures of the New Testament; they are the following: the four Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, after them the Acts of the Apostles and the seven so-called catholic epistles of the apostles -- namely, one of James, two of Peter, then three of John and after these one of Jude. In addition there are fourteen epistles of the apostle Paul written in the following order: the first to the Romans, then two to the Corinthians and then after these the one to the Galatians, following it the one to the Ephesians, thereafter the one to the Philippians and the one to the

[127] Despite his general condemnation of non-canonical writings, Athanasius identifies the Didache (or Teaching of the Apostles) and the Shepherd of Hermas as suitable for reading and instruction.

> Colossians and two to the Thessalonians and the epistle to the Hebrews and then immediately two to Timothy, one to Titus and lastly the one to Philemon. Yet further the Revelation of John.
>
> These are the springs of salvation, in order that he who is thirsty may fully refresh himself with the words contained in them. In them alone is the doctrine of piety proclaimed. *Let no one add anything to them or take anything away from them...*
>
> But for the sake of greater accuracy I add, being constrained to write, that there are also other books besides these, which have not indeed been put in the canon, but have been appointed by the Fathers as reading-matter for those who have just come forward and which to be instructed in the doctrine of piety: the Wisdom of Solomon, the Wisdom of Sirach, Esther, Judith, Tobias, the so-called Teaching [Didache] of the Apostles, and the Shepherd. And although, beloved, the former are in the canon and the latter serve as reading matter, yet mention is nowhere made of the apocrypha; rather they are a fabrication of the heretics, who write them down when it pleases them and generously assign to them an early date of composition in order that they may be able to draw upon them as supposedly ancient writings and have in them occasion to deceive the guileless.[128]

In the spirit of nothing being taken away, Athanasius becomes the first to list the current 27 books of the New Testament – although his order is somewhat different. In the spirit of preventing unwanted additions, Athanasius lists books that deserve to be read but are not part of the New Testament and then describes apocrypha which he denounces as fabrications and heretical.

This defender of Nicaea was strong in his support for books that had been questioned – such as Hebrews. He also backed the inclusion of Revelation.[129]

Athanasius did not hesitate to brand those who opposed him as "heretics". This staunch defender of orthodoxy also noted a tendency even then present to attempt to assign early dates to works that he believed to have been written much later.

However, the canon was not yet fully set. Some degree of *give and take* was still in play. About 380, the so-called *Apostolic Canons* (Latin version) generally appear to follow Athanasius *except that* Revelation is omitted and the 2nd epistle of Clement is added.

In 397, the complete canon of the New Testament (as known today) was ratified at the third Council of Carthage. The findings of the Council were strongly influenced by

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[128] Athanasius, *The 39h Festal Letter*, 367.

[129] Athanasius was no *shrinking violet.* Various Roman emperors exiled him for 17 of the 46 years of his Alexandrian episcopate. Athanasius was also unafraid of using political means to achieve religious ends. At one point, he threatened to withhold shipment of Egyptian grain from Alexandria, resulting in an exile ordered by emperor Constantine.

Augustine of nearby Hippo. While Carthage represented a local rather than church-wide council, this event seems to have fixed the canon in the west.

From 397 forward, the current list of 27 books appears to have been generally accepted throughout the Latin Church.[130] However, variations still existed. For example, the apocryphal Epistle to the Laodiceans was contained in a variety of NT manuscripts up to the middle ages.[131]

***Canon Retrospective:*** For some, the process by which some writings of the early church came to be canonized while others were discarded has been viewed as remarkably smooth. Certainly from the vantage-point of the 20th-21st centuries, the process appears providential, if not almost magical. Current orthodoxy is captured by this statement from a 20th century observer:

> It is then an admirable and manifestly providential fact that, on this point alone, one can nowhere find in the historical documents any public constraint, any group decision on the part of the bishops, any decree by the councils, or any prescribing by the emperors, although, after the fourth century, these interfered with everything in the church of God; in a word, *no act of human authority imposed on the flock* the acceptance of any sacred code or forced any individual conscience to receive into the canon even one of the twenty-seven books of which the New Testament is composed today.[132]

One can argue with the conclusion that "no act of human authority was imposed" to achieve a certain listing of NT books. However, it is more difficult to argue that the canon remains a source of significant church controversy. Christendom has benefited from 1,600 years of general acceptance of what are believed to be a set of inspired New Testament scriptures.

Though *accepted*, the New Testament of Athanasius, Jerome and the Vulgate would not be formally *canonized* for more than a millennium. It would take the reformist rantings of a medieval cleric – Martin Luther – to serve as the impetus by which an official listing of books approved for the New Testament would be formally authorized by the Roman Catholic church (in 1546).

The heretic who provided the earliest known impetus for formulating an orthodox New Testament may have had the last laugh. For the short introductory prologues found in

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[130]William Smith; revised and edited by F.N. and M.A. Peloubet, *Smith's Bible dictionary [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997.

[131] For example, Alfric, later Archbishop of Canterbury, listed the work as among the canonical Pauline epistles in the 10th century. This epistle was included in the Bohemian Bible as late as 1488.

[132] Rene Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, (Chicago: Moody Press), 1977, c1969.

many manuscripts of Jerome's Vulgate are generally believed to have come from followers of Marcion.[133]

### *Who's In & Who's Out?*

So, where have we ended up? Clearly, from the perspectives of various authors and their perspectives, there were *winners* and *losers* in the effort to establish writings that could be passed down as inspired Christian scripture.

*In retrospect*, it is useful to summarize the views of various early authorities as to the authenticity of prospective New Testament writings. This is illustrated by two lists on the pages accompanying this discussion.

***Who's In?*** The first list provides the list of *who's in* – the 27 documents that generally were acknowledged as the New Testament canon by the end of the 4th century. The views of 16 different figures of the early church who commented on the authenticity of what became the accepted canon are noted by the symbols on the chart.[134]

None of the New Testament books are fully accepted by all 16 authorities noted. Marcion (the gnostic heretic) did not fully accept any of the writings; Luke and the Pauline epistles were acceptable only with significant changes suggested by Marcion.

Two New Testament books (Matthew and Luke) are fully accepted by all the other commentators. Another 12 books are accepted by more than 75% (more than 12) of these authorities. Of the remaining 13 books, six are accepted by no more than one-half of the early authorities noted.

In quantitative terms, the most troublesome of the New Testament writings were:

- II Peter and III John – accepted by only 4 of these prominent church authorities (out of 16 reviewed). No definitive acceptance of these epistles is indicated prior to the fourth century; both Eusebius and Origen viewed them as dubious.

[133] Lavinia Cohn-Sherbock, *Who's Who in Christianity*, (New York: Routledge), 1998.

[134] The 16 noted are those who appeared to be most systematic in their classification of authoritative works of early Christian literature. There are others who may have provided commentary on a handful of books. Papias of the early 2nd century, for example, is important as a source for three of the gospels (except Luke) but nothing is known about his views of other writings that came to be part of the New Testament.

## New Testament Canon – Who's In[135]

| New Testament Book | Ignatius | Polycarp | Marcion | Valentinus | Justin Martyr | Irenaeus | Clement (Alexandria) | Tertullian | Muratorian Canon | Origen | Eusebius (Caesarea) | Codex Sinaiticus | Athanasius | Didymus the Blind | Peshitta (Syriac) | Vulgate (Jerome) | # Accepted (√ of 16) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Matthew** | √ | √ | X | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 15 |
| **Mark** | | √ | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 14 |
| **Luke** | √ | √ | ~~√~~ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 15 |
| **John** | | | X | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 13 |
| **Acts** | √ | √ | X | | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 13 |
| **Romans** | √ | √ | ~~√~~ | √ | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 14 |
| **I Corinthians** | √ | √ | ~~√~~ | √ | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 14 |
| **II Corinthians** | | √ | ~~√~~ | √ | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 13 |
| **Galatians** | | √ | ~~√~~ | √ | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 13 |
| **Ephesians** | √ | √ | ~~√~~ | √ | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 14 |
| **Philippians** | | √ | ~~√~~ | √ | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 13 |
| **Colossians** | √ | | ~~√~~ | √ | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 13 |
| **I Thessalonians** | √ | √ | ~~√~~ | | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 13 |
| **II Thessalonians** | | √ | ~~√~~ | | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 12 |
| **I Timothy** | | √ | X | | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 12 |
| **II Timothy** | | √ | X | | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 12 |
| **Titus** | | | X | | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 11 |
| **Philemon** | | | ~~√~~ | | | | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | | √ | √ | 8 |
| **Hebrews** | | √ | | | | √ | √ | √ | | ? | ? | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 8 |
| **James** | | | | | | | | | | ? | ? | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 5 |
| **I Peter** | | √ | | √ | | √ | √ | √ | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 12 |
| **II Peter** | | | | | | | | | | ? | ? | √ | √ | √ | | √ | 4 |
| **I John** | | √ | | √ | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | 13 |
| **II John** | | | | | | √ | | | √ | ? | ? | √ | √ | X | | √ | 5 |
| **III John** | | √ | | | | | | | | ? | ? | √ | √ | X | | √ | 4 |
| **Jude** | | | | | | | √ | √ | √ | ? | ? | √ | √ | √ | | √ | 7 |
| **Revelation** | | | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | | √ | 12 |

**Legend:**

| | |
|---|---|
| √ | Accepted, true, scriptural and/or quoted from approvingly |
| √ | Possible approving quotation or allusion |
| ~~√~~ | Acceptable, but only with changes |
| ? | Dubious, disputed, and/or useful for inspiration |
| X | Spurious (in the classification of Eusebius |
| X | False, heretical, heterodox, quoted from disapprovingly |
| | Not mentioned or quoted; authority's opinion is unknown (blank cell) |

[135] This listing is adapted from G. Davis on www.ntcanon.org/table.html, August 31, 2007. Revisions have been made base on our view of Origen's ambivalence regarding Hebrews and Jude.

- James and II John – accepted by only 5 of 16. For James, there is no definitive acceptance prior to the fourth century. II John appears to be noted in the third century Muratorian Canon.[136]
- Philemon – acknowledged by 8 and largely unmentioned (except by Marcion) prior to Tertullian.
- Jude – noted as authoritative by 7 of 16 – but questioned by Origen and Eusebius.
- Hebrews – definitively accepted by 8 of 16, helped via very early acknowledgement by Polycarp in the 2nd century. The best discussion of continuing concerns with this document is provided by the 4th century historian Eusebius of Caesarea together with expressed ambivalence from Origen.

***Who's Out:*** It is also helpful to know which books were not finally accepted despite considerable early support from some churches. Writings which did not find their way into the New Testament canon include:

- *I Clement*, a letter written from the Roman church to Christians at Corinth around 95 – addressing the need for order in the face of a rebellion against church presbyters.
- Seven letters attributed to Ignatius, bishop of Antioch *c.* 113 – also emphasizing order but with special concerns regarding what are regarded as divisive Docetic and Judaizing influences in the church.
- A letter from Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna.
- A document called the E*pistle of Barnabas,* written from Alexandria *c.* 130 – explaining the true Christian sense of Jewish law.
- An early sermon mistakenly called *2 Clement*, probably of Alexandrian origin.
- An apocalyptic work or revelation called *The Shepherd* authored around the turn of the second century by a Roman Christian called Hermas – expressing concern over moral lapses and pointing to the possibility of a second repentance for serious sins after baptism.
- A document most likely written in Syria called the *Didache* or *The Teaching of the Lord through the Twelve apostles to the Gentiles* – providing a code of conduct and instructions regarding such rites as baptism, the eucharist and church government.
- Other non-Gnostic works such as *The Preaching of Peter, Revelation of Peter,* and the *Revelation of the Apostles.*
- Gnostic gospels such as *The Gospel of Thomas.* This gospel was viewed as spurious and heretical by Eusebius. It also seems to have been known to Mani.

[136] The *Muratorian Canon* indicates that "… two with the title (or: two of the above mentioned) John are accepted in the catholic Church …" but the canon does not explicitly state which two epistles of John are accepted.

The next list (on the following page) is therefore equally instructive. It identifies *who's out* – early church writings that ultimately were not accepted as part of the New Testament canon.

These works tend to be known because of their supporters – or their detractors. Out of 19 identified writings, 10 received support as authoritative from one or more leading early church figures.

Most noteworthy is the Shepherd of Hermas which is cited as worthy by five early church authorities – notably Irenaeus, Clement, the Codex Sinaiticus, Didymus the Blind and Jerome (author of the Vulgate). The Epistle of Barnabas is cited by these same figures, excluding only Irenaeus.

The most active advocate for the authority of these other writings was Clement. Of works not included in the New Testament, Clement indicated that he felt nine of these documents were authoritative for the early church.

Another nine documents are included in the *who's out* list even though no clear supporters (of the 16 sources noted) are identified. These writings are of significance not just for their supporters, but for the opposition they engendered. A good example is the Gospel of Thomas for which there was no known remaining manuscript until the late 1800s. This book of sayings attributed to Jesus was specifically condemned, for example, both by Origen and Eusebius.

While not supported by any of the sources noted in the chart, books such as Thomas did have their advocates. For example, despite being lost to the world for centuries, the Gospel of Thomas was believed to be canonical by Marcus, a second century follower of the gnostic leader Valentinus.

Even works cited with approval by some were questioned by others. For example, despite favorable reviews from key authorities, the value of the Shepherd of Hermas was questioned by such luminaries as Tertullian, the Muratorian Canon, Origen, Eusebius and Athanasius.

## New Testament Canon – Who's Out[137]

| Writings Excluded from the New Testament Canon | Ignatius | Polycarp | Marcion | Valentinus | Justin Martyr | Irenaeus | Clement (Alexandria) | Tertullian | Muratorian Canon | Origen | Eusebius (Caesarea) | Codex Sinaiticus | Athanasius | Didymus the Blind | Peshitta (syriac) | Vulgate (Jerome) | Total # (In Support) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gospel of Thomas | | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | | | | 0 |
| Gospel of Truth | | | | √ | | X | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Gospel of the Twelve | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | 0 |
| Gospel of Peter | | | | | | | | | | ? | X | | | | | | 0 |
| Gospel of Basilides | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | | | | | 0 |
| Gospel of the Egyptians | | | | | | | √ | | | X | | | | | | | 1 |
| Gospel of the Hebrews | | | | | | | √ | | | ? | X | | | | | | 1 |
| Gospel of Matthias | | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | | | | 0 |
| Traditions of Matthias | | | | | | | √ | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Preaching of Peter | | | | √ | | | √ | | | X | | | | | | | 2 |
| Acts of Andrew | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | 0 |
| Acts of Paul | | | | | | | | X | | ? | X | | | | | | 0 |
| Acts of John | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | 0 |
| Epistle to the Laodiceans | | | | | | | | | ? | | | | | | | √ | 0 |
| I Clement | | | | | | √ | √ | | | ? | | | | √ | | | 2 |
| Epistle of Barnabas | | | | | | | √ | | | ? | X | √ | | √ | | √ | 3 |
| Didache | | | | | | | √ | | | ? | X | | ? | √ | | | 2 |
| Shepherd of Hermas | | | | | | √ | √ | ? | ? | ? | X | √ | ? | √ | | √ | 4 |
| Apocalypse of Peter | | | | | | | √ | | √ | | X | | | | | | 2 |

**Legend:**

| | |
|---|---|
| √ | Accepted, true, scriptural and/or quoted from approvingly |
| √ | Possible approving quotation or allusion |
| ~~√~~ | Acceptable, but only with changes |
| ? | Dubious, disputed, and/or useful for inspiration |
| X | Spurious (in the classification of Eusebius) |
| X | False, heretical, heterodox, quoted from disapprovingly |
| | Not mentioned or quoted; authority's opinion is unknown (blank cell) |

Note: Books from the Nag Hammadi Library included with this listing are the Gospels of Thomas and Peter and the Apocalypse of Peter. Not shown on the listing are other Nag Hammadi or other early complete and fragmentary "Gospel" writings including the Secret Book of James, Dialogue of the Saviour, Gospel of Mary, Infancy Gospel of Thomas, Infancy Gospel of James, Secret Gospel of Mark, Egerton Gospel, Gospel of the Ebionites, and Gospel of the Nazareans.

[137] Also adapted from G. Davis on www.ntcanon.org/table.html, August 31, 2007. Revisions to the Davis chart have been made based on our views of the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas, noted by Jerome as genuine and widely read.

***Consequences of Exclusion:*** On the one hand, it has been important to protect the purity of the gospel by excluding writings that clearly appeared to be in conflict with what cam to be perceived as orthodox teaching. However, this very process of exclusion has shortchanged Christianity of diversity in understanding and expression.

If orthodoxy and truth are one and the same, then this process of canonization has saved Christians from what might have been grievous errors of faith and practice. However, orthodoxy and truth are not necessarily one and the same. Certainly, this is what Martin Luther contended to initiate a Protestant reformation during the 16th century.

By keeping the discussion alive, there may be opportunity for experiencing the divine in ways not possible via adherence to a more narrow orthodoxy. As the Jesus of John's gospel declared: "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship *in spirit and truth.*"[138]

Is orthodoxy the only path or even the best route to spirit and truth? Writers outside the canon might argue for multiple paths.

In effect, writings excluded from the canon often went one step beyond the conventional. John's Jesus would say: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; [32] and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."[139]

The Jesus of the non-canonical Gospel attributed to Thomas carries this thought one step further: "Those who seek should not stop seeking until they find, When they find, they will be disturbed. When they are disturbed, they will marvel, and will rule over all." [140]

For the Jesus of Thomas, the journey is the reward. If Thomas is right, we may be selling ourselves short – remaining within the familiar space of a 2000 year old *comfort zone.*

[138] John 4:24.
[139] John 8:32.
[140] Thomas 1-2.

## *Supplement C: Perspectives on the Received Canon*

A more detailed examination of the diverse perspectives offered by early church writers, leaders and heretics on the 27 books of today's New Testament canon is provided by the following chart.

### Historical Viewpoints on Authenticity of the New Testament (NT) Canon

| NT Book | Issues & Comments Related to Historical Acceptance |
|---|---|
| **Matthew** | Authorship not explicit in text but is ascribed by Papias (*c.* 130-150) to this disciple as the first gospel to be written. Papias wrote: "Matthew organized the sayings in the Hebrew language, but everyone has translated them as best he could."[141] Rejected by the gnostic Marcion. Preferred by Jewish-Christian Ebionites who migrated to Transjordan by 70 A.D, but opposed by the Ebionite Symmachus who favored a return to Jewish Law. |
| **Mark** | The author is not explicitly identified by name. Earliest manuscripts (Vaticanus and Sinaiticus) do not contain last 12 verses of Chapter 16. Gospel is ascribed to Mark and described as accurately preserved but not "in order" by Papias. Not mentioned by Ignatius or Marcion. Preferred by 1st century Docetists who believed Christ only appeared to have human form. |
| **Luke** | Authorship not directly identified in the text, but addressed to Theophilus. Not explicitly mentioned by Papias. Accepted by the heretic Marcion, but only with changes. Also strongly praised by Eusebius of Caesarea. |
| **John** | In the text, the author is never clearly identified, though there is indirect reference to a "disciple whom Jesus loved." Some scholars believe chapters 15-17 and 21 were added later.<br>Not explicitly mentioned by Papias, Ignatius or Polycarp, though all were identified as disciples of John. However, a manuscript fragment is the earliest known portion of the New Testament (*c.* 125). Rejected by Marcion. Rejected by the Alogi in the second century because of Logos teaching, with authorship of both John and Revelation attributed to the Jewish-Gnostic heretic Cerinthus. Preferred gospel of the Valentinian gnostics. Attacked by Gaius of Rome (3rd century) on anti-Montanist (apocalyptic) grounds. |
| **Acts** | Authorship not directly identified in the text, but is addressed to Theophilus like the Gospel of Luke. Rejected by Marcion. Not mentioned by Valentius or Justin Martyr. |
| **Romans** | Like all of the Pauline epistles, the author is directly identified in the text as Paul. This book is not identified by Papias. Accepted conditionally by Marcion. Not mentioned by Justin Martyr. |
| **I Corinthians** | Attested by Clement of Rome as early as 96 AD. Accepted conditionally by Marcion. Not mentioned by Papias or Justin Martyr. |
| **II Corinthians** | Accepted conditionally by Marcion. Not mentioned by Papias, Ignatius or Justin Martyr. Believed by some modern scholars to be a compilation of several fragments. |
| **Galatians** | Possibly the earliest of the Pauline epistles. Accepted conditionally by Marcion. Not mentioned by Papias, Ignatius or Justin Martyr. |
| **Ephesians** | Accepted conditionally by Marcion. Not mentioned by Papias or Justin Martyr. Pauline authorship is questioned by some modern scholars due to stylistic differences. |
| **Philippians** | Accepted conditionally by Marcion. Not mentioned by Papias, Ignatius or Justin Martyr. Some modern scholars suggest this is a compilation of three separate letters. |
| **Colossians** | Accepted conditionally by Marcion. Not mentioned by Papias, Polycarp or Justin Martyr. Author questioned by some modern scholars, due to theological differences with other Pauline epistles. |
| **I Thessalonians** | Possibly the earliest of the Pauline epistles. Accepted conditionally by Marcion. Not mentioned by Papias, Valentius or Justin Martyr. May be comprised of fragments. |

[141] Eusebius, *The History of the Church,* 3.39.

| NT Book | Issues & Comments Related to Historical Acceptance |
|---|---|
| **II Thessalonians** | Accepted conditionally by Marcion. Not mentioned by Papias, Valentius or Justin Martyr. Authorship questioned due to hints of possible forgery (2:2, 3:17). |
| **I Timothy** | Rejected by Marcion. Not mentioned by Papias, Ignatius, Valentius or Justin Martyr. Pauline authorship has been challenged by modern scholars due to differences in style and theological concepts not expressed in other Pauline epistles. |
| **II Timothy** | Rejected by Marcion. Not mentioned by Papias, Ignatius, Valentius or Justin Martyr. Authorship questioned, may represent a compilation of fragments. |
| **Titus** | Rejected by Marcion. Not mentioned by Papias, Ignatius, Polycarp, Valentius or Justin Martyr. Authorship has been questioned by modern scholars. |
| **Philemon** | Rejected by Marcion. Not mentioned by Papias, Ignatius, Polycarp, Valentius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement or Didymus the Blind. |
| **Hebrews** | Quoted by Clement as early as 95 AD. Not mentioned by Ignatius, Marcion, Valentius, Justin Martyr, or the Muratorian Canon. Possible approval from Irenaeus. Attacked by Gaius of Rome (3rd century) for links to Montanism and Gnosticism and more generally rejected in the West because of a perceived Montanist harsh penitential system. Omitted by the Cheltenham Canon (mid-4th century), questions noted as "spurious" to some by the Canon of Amphilochius of Iconium (after 394). Rejected by Pope Innocent I in 405. Canonicity also questioned due to uncertainty of authorship, though attributed by some to Paul. Clement of Alexandria suggested Paul originally wrote this epistle in Hebrew, with Luke then translating the document to Greek. Other possible authors suggested include Barnabas, Apollos or Priscilla. In 325, church historian Eusebius of Caesarea wrote that "… we must not shut our eyes to the fact that some authorities have rejected the Epistle to the Hebrews, pointing out that the Roman Church denies it is the work of Paul."[142] Acceptance was urged by Origen in the 3rd century. Final acceptance may have been stimulated at the urging of Athanasius (subsequent to his flight to Rome in 339). |
| **James** | Viewed as dubious by Origen and Eusebius. Possible approval from Irenaeus. Not mentioned by Ignatius, Polycarp, Marcion, Valentius, Justin Martyr, Clement, Tertullian, or Muratorian Canon. Concerns related to James' leanings toward Judaism and emphasis on salvation through works over faith. Canonicity also was later questioned by Martin Luther. |
| **I Peter** | Not mentioned by Ignatius, Marcion, Justin Martyr, and Muratorian Canon. Petrine authorship is questioned by some modern scholars. |
| **II Peter** | Viewed as dubious by Origen and Eusebius.[143] Not mentioned by Ignatius, Polycarp, Marcion, Valentius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian, Muratorian Canon, and the Peshitta. Regarded by the Bodmer paprii of the early 3rd century as edifying but not necessarily authoritative. Appears to be rejected by Amphilochius of Iconium (after 394). Rejected by Nestorians. Reasons for rejection include orientation to Greek thinking and apocalyptic emphasis. Accepted in part because of stated Petrine authorship. Authorship in dispute today. |
| **I John** | Not mentioned by Ignatius, Marcion, and Justin Martyr. Authorship believed same as gospel. |
| **II John** | Rejected by Didymus the Blind. Viewed as dubious by Origen and Eusebius. Not mentioned by Ignatius, Polycarp, Marcion, Valentius, Justin Martyr, Clement, Tertullian, and the Peshitta. Appears to be rejected by Amphilochius of Iconium (after 394). Finally accepted in part due to consistency of style with I John, though author is identified in the text as "the elder." |
| **III John** | Issues and comments similar to those of II John. |
| **Jude** | Viewed as dubious by Eusebius and Origen. Not mentioned by Ignatius, Polycarp, Marcion, Valentius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and the Peshitta. Rejected by Nestorians to today for an apparent quote from the apocryphal book of Enoch. Regarded by the Bodmer paprii of the early |

[142] Eusebius, *History of the Church.*

[143] The earliest mention of II Peter usage by any Christian writer appears to be from Origen in the 3rd century.

| NT Book | Issues & Comments Related to Historical Acceptance |
|---|---|
| | 3rd century as edifying but not necessarily authoritative. Apparently rejected by Amphilochius of Iconium (after 394). As translator of the Vulgate, Jerome (342-420) also notes that Jude is rejected by some because of its quotation from an apocryphal text, Enoch.[144] Reasons for eventual acceptance are not entirely clear, but may include this epistle's strident advocacy of Christian traditions and condemnation of heretics. |
| **Revelation** | Not mentioned by Ignatius, Polycarp, Marcion, and the Peshitta. Rejected by the Nestorians. Noted as too apocalyptic and authored by a person other than the writer of the Gospel of John by Dionysius (mid-third century). Omitted by the Synod of Laodicea (363), the Canon of Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386), the Apostolic Canons (380), the Canon of Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389). Attacked by Gaius of Rome (3rd century). Viewed as spurious by the Canon of Amphilochius of Iconium (after 394). Omitted by the Catalogue of the Sixty Canonical Books (7th century). Not recognized by the Stichometery of Nicephorus (9th century). Issues included disputed authorship and apocalyptic message. In part, later opponents were reacting to the perceived excesses of the apocalyptic Montanist movement. Not included in the official lectionary of the Greek church. |

[144] Jude 14-15 contains the following passage: "It was also about these *that Enoch*, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, 'See, the Lord is coming with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all, and to convict everyone of all the deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.' "

## III. Origins of the Old Testament

We now leave the Christian writings of the New Testament and reach back a step earlier in time – to the formation of that portion of the Bible commonly known as the Old Testament (OT). The further we reach, the less certain we can be – of historical veracity. Yet these far reaches represent the seeds of a faith that reaches through Judaism and Christianity – even encompassing other faith groups including Islam.

The term "Old Testament" is actually a bit of a misnomer. For Judaism, there is neither "Old" nor "New" Testament. There are simply the Hebrew Scriptures.[145]

The Hebrew Scriptures are fundamentally different from subsequent writings of the Christian New Testament (NT) – in several key respects:

- These scriptures were written in Hebrew (or Aramaic), while most (or all) of the New Testament was written in Greek.[146]
- The first 39 books of the Bible were written for a distinctively Jewish religion and way of life, not explicitly by or for Christians.
- While we of the third millennium AD have the benefit of considerable historical information about the historical events and authors of the New Testament, much of the OT extends back beyond the reach of current methods for historical verification.[147]
- The process for OT/NT canonization occurred largely on parallel tracks – with little direct interconnection between the two. Early Christians were primarily focused on assembling a collection of authentic inspired works for a "New Testament." The process for maintaining documents and then determining a canon of OT scriptures remained primarily in Jewish hands.

Despite these significant differences, there are two threads that bind the two collections together. First, both OT and NT are important as a single biblical document for Christianity.

Second and less obviously, the impetus for establishing a definitive collection of authoritative Hebrew Scriptures came, in large measure, as a reaction to Christianity. And this is why we now reach back – to the furthest ends of antiquity. The purpose – to

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[145] While recognizing this difference in terminology, we *interchangeably* use the terms Hebrew Scriptures and Old Testament.

[146] Aramaic was the common language of Palestine of Christ and the last several centuries BC, derived from Hebrew. There is some evidence that the earliest but no longer available manuscripts of NT gospels such as Matthew and Luke may have been written in Aramaic. Papias of the late first century is one who identified Matthew as being written in Greek.

[147] This is particularly true of the pre-captivity era.

discover the historical basis for the Hebrew Scriptures and their connection to faiths both Jewish and Christian.

### *Old Testament Canonization Themes*

Before getting lost in the details, it is useful to delineate the main messages (or themes) that emerge from this OT review. Four themes are advanced for consideration:

> *1. Old Testament writings were created over a substantially longer time period and took more time to achieve canon status than for the New Testament.* The earliest OT manuscripts date in the range of 1,000 or more years before the birth of Christ. The first known attempt to piece together a complete collection came in the 1st century after the death of Jesus but Jewish consensus over the contents of the Hebrew scriptures did not occur until about the 5th-6th centuries AD.
>
> *2. Threats to Jewish identity and perceived heresies helped stimulate both preservation and eventual clarification of an accepted set of Hebrew scriptures.* Critical threats included the Babylonian captivity of Israel, Roman destruction(s) of Jerusalem, and the parallel emergence of what was to become a body of Christian New Testament (NT) writings.[148]
>
> *3. Despite a wide range of source documents, there has been remarkable consistency over the last two millennia in the OT writings generally regarded as canonical.* By the Council of Jamnia *c.* 90 AD, remaining disputes centered on only a handful of books. The major point of continuing confusion (and some disagreement) has been over the status and usage of the Apocrypha.
>
> *4. There also has been and remains considerable variation in translation, owing in large measure to the lasting legacy of the Babylonian captivity six centuries before Christ.* Differences in Hebrew and Greek translation affected early Christian understanding of the Old Testament. Divergent versions combined with greater availability of alternative manuscript texts have spawned an increased proliferation of Bible translations in the last one to two centuries of the modern era.

With these themes in mind, we now proceed to consider questions of:

- When and how the Hebrew Scriptures were written
- The status of the earliest extant manuscripts
- How the early writings were assembled into an OT canon

[148] Roman destruction and persecution also played a role in the formation of a Christian New Testament canon – albeit Roman persecution of Christianity occurred for different reasons.

### *When & How Were the Hebrew Scriptures Written?*

Information as to when and how the Old Testament (OT) was written is, of necessity, more conjectural than for the New Testament. As one might expect, a major obstacle is the much greater age of the manuscripts.[149] Simply put, sources of the Hebrew Scriptures are mired in the obscurities of antiquity.

Today, there is no scholarly consensus as to who wrote the books of the Old Testament or when they were written. Traditional Jewish and early Christian sources together with today's fundamentalists tend to support traditional names as authors. So, Moses is regarded as the author of the Pentateuch – the first five books of the Bible – and so on.

Modern scholars and more liberal theologians take a more skeptical view. They question traditional claims of authorship, arguing that books were written by multiple sources – often over an extended period of time. For example, the works of the Pentateuch have been ascribed to at least four different authors – abbreviated as JEDP – rather than to composition by the patriarch Moses.

These modern observers also tend to date at least the final composition of New Testament books as occurring much later in time than do traditionalists. In part, later dates can be attributed to multiple edits by successive generations of scribes – before the Old Testament as we know it came to be.

Of the 39 current books of the Old Testament (excluding apocrypha), there is general agreement regarding authorship and dating for only about 9 books. Books for which there is relative agreement include Esther, Jeremiah and Lamentations and minor prophets including Hosea, Amos, Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah and Haggai.

There is substantial disagreement as to authorship and dating of the early OT writings as well as major works such as the Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. For the moderns, the emerging viewpoint is that few, if any, OT books reached a form similar to that of today prior to King Hezekiah's reign starting early in the 8th century BC.

The chart on the following two pages provides a synopsis of viewpoints regarding authorship and dating of what are now 39 books of the Old Testament. Traditional views are represented in normal type; alternative viewpoints are indicated in *italics.*

For this review, we have drawn on two primary sources: a) the New International Version (NIV) as consistent with more traditional viewpoints; and b) the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) as representing a more modern albeit literal and critical perspective.

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[149] Another obstacle was the scribal notation. Earliest manuscripts were written with 22 consonantal characters of the Hebrew alphabet, in columns, without word divisions – all to minimize the amount of space taken.

## Authorship & Dating of Old Testament (OT) Books

| OT Book | **Author(s):** Conventional *(Alternative(s))* | **Dating:** Conventional *(Alternative(s))* |
|---|---|---|
| **Genesis** | Moses; *alternative 4-part JEDP authorship (see text for details)* | 1446-1406 BC, *perhaps as late as 6th century BC* |
| **Exodus** | Moses; *alternative 4-part JEDP authorship, possibly a variety of independent sources* | 1446-1406 BC, *perhaps later* |
| **Leviticus** | Moses; *alternative 4-part JEDP authorship, an alternative view is dual PH authorship* | 1446-1406 BC, *perhaps later* |
| **Numbers**[150] | Moses; *alternative 4-part JEDP authorship, or two source priestly and epic authorship* | 1446-1406 BC, *perhaps later* |
| **Deuteronomy** | Moses; *alternative 4-part JEDP authorship, possible multiple sources* | *c.* 1406 BC, *perhaps as late as 6th century (or 721- 535) BC* |
| **Joshua** | Joshua and Eleazor son of Aaron; *Samuel or others 800 years later at the end of the kings or further editing during and after the reign of Josiah.* | After 1406 BC, *possibly 622 to post-587 BC* |
| **Judges** | Samuel; *possibly prophets such as Nathan and Gad, or further editing during and after the reign of Josiah* | *c.* 1000 BC after the Jewish monarchy established, *possibly as late as after 587 BC* |
| **Ruth** | Samuel; *unknown* | Period of the monarchy from David to the end of the Northern Kingdom, *possibly 950-722 BC* |
| **I Samuel** | Uncertain with Zaduk son of Nathan the prophet suggested, *multiple sources* | After Solomon's death in 930 BC, *possibly after the Babylonian exile of 587 BC* |
| **II Samuel** | Same as I Samuel since composed as 1 book, *possible multiple sources* | After Solomon's death in 930 BC, *possibly after the Babylonian exile of 587 BC* |
| **I Kings** | Jeremiah, *possible multiple sources with re-editing* | *Subsequent to Jehoiachin's release from prison in 562 BC and prior to end of the Babylonian exile in 538, possibly earlier at the death of Josiah with a postcript c. 550 BC.* |
| **II Kings** | Same as I Kings since composed as 1 book | Same as I Kings |
| **I Chronicles** | Ezra, *separate authorship* | Latter half of the 5th century BC, *possibly 4th century BC* |
| **II Chronicles** | Same as I Chronicles since written as 1 book | Same as I Chronicles |
| **Ezra** | Ezra; *same person as author of I/II, Chronicles and Nehemiah, combined with Persian documents* | Latter half of the 5th century BC, *possibly as late as 398 BC* |
| **Nehemiah** | Same as Ezra, *multiple authors including Ezra, Nehemiah and other documents* | Similar to Ezra |
| **Esther** | Unknown but of Jewish origin | *c.* 460 AD before Ezra's return to Jerusalem |
| **Job** | Unknown but likely of Israelite origin; *Edomite origin traced back to times of the patriarchs* | Anytime from the reign of Solomon to the exile (albeit recounting earlier events from 2000-1000 BC), *possibly as late as 5th-6th centuries BC* |
| **Psalms** | David and other named authors; *unknown, headings or superscriptions may be* | Likely compiled over centuries, put into final form about the 3rd century BC after the exile, |

[150] The term "Numbers" is based on the Greek translation known as the Septuagint. A more appropriate translation from the original Hebrew would be "in the wilderness."

| OT Book | **Author(s):** Conventional *(Alternative(s))* | **Dating:** Conventional *(Alternative(s))* |
|---|---|---|
| | *secondary to the actual authors.* | *composed as late as Isaiah* |
| **Proverbs** | Solomon and other named authors; *written by author after Solomon* | 10th century BC for Solomon, likely editing by scribes of King Hezekiah 715-686 BC, *possible final post-exilic editing in 6th century BC or as late as 200-300 BC* |
| **Ecclesiastes** | Solomon; *unknown and likely written well after Solomon* | 10th century BC if Solomon, *possibly as late as 2nd to 3rd century BC* |
| **Song of Songs** | Solomon | 10th century BC if Solomon, *prior to King Omri (885-874 BC)* |
| **Isaiah** | Isaiah; *unnamed others including possibility of a composite work by multiple authors at different periods in Hebrew history* | 701-681 BC, *third Isaiah section composition suggested as late as post 520-515 BC, after temple rebuilding* |
| **Jeremiah** | Jeremiah and scribe Baruch | Before 580 BC |
| **Lamentations** | Jeremiah | 586-516 BC |
| **Ezekiel** | Ezekiel; *subsequent editing* | *c.* 571 BC |
| **Daniel** | Daniel; *unknown* | *c.* 530 BC, *chapter 11 written as late as just before 167 BC (death of Antiochus)* |
| **Hosea** | Hosea or unknown author | Middle of 8th century BC |
| **Joel** | Joel or unknown author | Approx. 9th century BC; *possibly as late as 6th or even the 3rd century BC* |
| **Amos** | Amos | By 750 BC |
| **Obadiah** | Obadiah | *Disputed as 9th or 6th century BC* |
| **Jonah** | Jonah or unnamed others | 8th century BC, *6th-5th century BC* |
| **Micah** | Micah | Likely before 715 BC (and the beginning of Hezekiah's reign) |
| **Nahum** | Nahum | Between 663-612 BC; *possibly after 597 BC* |
| **Habakkuk** | Habakkuk | *c.* 605 BC |
| **Zephaniah** | Zephaniah | Before 627 BC |
| **Haggai** | Haggai | 520 BC early in the reign of Persia's Darius I |
| **Zechariah** | Zechariah the priest and prophet; *multiple authors* | 519 to sometime after 480 BC |
| **Malachi** | Malachi or "this messenger' | After 433 BC (last OT prophet), *shortly before Nehemiah's 1st return in 445/4 BC* |

Note: Traditional views are represented in normal type; alternative views are indicated in *italics.*

Sources: *The Harper Collins Study Bible New Revised Standard Version* (New York: Harper Collins), 1993, and *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan), 1985.

In recent years, there has been a new challenge to the more modern 20th century view of Old Testament dating. Discoveries of Canaanite literature shows that the literary roots of the Hebrew Scriptures may well predate the years of the late kingdom and captivity.[151]

Up through Nehemiah, the Old Testament appears to arranged in roughly chronological order. A case can be made that the other OT books are also arranged in some fashion – but the organization is certainly not chronological.

[151] See, for example, John Romer, *Testament* (New York: Henry Holt & Company), 1993, p. 79.

***Earliest Writings:*** Moses, the reputed author of the first five books (or Pentateuch), lived approximately 1,500 years before Jesus. The entire period from Moses to the Babylonian exile spans nearly a millennium to 586 BC.

Outside of the OT writings themselves, there is little contemporaneous documentation to independently corroborate or amplify on the contents, origins and sources of these earliest scriptures. Early Christian writers could be left to speculate on matters such as when and how the Hebrew language was developed and transmitted – from oral to written form. For example, in the fourth century AD, Saint Augustine would argue for a written language that pre-dated Moses:

> Now we *must not believe* that Heber, from whose name the word Hebrew is derived, preserved and transmitted the Hebrew language to Abraham only as a spoken language, and that the Hebrew letters began with the giving of the law through Moses; but rather that this language, along with its letters, *was preserved by that succession of fathers.* Moses, indeed, appointed some among the people of God to teach letters, before they could know any letters of the divine law.[152]

The temptation to speculate is as strong today as in Augustine's time. Even today, more objective archaeological evidence is sparse. For example, there remains little in the way of archaeological or other information that independently attests to the reign and conquests of Israel's most famous king – David.[153]

In effect, the earliest Hebrew scriptures may have been composed over as much as a 1,000-year period, primarily in Hebrew.[154] Comparatively little attention appears to have been given to the preservation and perpetuation of Hebrew scripture prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and resulting Babylonian captivity (in 586 BC).

The captivity occurred within just under 400 years after David's death. It is from this point that both a biblical and historical record becomes available.

***OT Authorship:*** As noted, antiquity also inevitably gives rise to questions of authorship. These questions begin with the first five books (or Pentateuch) – comprising Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Both Jewish and Christian traditions assign authorship of the Pentateuch to Moses.[155]

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[152] Augustine, *The City of God*, XVIII, 39.

[153] As an example, John Romer writes in *Testament* that "… David and Solomon still await archaeological evidence of their earthly existence …", *op. cit.*, p. 141.

[154] OT narrative believed to have been composed in Aramaic (rather than Hebrew) may include portions of Genesis, Jeremiah, Ezra and Daniel.

[155] The Jews of Palestine and of the dispersion were virtually unanimous in their belief that Moses wrote Genesis. This belief is reflected in the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Palestinian Talmud, the Apocrypha (cf. Eccles 45:4; II Macc. 7:30), the writings of Philo (*Life of Moses* 3:39), and Josephus (*Antiq.* 4:8:45; *Contra Apion* I.8). Early Christian church patriarchs appear similarly convinced of Mosaic authorship.

In the last couple of centuries, modern scholars have theorized that the Pentateuch likely had multiple authors. The most common theory currently in vogue suggests at least four different sources of authorship.

The initials JEDP are applied to identify what are considered to be four different manuscript sources. The J manuscript was named from the writer's supposed use of the divine name Yahweh (YHWH) (ca. 850 BC). The E document was named after the author's supposed use of the name Elohim for God (ca. 750 BC). The D document, which includes the major part of Deuteronomy, was believed to have been composed around 621 BC by Josiah. The P document is hypothesized as the work of a priestly writer in the post-exilic age – and may have involved editing of the whole Pentateuch.[156]

Some scholars postulate a dual PH source for Leviticus – P for priestly and H for holiness code. The priestly code is ostensibly limited to the sanctuary and the priests; the holiness code extends to cover the entire promised land.

Some believe that Joshua, Judges, I-II Samuel and I-II Kings are part of a single historical work with the Book of Deuteronomy as a preface, in effect a *Deuternomistic History*. This work also may have been edited during the reign of King Josiah (640-609 BC) and then again after the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army in 587 BC. This last edit would have served the purpose of better preparing the displaced nation for a life in exile.

Even our current OT also refers to other documents for which there is no extant manuscript.[157] This clearly indicates that there were other considered as inspired by the Hebrew people and priestly leadership – but which have been lost to posterity.

In addition to well-known personalities such as Moses, David and Solomon, there are some surprising and lesser-known authors. As cited by the Old Testament scriptures, these include Hebrew women such as Deborah and Miriam and non-Hebrews such as Agur and Lemuel.[158]

Some form of written compilation of Jewish history and law takes place at least by the period of the Jewish monarchy. The book of the Kings refers to the high priest for King Josiah who says: "I *have found* the book of the law in the house of the Lord."[159]

Hebrew scriptures clearly refer to non-canonical writings which are no longer extant. For example, the writer of II Samuel refers to a Book of Jashar.[160] The author of Chronicles

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[156] The "P" document may have been dated from somewhere between the tenth to sixth century BC.

[157] For example, Numbers 21:14 refers to the *Book of the Wars of the Lord.* Joshua 10:12-13 and II Samuel 1:18-27 quote from the *Book of Jashar*.

[158] Reference to authorship by Deborah is found (at Judges 5:1), Miriam (at Exodus 15:20-21), Agur and Lemuel (from Proverbs 30:1 and 31:1 respectively).

[159] II Kings 2:8.

refers to four other documents – the book of the annals of King David, the records of Samuel the seer, the records of Nathan the prophet, and the records of Gad the seer.[161] Similarly, the author of I Kings refers to the "book of the annals of Solomon," the "book of the annals of the kings of Israel," and the "book of the annals of the kings of Judah."[162]

I/II Chronicles are ascribed by Jewish tradition to Ezra, written in perhaps the 5th century BC. In many respects, the historical account of the monarchies of Judea and Israel found in Chronicles closely parallel those found in Kings. This has led some to question whether the Chronicles are redundant. However, written from a priestly perspective, Chronicles gives far more emphasis to issues of Jewish purity not found in Kings.[163]

The Psalms is believed to comprise a series of collections written over perhaps 500 years. Current scholarship suggests that the Psalms may have been put into final form by postexilic temple personnel and finally completed about the 3rd century BC.

Authorship and dating of Daniel is disputed. The traditional view is that the book was written as described by Daniel, completed about 530 BC after the capture of Babylon by Cyrus is 539. A more recent view is that Daniel is written by an unknown author, penned during a period involving persecution of the Jews by Antiochus starting about 167 BC.

Professional scribes were entrusted with the responsibility of transcribing and maintaining the Hebrew scriptures. These official secretaries also held important civil posts and served diplomatic functions.[164] By the time of the first century AD and the life of Jesus, scribal functions were limited to the Temple – where scholars copied, preserved, published and interpreted the law of Moses.

Sometimes, the level of detail about composition provided in the Hebrew scriptures is remarkable. Writing instruments identified directly in various OT books include the iron stylus, reed pen, penknife to sharpen pens and a writing case.[165]

***Effects of Captivity:*** A critical period in OT formulation came with the Babylonian captivity (starting 586 BC). This period led to subsequent development of at least three OT traditions in Babylon, Palestine and Egypt.

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[160] II Samuel 1:18.

[161] See I Chronicles 27:24 and I Chronicles 29:29.

[162] See I Kings 11:41, 14:19 and 14:29 respectively.

[163] For example, the Chronicler tends to omit material (found in Samuel and Kings) that is unfavorable to David and Solomon. John Romer, author of *Testament,* observes that: "The difference in attitude between the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler is often seen as representing two different factions among the returning Jews." In some respects, the Jewish tension between of purity versus accommodation presages similar Christian controversies occurring in the wake of Roman persecutions of the 2nd to early 4th centuries AD.

[164] See, for example, II Samuel 8:16-17, II Kings 18:18-26, II Chronicles 34:13-15, and Jeremiah 36:18 for different scribal roles.

[165] See passages from Job 19:24, and from Jeremiah at 17:1, 8:8, 36:23 and 36:18.

The modern OT can be traced to the Babylonian or Masoretic text.[166] Both the Greek Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch likely emerged from the Old Palestinian text of Ezra. The Septuagint is of particular importance to the formation of the New Testament as this Greek translation is cited and quoted extensively by NT writers.

During the period of restoration led by Ezra, there is clear evidence that Jerusalem was purged of those who had intermarried with non-Jews. Both women who had married Jews and their children were sent away. [167]

As with the *Chronicler* of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah appear to reflect a more priestly view emphasizing purity and separation – no matter the consequences to families and children. In contrast, other OT books evidence more sympathy for the "poor people who owned nothing" [168]

Tradition is that those who departed the Jewish family at the instigation of Ezra formed the nucleus of what became known as Samaritans, who built their own Temple at Mt. Gerizim. Samaritans accepted only the five books of the Pentateuch and rejected the authenticity of the other Hebrew scriptures.

The ensuing tradition involving levels of purity was well known and even specifically referenced centuries later in interaction of Jesus with the woman at the well in Samaria. Speaking to Jesus, she observes: "Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you (Jesus) say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."[169]

***The Septuagint:*** The oldest known extant manuscript of the Hebrew Scriptures comes from what is called the Septuagint. This is a translation of Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek language at Alexandria starting about 285 BC.

The Septuagint is believed to have been authorized by Ptolemy Philadelphus. A widespread legend was that 72 interpreters, working independently, composed their translations within just 72 days.[170]

Until the 4th century AD, the Septuagint was the only OT version used by the early Christian church. Reliance on the vagaries of this Greek translation by NT writers clearly

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[166] This includes all Protestant English versions. The term signifies the importance of the Masoretes contribution to preservation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

[167] See Ezra 10 for a description of this purification and purging process.

[168] Jeremiah 39:10.

[169] John 4:20. In verse 21, Jesus responds that "… the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem."

[170] As described by Aristeas. The earliest writer who gives an independent account of the Septuagint is Aristobulus, a Jew from about the start of the 2nd century BC. However, modern scholars view these early accounts with skepticism. It is possible that the Torah was the first portion of composing a Greek Septuagint. There are no longer any extant copies of the earliest versions of the Septuagint.

produced some errors in interpretation – affecting and possibly mis-directing Christian theology to the present day.

### *What Are the Earliest Extant Manuscripts?*

Given the age of Dead Sea Scroll manuscripts of Hebrew Scriptures found at Qumran (in 1947), it is not surprising that the manuscripts available today should themselves be considered copies of earlier copies. However, despite obvious limitations, a remarkable quantity of relatively early (including some pre-Christian) materials are available.

It is worth noting that manuscripts of some OT writings are referred to in the Old Testament itself. Keeping track of authentic older documents was no easier then than now. For example, the second book of Chronicles refers to *finding* the Book of the Law given through Moses.[171]

Up through the time of Jesus the Hebrew scriptures existed not as a single collection of books, but as separate scrolls. For example, Luke's gospel clearly recounts how Jesus "… stood up to read, and the *scroll of the prophet Isaiah* was given to him."[172]

Jesus did not look to a single book from which to quote scripture – because there was no single authorized source to consult. In fact, throughout the period of his ministry, the four gospels combined indicate that Jesus directly quoted from only 14 of the current 39 books of the Old Testament.

***Early Manuscripts:*** The earliest currently available portion of an OT manuscript known today dates from the 2nd century BC. This constitutes a fragment of Deuteronomy taken from a Greek Septuagint translation. Early Samaritan versions of the Pentateuch of indeterminate age are also extant.

Prior to discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, the oldest surviving Hebrew texts were copies of manuscripts compiled by Aaron ben Moses ben Asher. These texts likely were prepared at Tiberias by the Sea of Galilee in 1008 AD. From about the early second century AD, the ben Asher family had assumed the Jewish mantle of responsibility for manuscript maintenance.

***Contribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls:*** While no complete texts of the OT date back more than about a millennium, there are older copies of individual books available. As a result of the Dead Sea Scrolls discoveries, the earliest complete manuscript of an OT book is from Isaiah dating to about 150 BC. This is from the set of manuscripts found at Qumran in 1947.

A wide variety of other OT material was found with the Dead Sea Scrolls. Included are an estimated 175 copies (whole and partial) of various books of the Hebrew scriptures.

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[171] II Chronicles 34:14-15.

[172] Luke 4:16-17.

Of the 175 texts discovered, about 70 are from the Pentateuch. Another 48 are from the prophets, the majority from Isaiah.[173]

Some texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls collection appear to parallel the Samaritan Pentateuch. Others are more similar in character to the later Masoretic text of ben Asher of Tiberias.

***Later Manuscripts:*** Of the later manuscripts, perhaps the most important is the Vulgate. This comprises the Old and New Testaments as translated by Jerome into Latin in the early fifth century AD.[174]

The best surviving manuscript of the Latin Vulgate, the Codex Amiatinus, is now in the Laurentian Library of Florence, Italy. Written in a monastery in Northumbria, England, it was presented to Pope Gregory II in 716 AD.

### *How Were Early Writings Assembled into an Old Testament Canon?*

As with the NT, this is likely the most important question that should be asked of the Hebrew Scriptures. While the full answer is not known, useful clues abound.

***Sequential Assembly:*** The first five OT books – known as the Torah, Law or Pentateuch – appear to have been recognized as authoritative to the Hebrews by about the 6th to the 5th century BC. Acceptance of various Prophets may have occurred shortly thereafter – or by the 4th century BC.

The Writings – comprising the last 13 books of the Jewish canon – are generally believed to be of later origin. These prophetic documents appear to have been well circulated by the period of the 2nd century BC.

***Compiling an OT Canon:*** As early as 200 BC, there are non-canonical references to the "great teaching" of Hebrew Scripture. This teaching included the law, prophets and other teachings.[175]

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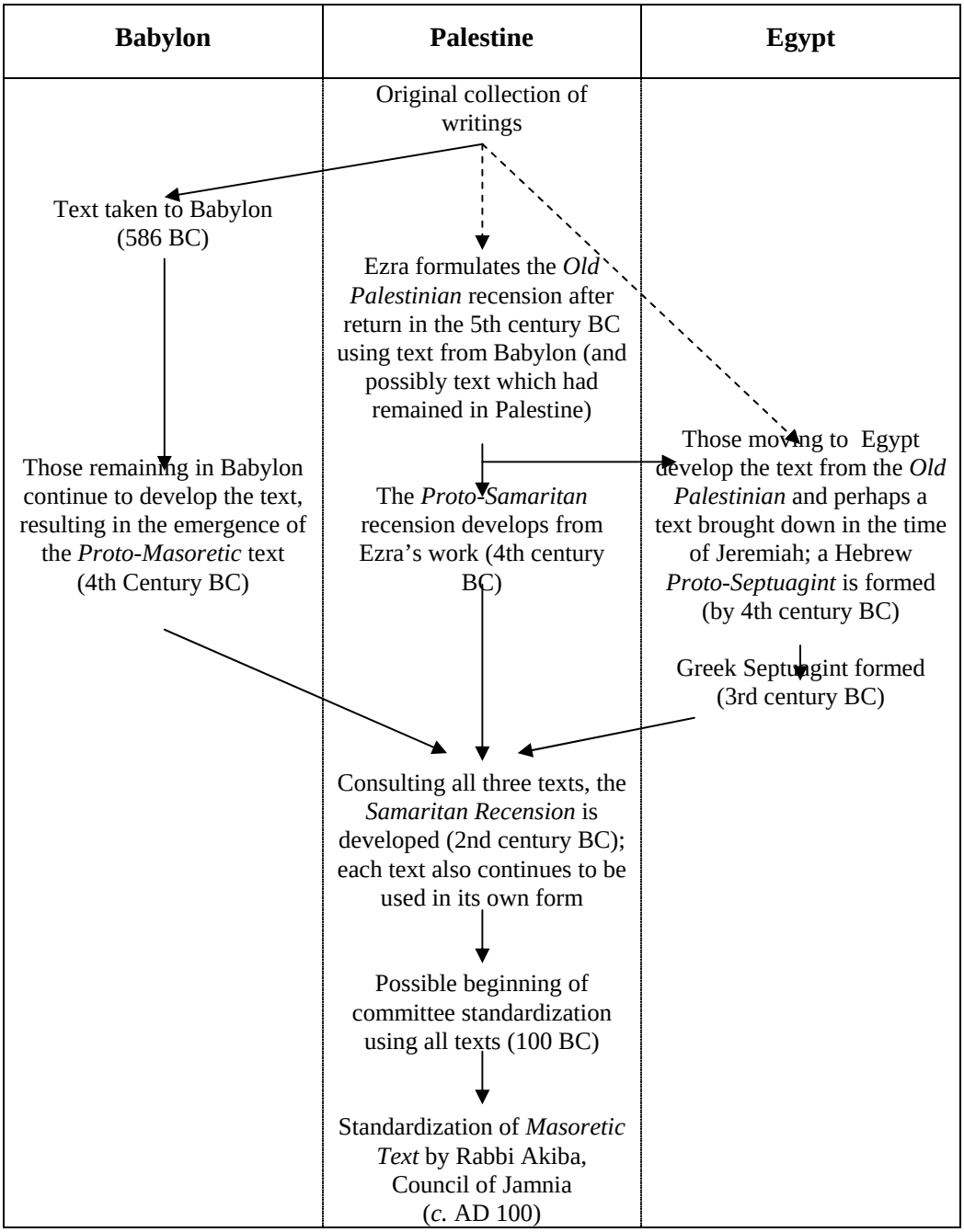
[173] A text of Samuel dates to the 3rd century BC and appears to be a version of text used to make the Greek Septuagint.

[174] The oldest surviving manuscript of the Latin Vulgate is the Codex Amiatinus, now in the Laurentian Library of Florence (but most likely written in a monastery in Northumbria, England).

[175] As cited by the Apocryphal Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus).

**Chronology of the Old Testament**




Source: Adapted from John H. Walton, *Chronological Charts of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), p. 14.

The first known attempt to make a final selection of the Writings may have occurred about 100 AD – well after the period of Jesus' earthly ministry. The initiative to settle on an authoritative collection of inspired OT scripture was undertaken by rabbis living at

Jamniah in Palestine. Subsequent to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, Jamniah had become a major center of Judaism scholarship.[176]

However, detailed knowledge of the formation process for an OT canon remains indefinite. There are virtually no known scribal documents detailing the steps leading to the manuscripts found at Qumran (1947) or otherwise describing how an authoritative set of Hebrew scriptures was determined.

Jewish text indicates that Rabbi Johannon ben Zakkai founded an academy in Jamnia near Jaffa on the Palestinian coast. This occurred after the Rabbi had left Jerusalem and warring Jewish factions in a coffin – about 70 AD.

Johannon ben Zakkai apparently convinced Roman general Titus to allow the establishment of an academy away from the city of Jerusalem. Johannan's successor Rabbi Akiva, a purported student of Gamaliel, subsequently began the process of the canonization of Hebrew scripture.[177]

***Components of the OT Canon:*** The Hebrew Scriptures of today are known as the *Tanak.* This term serves as an acronym for the three-part OT division of T-Torah (or Law), N-Nebiim (Prophets), and K-Ketubim (Writings).

This three-part categorization is also noted by Christianity, most notably the post-resurrection Jesus.[178] Luke's gospel quotes Jesus as saying:

> These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the *law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms* (part of the Writings) must be fulfilled. [179]

Most listings of the Hebrew scriptures contained 24 books. However, a number of books of the current 39 book OT were originally compiled together, so that the material in the current non-Catholic OT (without apocrypha) is essentially the same as the Hebrew scriptures.

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[176] According to a Jewish text, Rabbi Johannon ben Zakkai founded the academy in Jamnia (near Jaffa), after leaving Jerusalem and warring Jewish factions in a coffin (about 70 AD). and convincing Roman general Titus to allow the establishment of an academy away from the city.

[177] Factors ascribed as having been important to OT canonization included the authoritative utterances, authorship, internal consistency of teaching, and common usage throughout the Hebrew religious community. See, for example, Andrew E. Hill & John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 1991.

[178] The threefold division is further attested to by other figures of Judaism and Christianity of the first four centuries AD including such personalities as Philo, Josephus, Melito, Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome and Augustine.

[179] Luke 24:44.

Masoretic scribes appear to have had no specific guidelines for the order in which the books of the Hebrew Scriptures were to be presented – as various manuscripts are presented in different orders.[180] The current OT canon follows the order of Jerome's Latin Vulgate – albeit excluding the Apocryphal writings.

***Disputed OT Books:*** Some OT books were "spoken against" or questioned by the Hebrew community. Concerns related to:

- Esther – with no mention of God
- Proverbs – for practical or earthly rather than divine wisdom
- Ecclesiastes – due to pessimistic and hedonistic overtones
- Song of Solomon – for erotic poetry
- Ezekiel – for a variety of bizarre antics, visions and teachings on sacrifice viewed as counter to the Torah[181]

About 90 AD, the rabbinic council at Jamnia included discussion of the number and order of the Hebrew canon. Still disputed at Jamnia were interpretations of the Song of Songs, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Changes were made accordingly. Among the more dramatic was that the book of Esther was cut in half. Material from Esther not found in the OT canon is contained in the non-canonical apocrypha. Today, the Roman Catholic Bible contains "The Additions" to Esther not found in the King James or other Protestant Bibles.[182]

Solomon's reputed Song of Songs was also embattled. Rabbi Akiva was instrumental in saving this text as authentic, inspired scripture for posterity. Although a conservative, Rabbi Akiva argued:

> God forbid, that any man of Israel deny that the Song of songs is a holy text; for all the ages are not worth the single day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel. All scripture is holy, but the Song of Songs is holiest of all.[183]

Some texts did not fare so well. The Books of Maccabees, Tobit and Ecclesiasticus were all excluded – not so much because of their relative youth, but because they were perceived as not supportive of the Law.

Despite the conclusions of Jamnia, the contents of the Hebrew Scriptures remained unsettled. It was not until completion of the Jewish Talmud in the 5th-6th centuries that discussions over "disputed books" of the Hebrew scriptures reached a more definitive conclusion.

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[180] Early texts of the Septuagint also evidence no particular order of presentation.

[181] According to some Jewish traditions, Ezekiel was fit to be read only by those over 30 years of age.

[182] Also noted is that the book of Esther is not found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

[183] As quoted by John Romer, *Testament* (New York: Henry Holt and Company), 1988.

Rabbi Akiva is remembered not only for formulating an OT canon, but also for his political entanglements. As a young man of about 20 when Jerusalem was first destroyed, Akiva played a pivotal role in the City's second and final destruction. He handpicked guerrilla leader Bar Kokhba who led the last Jewish rebellion against Rome in 130 AD.

Akiva somehow survived the Roman massacres of Jerusalem's inhabitants. He continued to preach adherence to the Law, now forbidden by the Romans. Finally, he was executed by the Romans who literally peeled the skin from his body with "combs of iron."[184]

***Issues with the Septuagint:*** Initially composed about 250 BC, The Greek Septuagint appears to have been applied extensively in OT quotations noted in the NT. However, the quality of translation was clearly uneven.

The Pentateuch of the Septuagint (LXX) most closely parallels the earlier Hebrew text. Conversely, Isaiah presented some of the greatest problems in translation. The LXX had more OT books than were in the Hebrew scriptures; Jeremiah and Daniel were both longer both in the Septuagint and early Catholic versions of the Deutero-Canon. However, Job was about one-sixth shorter than in the Hebrew.

The majority of the Dead Sea Scrolls appear to resemble what is today known as the Masoretic (or Samaritan) Text. However a significant minority (of about 5%) appear to be very similar to the Hebrew used to translate the Septuagint (LXX).[185]

A significant limitation reflected the difficulty of adequately communicating Hebrew terms and concepts in the Greek language. This difficulty is acknowledged by the Prologue to the book of Sirach – written about 130 BC – which notes that:

> For the same things expressed in Hebrew have not an equal force when translated into another language. Not only so, but even the Law and the prophecies and the rest of the books differ not a little as to the things said in them.

Even more problematic has been the *mistranslation* of some words from the Hebrew to the Greek. Perhaps the most notorious example of a mistranslation arises in the quotation by the NT gospel writer Matthew of the OT book Isaiah as: "Behold, a *virgin* shall conceive …"[186]

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[184] As Rabbi Akiva was flayed, he recited the Shema from Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord …," as cited by *Testament, op. cit.* This appears to have been a premeditated choice. Faced with the prospect of death by torture, Rabbi Akiva had laughed, "All my life I have been waiting to fulfill the concept 'You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul…' and now I finally have the chance." As cited by Ohr Somayach International, Copyright ©1996.

[185] In effect, examples of Hebrew text from the Dead Sea Scrolls that match the LXX has revealed that, while the LXX was composed from a text different than the MT, it appears to be a more accurate translation than was previously assumed.

[186] Matthew 1:23 quotes Isaiah 7:14.

Matthew apparently quotes from the Greek Septuagint, which uses the term *parthenos*, i.e. virgin. However, the Hebrew term is *almah*, meaning young woman or maiden. By changing the meaning of a single word, the mother of Jesus was imbued by Matthew with the prophetic mantle of perpetual virginity.

Problems with the Septuagint were well recognized by the early Christian community – as Christians proved to be major consumers of this translation. Not surprisingly, numerous efforts were made to correct perceived errors of the Septuagint. This typically involved the formulation of a new translation from a recognized Hebrew text.

At least three other complete translations of the OT from Hebrew to Greek were made in the 2nd century AD. These were the:

- *Aquila* – from a Jewish writer opposing the Septuagint
- *Symmachus* – apparently written by a Christian Ebionite
- *Thodotion* – composed by another Ebionite

Despite its limitations, the Septuagint had its defenders. A key supporter was the fourth century Catholic theologian Augustine, who wrote:

> For the translations of the Scriptures from Hebrew into Greek can be counted, but the Latin translators are all out of number. For in the early days of the faith every man who happened to get his hands upon a Greek manuscript and who thought he had knowledge, were it ever so little, of the two languages, ventured upon the work of translation.[187]

In effect, Augustine believed the authority of the Septuagint as equal or better than the original Hebrew and certainly as superior to that of the many Latin translations then in circulation.[188] Augustine's viewpoint is corroborated from one important source. The LXX remains the official Old Testament of the Eastern (Greek Orthodox) church to this day.

***Old Testament Apocrypha:*** Literally translated in the Greek as "hidden things," the writings of the *apocrypha* were generally composed between about 200 BC and 100 AD. Books of the apocrypha appear to have been added to later editions of the Septuagint.

While distinctly separated from the Hebrew Scriptures, there were no scribal markings to directly indicate this separation. This apparently confused Greek speaking Christians who adopted the Septuagint as their Old Testament – particularly after about 100 AD when subsequent copies of the Septuagint were made by Christian scribes for a non-Jewish audience.

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[187] Augustine, *De Doctrina*, II.11.

[188] Augustine even advised Jerome to stick to the Septuagint (LXX) rather than translating the OT from the Hebrew.

A number of apocryphal writings were given credence by writers of the early Christian church including: Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, and Augustine.[189] Such stalwarts of the faith as Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement quoted from the Apocrypha as Scripture.[190] However, other early notable theologians including Origen and Eusebius identified the Apocrypha as separate and distinct from the Old Testament.

The great defender of the Nicene Creed, Athanasius, made clear his opposition to inclusion of apocryphal documents with the canon. Writing in 367 AD, Athanasius expounds in this way:

> But for the sake of greater accuracy I add, being constrained to write, that there are also other books besides these, which have not been put in the canon, but have been appointed by the Fathers as reading-matter for those who have just come forward and which to be instructed in the doctrine of piety: the Wisdom of Solomon, the Wisdom of Sirach, Esther, Judith, Tobias, the so-called Teaching [Didache] of the Apostles, and the Shepherd. And although, beloved, the former are in the canon and the latter serve as reading matter, *yet mention is nowhere made of the apocrypha; rather they are a fabrication of the heretics*, who write them down when it pleases them and generously assign to them an early date of composition in order that they may be able to draw upon them as supposedly ancient writings and have in them occasion to deceive the guileless.[191]

As author of the Latin *Vulgate*, St. Jerome also apparently opposed recognition of the Apocrypha as part of the OT canon, making notations in the Vulgate to that effect. In commenting on this question, Jerome noted that: "… the other books (i.e. Apocrypha) which the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth not apply them to establish any doctrine."[192]

However, later editions failed to maintain Jerome's distinction so that, over time, the Vulgate came to more directly incorporate these additional writings. Catholic confusion over the rightful status of the Apocrypha was further clouded by Augustine who advocated for canonicity of some apocryphal works – including Tobias, Esther, Judith and two books purportedly written by Jesus the son of Sirach and the two books of the Maccabees.[193] Specifically arguing for the Maccabees, Augustine writes:

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[189] In addition to the 14-15 works of the Apocrypha (depending on numbering), there are another 18 books of Pseudepigraphia, written in the inter-testament period between the OT and NT. This includes the book of I Enoch later quoted by the NT book of Jude.

[190] The Synod of Hippo (393 AD) authorized the Apocrypha as canonical.

[191] Athanasius, *39th Festal Letter.*

[192] Also noted is that the term "Vulgate" was not applied to Jerome's translation until about the 13th century.

[193] Augustine, *De Doctrina*, II.8.

> For by consulting the Gospel we learn that Christ is the Truth. From this time, when the temple was rebuilt, down to the time of Aristobulus, the Jews had not kings but princes; and the reckoning of their dates is found, not in the Holy Scriptures which is called canonical, but in others, among which are the works of the Maccabees. These are *held as canonical, not by the Jews, but by the Church*, on account of the extreme and wonderful sufferings of certain martyrs, who, before Christ had come in the flesh, contended for the law of God even unto death, and endured most grevious and horrible evils.[194]

Augustine essentially argued that the Jewish determinations of canonicity should, at least in this instance, be overridden by the Christian church. However, Augustine drew the line at other books including Enoch of the so-called Pseudipigraphia. This exclusion occurs even though Enoch is specifically referred to by the New Testament epistle of Jude. In this instance, Augustine's argument is as follows:

> What of Enoch, the seventh from Adam? Does not the canonical epistle of the Apostle Jude declare that he prophesied? But the writings of these men could not be held as authoritative either among the Jews or us, on account of their too great antiquity, which made it seem needful to regard them with suspicion, lest false things should be set forth instead of true.[195]

In the end, the OT Apocrypha would remain in most Catholic Bibles. However, these works subsequently have been excluded from most Protestant sources.

The Apocrypha was accepted as canon by the Council of Trent (in 1545-1564) and as Deutero-Canon by the Vatican Council of 1870.[196] The only Apocryphal books not accepted by the Roman Catholic Church after the Reformation were I/II Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh.

Questions about the Apocrypha resurfaced during the period of the Reformation. Martin Luther did not regard the Apocrypha as equal to the Holy Scriptures. However, he did view this collection as profitable to read and valuable for personal edification.

Although the King James version of 1611 included the Apocrypha, Protestant churches subsequently have generally excluded these books – including exclusions from most contemporary King James Bibles.

For example, the Westminster Confession of 1647 specifically rejected the Apocrypha as part of the OT canon. However, the Apocrypha are included within the biblical text of the

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[194] Augustine, *The City of God*, XVIII. 36.

[195] Augustine, *the City of God*, XVIII. 38.

[196] Catholic doctrines that have been related to the Apocrypha include the concepts of Purgatory, merit for good works, and prayers for the dead.

Church of England. Rather than ascribing canonical status, the Church of England assigns these writings deutero-canonical rank.

### *Christianity & the Hebrew Scriptures*

As noted at the outset of this book, we began with the New Testament itself – as a context for consideration of the earlier OT. It is now time to more specifically consider what NT writers had to say about the Hebrew scriptures. For the gospel writers, the apostle Paul and the authors of other New Testament books refer repeatedly to back to what was already generally considered as Scripture.

This discussion reviews the earliest known Christian compilations of what became known as the Old Testament writings – leading to a combined OT/NT canon. We then conclude by considering translations from the medieval to modern era – including emerging themes of greater diversity in translation and expression.

***New Testament References to OT Scriptures:*** Consistent with the thesis that the New Testament influences interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures, we focus on NT references to the OT. And what we find is noteworthy, in at least three respects:

- Many, but by no means all, of the OT books are directly quoted in the NT.
- Jesus quotes from just a handful of OT documents.
- The Hebrew Scriptures not cited in the NT tend to be those that were: (a) also more controversial with Jewish scholars; and/or (b) more strident (i.e. *at the edge*) in terms of their perspective on the divine.

The following chart provides a compilation of New Testament verses in which scriptures from the Hebrew Old Testament are quoted. Also noted is their respective placement or ordering. References in **bold** indicate quotations directly attributed to Jesus.[197]

**New Testament References to the Hebrew Scriptures (OT)**

| OT Book | New Testament Reference |
|---|---|
| **Genesis** | Matthew 2:18, **19:4-5, Mark 10:6, 10:8,** Acts 3:25, 7:3, 7:7, Romans 4:3, 4:17, 4:18, 9:12, I Corinthians 6:16, 15:45, II Corinthians 4:6, Galatians 3:6, 3:8, 3:16, 4:30, Ephesians 5:31, Hebrews 4:4, 6:14, 11:18, James 2:23. |
| **Exodus** | **Matthew 5:21, 5:27, 5:31, 5:38, 15:4, 19:19, 22:32, Mark 7:10, 10:19, 12:26,** Luke 2:23, **18:20, 20:37,** John 6:31, 19:36, Acts 7:28, 7:32, 7:34, 7:40, 23:5, Romans 7:7, 9:15, 9;17, 13:9, I Corinthians 10:7, II Corinthians 8:15, Hebrews 8:5, 9:20, 12:20, James 2:11. |
| **Leviticus** | **Matthew 5:33, 5:43, 19:19, 22:39, Mark 12:31,** Luke 2:24, 10:27, Romans 10:5, 13:9, II Corinthians 6:16, Galatians 3:12, 5:14, James 2:8, I Peter 1:16. |
| **Numbers** | **Matthew 5:33,** II Timothy 2:19 (Septuagint). |

[197] Where there are references to multiple OT passages, the earliest reference is selected. For example, the 10 commandments are found in both Exodus and Deuteronomy. A NT reference to one of the commandments is referenced back to Exodus.

| OT Book | New Testament Reference |
|---|---|
| **Deuteronomy** | **Matthew 4:4, 4:7, 4:10, 4:31, 18:16, 22:37, Mark 12:30, Luke 4:4, 4:8, 4:12,** 10:27, Acts 3:22-23, 7:37, Romans 10:6-8, 10:19, 15:10, I Corinthians 5:13, 9:9, II Corinthians 13:1, Galatians 3:10, 3:13, Ephesians 6:3, I Timothy 5:18, Hebrews 1:6, 10:30, 12:21, 12:29, 13:5. |
| **Joshua** | -- |
| **Judges** | -- |
| **Ruth** | -- |
| **I Samuel** | -- |
| **II Samuel** | Matthew 2:6, Romans 15:9, II Corinthians 6:18, Hebrews 1:5. |
| **I Kings** | Romans 11:3, 11:4. |
| **II Kings** | -- |
| **I Chronicles** | Hebrews 1:5 (also in II Samuel). |
| **II Chronicles** | -- |
| **Ezra** | -- |
| **Nehemiah** | -- |
| **Esther** | -- |
| **Job** | Romans 11:35, I Corinthians 3:19,. |
| **Psalms** | Matthew 4:6, **5:5,** 13:35, 21:9, **21:16, 21:42, 22:44, 23:39,** 26:35(?), **27:46, Mark 11:9, 12:10-11, 12:36,** Luke 4:10-11, **13:35,** 19:38, **20:17, 20:43,** John 2:17, **10:34,** 12:13, **12:18, 15:25,** 19:24, Acts 1:20, 2:25-28, 2:34-35, 4:11, 4:25-26, 13:33, 13:35, Romans 2:6, 4:7-8, 8:36, 10:18, 11:9-10, 15:3, 15:11, I Corinthians 3:20, 10:26, 14:21, 15:32, 15:54, II Corinthians 4:13, 9:9, Ephesians 4:8, 4:26, Hebrews 1:5, 1:7, 1:8-9, 1:10-12, 1:13, 2:6-8, 2:12, 3:7-11, 3:15, 4:3, 4:7, 5:5, 5:6, 7:17/21, 10:5-7, I Peter 2:7, 3:10-12, **Revelation 2:27,** 19:15. |
| **Proverbs** | Romans 2:6 (similar to Psalms), 12:20, Hebrews 12:5-6, 12:13, James 4:6, I Peter 4:18, 5:5, II Peter 2:22. |
| **Ecclesiastes** | -- |
| **Song of Songs** | -- |
| **Isaiah** | Matthew 1:23, 3:3, 4:15-16, 8:17, 12:18-21, **13:14-15, 15:8-9, 21:13, 24:29,** Mark 1:3, **4:12, 7:6-7, 9:48, Mark 11:17, 13:25,** 15:27?, Luke 3:4-6, **4:18-19, 8:10, 19:46, 20:37,** John 1:23, **6:45,** 12:38, 12:40, Acts 7:49-50, 8:32-33, 13:34, 13:47, 28:26-27, Romans 9:20, 9:27-28, 9:29, 9:33, 10:11, 10:15, 10:16, 10:20, 10:21, 11:26-27, 11:34, 12:19, 14:11, 15:12, 15:21, I Corinthians 1:19, 2:9, 2:16, 14:21, II Corinthians 6:2, 6:17, Galatians 4:27, Hebrews 2:13, 13:6, I Peter 1:24-25, 2:6, 2:8, 2:22, 3:14. |
| **Jeremiah** | Matthew 2:18-19, **21:13, 21:16,** 27:9-10, **Mark 11:17, Luke 19:46,** I Corinthians 1:31, II Corinthians 10:17, Hebrews 8:8-12, 10:16, 10:17. |
| **Lamentations** | -- |
| **Ezekiel** | II Corinthians 6:16 (also quoted from Leviticus and Jeremiah), 6:17 (also quoted in Isaiah). |
| **Daniel** | **Matthew 24:15, Mark 13:14,** Revelation 1:13, 14:14. |
| **Hosea** | Matthew 2:15, **9:13, 12:7, Luke 23:30,** Romans 9:25, 9:26, I Corinthians 15:55. |
| **Joel** | Acts 2:17-21, Romans 10:13. |
| **Amos** | Acts 7:42-43, 15:16-18. |
| **Obadiah** | -- |
| **Jonah** | -- |
| **Micah** | Matthew 2:6, **10:35-36.** |
| **Nahum** | -- |
| **Habakkuk** | **Luke 19:40,** Acts 13:41, Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:37-38. |
| **Zephaniah** | -- |
| **Haggai** | Hebrews 12:26. |
| **Zechariah** | Matthew 21:5, **26:31, Mark 14:27,** John 12:15, 19:37. |

| OT Book | New Testament Reference |
|---|---|
| **Malachi** | **Matthew 11:10,** Mark 1:2, **Luke 7:27,** Romans 9:13. |

Of the 39 books of the current and commonly accepted Old Testament (excluding Apocrypha), 21 are clearly quoted in the New Testament. This leaves 18 OT books (or just under one-half) for which there is no clear and unique New Testament reference.[198]

The most commonly referenced OT books are the five books of the Pentateuch (with nearly 100 NT citations). From the Pentateuch, most frequently referenced are Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy.

Next most quoted is Psalms (with over 65 citations) followed by Isaiah (at nearly 60). No other OT book is cited in the NT more than 10 times.

Quotes attributed to Jesus by NT writers come from only 14 of the 39 OT books. Jesus draws from all five books of the Pentateuch (particularly Exodus and Deuteronomy). Other preferred sources he quoted frequently were the Psalms and Isaiah.

No more than four quotes each can be attributed to Jeremiah, Daniel, Hosea, Micah, Habakkuk, Zechariah and Malachi. While the number of references is small, it is noteworthy that Jesus did quote from several of what are regarded as the minor prophets.

OT books not directly cited anywhere in the NT tend to fall into at least one of two categories:

- *Books which were also questioned by (non-Christian) Jewish sources.* These include works such as Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Lamentations. Two documents were written about women, two are attributed to Solomon and one to Jeremiah. Also suspect to Jewish compilers were the apocalyptic visions of Ezekiel.[199]
- *Manuscripts which may have been viewed as more extreme in viewpoint.* Included in this category are the writings of Ezra including I/II Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. The *Chronicler* advocated a return to Jewish purity and a more harsh portrayal of God. Also not referenced are Joshua and Judges, both of which similarly portray an extraordinarily warlike Jehovah – ordering the total elimination of pagan cultures in conflict with the emerging Israelite nation-state.

[198] Included in the list of 18 are I Chronicles and Ezekiel, for which parallel citations are found in other OT books.

[199] The only OT book questioned by Jewish compilers of the early AD period but cited by the NT is Proverbs.

> Prophetic scriptures not directly quoted are the rantings of Jonah together with other lesser prophets of Obadiah, Nahum and Zephaniah.[200]

In summary, the New Testament canon clearly emphasizes some OT books, while de-emphasizing or not mentioning others. OT books not mentioned by the NT appear to be more suspect to non-Christians as well. For both Jewish scholars and early Christians, some writings of the Hebrew scriptures had significant value; others apparently were of less importance.

***Christian OT Compilations:*** In the second century after Christ, Melito (Bishop of Sardis) made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and compiled a list of Old Testament books. In a letter from *The Petition,* Melito lists the books that he has concluded are recognized works of the Old Testament:

> Melito to Onesimus, his brother in Christ, greeting. In your devotion to the word you have repeatedly asked for extracts from the Law and the Prophets regarding the Saviour and the whole of our Faith, and you also wished to learn the precise facts about the ancient books, *particularly their number and order*. I was most anxious to do this for you, knowing your devotion to the Faith and eagerness to learn about the word, and how in your yearning for God you value these things more than all else, as you strive with might and main to win eternal salvation. So when I visited the east and arrived *at the place 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. Here are the names.
>
> > Five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, Deuteronomy;
> > Joshua son of Nun, Judges, Ruth;
> > Kings (four books),[201] Chronicles (two);
> > The Psalms of David;
> > Solomon's Proverbs (Wisdom) Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs;
> > Job;
> > Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Twelve in a single book, Daniel, Ezekiel;
> > Ezra.
>
> From these I have taken the extracts arranged in six books.[202]

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[200] However, in two of the Gospels (Matthew and Luke), Jesus refers to Jonah's experience with the whale and/or Nineveh. Joshua is identified as is Ruth (in Matthew's genealogy). Matthew 16:3-4 refers to the "sign of Jonah."

[201] This listing of Kings includes I and II Samuel.

[202] As cited by Eusebius, *The History of the Church,* 4.26.

Including the "Twelve in a single book" as the minor prophets, Melito's list essentially covered 36 books out of the current 39. Excluded from Melito's list were Nehemiah, Esther and Lamentations.

Somewhat later, in the 3rd century AD the Christian theologian Origen composed the *Hexapla* and *Tetrapla*. This document compared six and four OT manuscripts side-by-side, respectively. The six columns of the Hexapla compared:

- The Hebrew text
- The Hebrew text expressed in Greek characters
- The Greek text of Aquila
- Symmachus[203]
- The Septuagint
- Teodotion.[204]

Origen's corrected version of the Septuagint was called the *Hexaplar*. His efforts to recover previously lost and discarded manuscripts bordered on the extraordinary, as observed by Eusebius, who wrote:

> So meticulous was the scrutiny to which Origen subjected the Scriptural books that he even mastered the Hebrew language, and secured for himself a copy, in the actual Hebrew script, of the original documents circulating among the Jews. Moreover, he *hunted out* the published translations of the Holy Writ other than the Septuagint, and in addition to the versions in common use – those of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion – he discovered several alternative translations. These had been *lost for many years* – I don't know where – but he hunted them out of their hiding-places and brought them to light. These were *wrapped in mystery*, and he had no idea who wrote them: the only thing he could say was that he found one at Nicopolis near Actium and another at some similar place.[205]

After Origen, two other attempts were made to revise the Septuagint. One attempt was the work of Lucian, a presbyter of Antioch in the fourth century. Hesychius, an Egyptian bishop, made another revision or recension.

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[203] Symmachus was an Ebionite, supportive of maintaining Jewish law and particularly opposed to the Gospel of Matthew. Eusebius regards Symmachus as a heretic.

[204] The *Tetrapla* contained only the last four columns of the *Hexapla*. The *Hexapla* itself is said never to have been copied; the only remains are fragmentary. The *Hexaplar* was copied about half a century later by Pamphilus and Eusebius of Caesarea.

[205] Eusebius, *The History of the Church,* 6.16.

These two revised versions were widely used in the Eastern churches. However, even with these attempted revisions, the Septuagint still was generally regarded by these Eastern churches as authentic scripture.[206]

***Toward a Christianized OT & NT Canon:*** Much of the focus by the early church was on identifying and compiling a list of writings that could be regarded as authentic to Christian belief – as the New Testament. There appears to have been less attention given by Christians to ascertaining a similar canon for the Hebrew Scriptures. Up to about the time of Constantine's conversion, much of the OT related work was left to Jewish sources.

However, by the fourth century the concept of a complete Bible encompassing both Old and New Testaments had come to the fore. Undoubtedly, Emperor Constantine's elevation of Christianity from persecuted cult to official state religion had much to do with this new interest.

In any event, the concept of a Christian "canon" covering both Old and New Testament writings was explicitly described by Athanasius, prime defender of the Nicene Creed, in his Easter (or Festal) letter of 367 AD.

***Diversity in Expression:*** By the time of Christ, Jewish targums (or "translations") had been written in Aramaic as paraphrases of the OT Hebrew. On occasion, it is the Targum that is quoted in the NT rather than an older Hebrew text. For example, the quotation in Romans 12:19 of "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," corresponds most closely to the Targum translation of Deuteronomy 32:35 rather than to either the Hebrew scriptures (MT) or Septuagint.[207]

The Septuagint remains the official OT of the Greek Orthodox church. In contrast, Catholic and Protestant versions both rely more on the Jewish Hebrew texts of ben Asher and Jacob ben Chayyim. The ben Chayyim text was first published in 1524-25 and was the version used by translators of the King James less than a century later.

Translations in languages other than Greek and Latin existed fairly early. For example, about AD 360 Bishop Ulfilas, "the apostle to the Goths," led his converts south of the Danube to settle in what is now Bulgaria. There he translated the Bible into their language.

***Standardizing the Translations:*** With the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire in the first part of the fourth century, greater efforts were made to standardize a common set of Old and New Testament scriptures. The task of producing

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[206] Doctrinal differences of the Eastern church (for example those connected with the Arian controversy) reportedly become more understandable with the Septuagint.

[207] The NRSV version of Deuteronomy 32:35 reads: "*Vengeance is mine*, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; because the day of their calamity is at hand, their doom comes swiftly."

one standard Latin Bible (the Vulgate) to replace numerous competing translations was entrusted by Damasus, bishop of Rome (366–384), to Jerome, his secretary.

Jerome reportedly undertook the task unwillingly, knowing that replacing an old version with a new would cause offense, even if the new proved to be better. Writing about the New Testament portion of his Vulgate, Jerome asked the question:

> Why not go back to the original Greek and correct the mistakes introduced by inaccurate translators and the blundering alternations of confident but ignorant critics and, further, all that has been inserted or changed by copyists more asleep than awake?[208]

Jerome began with a revision of the gospels, followed by the Psalms. After completing the entire New Testament, Jerome mastered the Hebrew language in order to effect a new translation of the Old Testament (previously reliant on the Greek Septuagint) into Latin. The entire Vulgate was completed about 405 AD.

Despite the best efforts of the now pre-eminent Catholic church, some divergence continued. This involved continuing questions over how to handle the Apocrypha (previously noted) and an alternative eastern set of scriptures.

For example, a Syriac Peshitta (or "common" version) was completed *c.* 400. It is believed that this Bible was carried into India and parts of China. The earliest forms of the Bible in the languages of Armenia and Georgia also were based on the Syriac.

***Preserving the Hebrew OT Manuscripts:*** The Hebrew Scriptures were believed to have been transmitted (after initial authorship) by scribes copying and then re-copying the original text in successive generations. A possible reconciliation of the Babylonian, Samaritan and Septuagint texts may have occurred by the 2nd century, though this is uncertain.

By about the sixth century AD, scribal authority had been replaced by a group known as Masoretes – in major centers including Babylonia, Palestine and Tiberias. By the 10th century, the ben Asher family of Tiberias gained ascendancy.[209] By the 12th century, the ben Asher text was the primary (perhaps only) recognized form of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The first Rabbinic Bible was printed by Daniel Bomberg in 1516-17, followed by the Jacob ben Chayyim edition in 1524-25 (also published by Bomberg).[210] Bomberg was a Christian printer operating in Venice who agreed to publish ben Chayyim's work after

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[208] As cited by John Romer, *Testament, op. cit.,* p. 240.

[209] The oldest known ben Asher manuscript is the Leningrad Manuscript dated to about 1008 AD.

[210] His last name has also been spelled ben Khayim.

the venerable Jewish scholar had been expelled from Tunis. As ben Chayyim later would wryly say, "God sent me a highly distinguished and pious Christian."[211]

Bomberg asked ben Chayyim to review and correct the mistakes with Bomberg's first Hebrew Bible.[212] So Bomberg's second edition was published under the direction of Jacob ben Chayyim – becoming the standard printed text of the Hebrew Bible.

***Late Medieval Translations:*** Until the beginning of the 16th century, all Bibles in western Europe were based on the Vulgate.[213] The first dated set of printed Hebrew scriptures was printed in about 1477.[214]

Martin Luther translated the NT from Greek to German and the OT from Hebrew manuscripts (separate from the Vulgate) to German. William Tyndale accomplished much the same for the English – as a translation from the Latin Vulgate.

During this same time period, the Geneva Bible was composed (1560). This was the first English Bible to be translated from the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.

A generation before the appearance of the King James Bible, translation of an *English version* for Roman Catholics was undertaken by the faculty of the English College at Douai, France. Unlike the Geneva Bible, which was translated from the original languages, the Douai (or Douay) Bible was translated directly from the Latin Vulgate.

The translator of the Douai Bible was Gregory Martin, formerly an Oxford scholar, who translated two chapters a day until the project was finished. Each section was then revised by two of his colleagues.

The New Testament portion of this version was issued in 1582 and the Old Testament in 1609–10.[215] Until 1945, the Douai version as refined by Challoner remained the only version of the Bible officially sanctioned for English-speaking Catholics.

***Versification:*** OT subdivision into chapters first occurred with the Latin Bible by Stephen Langdon (1150-1228). Versification of the Hebrew Scriptures is based on the

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[211] As quoted in John Romer, *Testament* (New York, Henry Holt & Company), 1993, p. 154.

[212] Bomberg asked ben Chayyim "… to correct the mistakes and purify the style and examine the works till they are as refined silver and purified gold," *op. cit.*

[213] For example, Wycliffe's English translation (of 1380-1384) was from the Latin Vulgate.

[214] In 1495, a Hebrew Bible small enough to be carried in a bag or pocket was printed. Martin Luther used this text in making his German OT translation.

[215] The Douai Bible was scholarly and accurate, but the English style and vocabulary were modeled on Latin usage. It would not have become popular among the Catholic laity if it had not been for the work of Richard Challoner (1691–1781), who revised it thoroughly between 1749 and 1772. What has generally been called the Douai Bible since Challoner's day is in fact the Douai Bible as revised by Challoner. In several respects it was a new version.

work of a 15th century Jewish scholar, edited by Jacob ben Hayyim ibn Adonijah and published in Venice in 1524.

New Testament versification was completed by the Parisian printer Stephanus in 1551 A resulting printed version of the Latin Bible in 1551 was the first to contain both testaments in their current chapter and verse form.

***The King James Bible:*** Shortly after James VI of Scotland ascended the throne of England as James I (1603), he convened a conference to settle matters under dispute in the Church of England. An important result of this conference was approval to begin work on the King James Version of the English Bible (KJV).

A group of scholars, divided into six teams, was appointed to undertake the work of preparing the new version. Three teams worked on the Old Testament; two were responsible for the New Testament; and one worked on the Apocrypha. Although fifty-four men were nominated, only forty-seven were known to have taken part in the work of translation.

For the Old Testament, scholars relied primarily upon ben Chayyim's edition of the ben Asher text; for the New Testament, they relied upon the Greek text of Erasmus and a bilingual Greek-and-Latin text of the sixth century, found by Theodore Beza.[216]

KJV scholars extensively used the 1602 edition of the Bishops' Bible as a basis for their revision, but they had access to many other versions and helps, as well as the texts in the original biblical languages.

When the six groups had completed their task, a committee of twelve reviewed the final draft. This original authorized version also included the apocrypha.

Because King James had authorized this project, the new Bible became known as the "Authorized Version." First published in 1611, the King James was subsequently revised in 1615, 1629, 1638, and 1762. The 1762 revision is what most people now know as the King James Version.

***Modern Translations:*** The 19th and 20th centuries have been accompanied by an expanding number of OT and NT revisions for the English language. Some have involved more modern language usage but have retained a relatively literal style of translation from early Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek manuscripts. The Revised Standard and New Revised Standard Versions fall into this category.

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[216] James I. Packer, Merrill C. Tenney and William White, Jr., editors, *Nelson's illustrated manners and customs of the Bible [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1995.

Others have attempted to convert terms no longer readily understood into a more contemporary context and linguistic style. These follow a technique of dynamic equivalence. The New International Version would be an example of this style.

Yet others are paraphrases of earlier versions offering easier reading, often known as free translations. Books such as The Living Bible fit this category.

Most translations of the 20th century typically have relied on the Masoretic Text supplemented by other recently discovered manuscripts. One source lists 107 English translations alone that have appeared from 1881 to 1973.[217]

A particular concern of modern day translators has been the correct interpretation of Hebrew vowel markings that can dramatically change word meanings. For example, the divine name for God, YHWH (also known as the *Tetragrammaton),* consists only of consonants.

With greater accessibility of old manuscripts including discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (in 1947), it has been possible to validate or revise by comparison to a wider range of texts. Recent translations have included:

- The Revised Standard Version (RSV) started in 1929 and completed with both NT and OT translations in 1952. Although this is one of the most consistent translations ever made into English and eminently readable, the RSV met a mixed response.[218]
- The New King James Version (NKJV) relies on the older Leningrad Manuscript as referenced in *Biblia Hebraica* (1937 edition). Also consulted are the Greek Septuagint and Latin Vulgate.
- The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) also relies on the *Biblia Hebraica* coupled with older OT material from the Dead Sea Scrolls and some Greek texts. The New International Version (NIV) is perhaps the most eclectic, relying on similar material as the NRSV. However, the NIV also includes consultation of other early manuscripts including the Septuagint, Aquila, Symmachus and Thodotion, the Vulgate, the Syriac Peshitta, the Targums, and the *Juxta Hebraica* of Jerome for the Psalms. The NIV was completed in 1978 and has been billed as the first completely new translation of the Bible.

***Consequences of New Testament Theology for Old Testament Canon:*** Exclusion of diverse Christian thought is a primary consequence resulting from the process of NT canonization. For the process of OT canonization, NT politics again play a central role.

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[217] Source is John M. Skilton as referenced in *Nelson's illustrated manners,* op cit.

[218] The RSV has been criticized for two primary reasons: (a) it altered the wording of many classic passages; and (b) it chose new readings for a number of passages with far-reaching theological implications.

A major impetus for forming a Jewish OT canon came from the threat that upstart Christianity posed for its older Jewish counterparts. Major sources of confusion in OT canonization and interpretation – involving the Septuagint and Apocrypha – appear to be rooted primarily in Christian misunderstandings. Other issues of interpretation have often result from poor Christian translations of the Hebrew scriptures.

Although Christianity has muddied the waters of the Hebrew scriptures, Christians have also (perhaps inadvertently) found themselves in league with their Jewish brethren in adopting a remarkably similar OT canon. Both the Catholic Vulgate and Protestant King James versions have relied on Jewish OT manuscripts.

While not widely publicized, Judaism and Christianity share similar views as to OT books of primary versus secondary importance – including references most often cited by Jesus. Perhaps the best sign of this interdependence came in 1524-25, when a Christian became the first to print a rabbinic set of Hebrew scriptures. One century later, this text became the primary source of OT material for the King James Bible.

## *Old Testament Supplement. Comparative Books of the Old Testament*

The following chart provides a comparison of the books included by four different versions of the Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament. Also noted is their respective placement or ordering.

| **Old Testament Book (Ordered as with the King James (KJV))** | **Septuagint (Greek)**[219] | **Jewish Tanak**[220] | **Roman Catholic**[221] | **King James**[222] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Year of Document (Approximate)*** | 3rd century BC + | 2nd – 6th century AD | 1609-1610 | 1611 |
| ***# of Books (without & with Apocrypha)*** | 39/54 | 24/39 | 46[223] | 39/53 |
| ***Hebrew Scriptures:*** | | | | |
| **Genesis** | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| **Exodus** | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| **Leviticus** | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| **Numbers** | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| **Deuteronomy** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| **Joshua** | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| **Judges** | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **Ruth** | 8 | 17 | 8 | 8 |
| **I Samuel**[224] | 9 | 8a | 9 | 9 |
| **II Samuel** | 10 | 8b | 10 | 10 |
| **I Kings** | 11 | 9a | 11 | 11 |
| **II Kings** | 12 | 9b | 12 | 12 |
| **I Chronicles** | 13 | 24a | 13[225] | 13 |
| **II Chronicles** | 14 | 24b | 14 | 14 |
| **Ezra** | 15 | 23a | 15[226] | 15 |

[219] A Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures made at Alexandria by about 70 Jewish scholars. Listing is from Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, originally published by Samuel Bagster & Sons, Ltd., London, 1851.

[220] The 24 books become 39 if combinations are listed separately according to common conventions. The first 5 books are referred to as The Law (or Torah), the next 21 as The Prophets, and the last 13 as The Writings. Listing is from Walter A. Elwell, ed. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker), 1988.

[221] Douai-Confraternity Version. In the subsequent Revised Standard Version of the Catholic Bible, the apocryphal portions are shifted to the Apocrypha so that the order of the first 39 books becomes identical with that of the Protestant KJV.

[222] The 1611 authorized King James Version included Apocrypha; these have been deleted with most modern KJV versions.

[223] With the Revised Standard Version, the number of OT books is the same as for the KJV, with the other 7 books plus additions to Esther and Daniel contained in a separate Apocrypha.

[224] I/II Samuel are labeled as First and Second books of Kings, respectively (in both the Septuagint and Roman Catholic OT).

[225] I/II Chronicles are labeled as First and Second books of Paraliponenon, respectively.

| Old Testament Book (Ordered as with the King James (KJV)) | Septuagint (Greek)[219] | Jewish Tanak[220] | Roman Catholic[221] | King James[222] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Nehemiah** | 16 | 23b | 16 | 16 |
| **Esther** | 17 | 21 | 19[227] | 17 |
| **Job** | 18 | 15 | 20 | 18 |
| **Psalms** | 19 | 14 | 21 | 19 |
| **Proverbs** | 20 | 16 | 22 | 20 |
| **Ecclesiastes** | 21 | 19 | 23 | 21 |
| **Song of Songs** | 22 | 18 | 24[228] | 22 |
| **Isaiah** | 23 | 10 | | 23 |
| **Jeremiah** | 24 | 11 | 28 | 24 |
| **Lamentations** | 25 | 20 | 29 | 25 |
| **Ezekiel** | 26 | 12 | 31 | 26 |
| **Daniel** | 27 | 22 | 32[229] | 27 |
| **Hosea** | 28 | 13a | 33 | 28 |
| **Joel** | 29 | 13b | 34 | 29 |
| **Amos** | 30 | 13c | 35 | 30 |
| **Obadiah** | 31 | 13d | 36 | 31 |
| **Jonah** | 32 | 13e | 37 | 32 |
| **Micah** | 33 | 13f | 38 | 33 |
| **Nahum** | 34 | 13g | 39 | 34 |
| **Habakkuk** | 35 | 13h | 40 | 35 |
| **Zephaniah** | 36 | 13I | 41 | 36 |
| **Haggai** | 37 | 13j | 42 | 37 |
| **Zechariah** | 38 | 13k | 43 | 38 |
| **Malachi** | 39 | 13l | 44 | 39 |
| ***Apocryphal / Deuterocanonical:***[230] | | | | |
| **I Esdras** | 40 | | | 42 |
| **II Esdras** | | | | 46 |
| **Tobit (Tobias)** | 41 | | 17 | 52 |
| **Judith** | 42 | | 18 | 41 |
| **Wisdom of Solomon** | 43 | | 25 | 49 |
| **Ecclesiasticus**[231] | 44 | | 26 | 48 |
| **Baruch** | 45 | | 30 | 50 |
| **Epistle of Jeremiah** | 46 | | | |
| **Song of the Three Children (Additions to Daniel)** | 47 | | | 40 |

[226] Ezra and Nehemiah are labeled as the First and Second books of Esdras, respectively.

[227] Includes The Additions.

[228] Labeled as Canticle of Canticles.

[229] Includes the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon.

[230] Deutero-Canonical means secondary to the canon. While the Roman church assigns these books to the canon, the Anglican gives the Apocrypha deutero-canonical rank.

[231] Also known as the Wisdom of the Son of Sirach.

| Old Testament Book (Ordered as with the King James (KJV)) | Septuagint (Greek)[219] | Jewish Tanak[220] | Roman Catholic[221] | King James[222] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Susanna** | 48 | | | 44 |
| **Bel and the Dragon** | 49 | | | 53 |
| **I Maccabees** | 50 | | 45 | 51 |
| **II Maccabees** | 51 | | 46 | 45 |
| **III Maccabees** | 52 | | | |
| **IV Maccabees** | 53 | | | |
| **Prayer of Manasseh** | 54 | | | 47 |
| **Additions to Esther** | | | | 43 |
| | | | | |

# IV. What of Canonicity?

All scripture is *inspired by God* and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.
– II Timothy 3:16-17

Fundamentalists argue that inspired scripture equals inerrant scripture; more liberal theologians suggest that inspired does not necessarily mean either inerrant or literal. Both sides miss the underlying question: *What is scripture?*

This is the bedrock question that we have been asking of what we know as the Holy Bible. Should the books that have been received be regarded as scripture? Are there other writings not included within the canon that could also be regarded as inspired scripture?

In short, should the canon remain closed?

This review suggests the answer is no. The case can be made that the canon remains open – for new information, for further argumentation, and quite possibly for multiple interpretations.

Consider this outline of a case for reconsideration:

- Both the Old and New Testaments were formed over long periods of time – via multiple writers and possibly additional editors.
- Notions of a set of Hebrew scriptures and a canonical New Testament arose in response to challenges from so-called "heretics" – those operating outside the orthodox traditions, beliefs and practices of Jewish and early Christian communities, respectively.
- Within both Jewish and Christian communities, questions have been raised time and again by respected figures of their time – challenging the orthodoxy that led to today's Holy Bible.

With these overview observations in mind, it is useful to now examine the case for reconsideration, first, of the New Testament canon. We then proceed to address similar questions for the Old Testament.

### *Should the New Testament Canon Remain Closed?*

Is the door closed on the New Testament? Are the books included all equally worthy? Are there other writings that should be reconsidered for possible inclusion within a revised New Testament canon?

These are questions that are rarely explored by the modern church – whether conservative or liberal. They also are questions that have attracted scant attention from scholars and critics.

Yet, reconsideration may be warranted – for at least two reasons:

- Despite the apparent near consensus convergence on a canon over 1,600 years ago, questions remain. These questions were raised most forcefully during the Protestant Reformation; there are even a few die-hards willing to raise such questions today.[232]
- Christian faith and practice are inextricably bound to what has been received as inspired scripture. If the scripture changes, our views of who Jesus was and what he meant also may change. And so may our day-to-day lives.

Before moving to the bigger question about implications for today, let's briefly consider perspectives of Reformation radicals and a handful of modern thinkers.

***Reformation Perspectives:*** During the Protestant Reformation, questions about the reliability and authenticity of some New Testament writings were raised by none other than Martin Luther. This reformation leader explicitly stated that the books of Hebrews, James (in particular), Jude and Revelation were of inferior worth, not belonging to "the true and certain *chief books* of the New Testament."[233]

Luther's thoughts were echoed by others of his time – even from within the Catholic church itself.[234] However, these opinions were to be quickly and forcefully addressed.

In response, Biblical content was made an absolute article of Faith by the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent in 1546.[235] The Vulgate was declared to be "authentic." And, in its ruling, the Council proclaimed:

> If, however, anyone does not receive these books in their entirety, with all their parts, as they are accustomed to be read in the Catholic Church and are contained in the ancient Latin Vulgate *as sacred and canonical*, and knowingly and deliberately rejects the aforesaid traditions, let him be Anathema.

The Council of Trent was followed by a variety of confessional statements – explicitly recognizing a New Testament canon comprised of the same list of 27 books. These confessions reflected statements from both Catholic and Protestant churches. They include the French Confession of Faith (1559), the Belgic Confession (1561), and the Westminster Confession (1647).

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[232] An example of a conservative theologian who raises such questions is M. James Sawyer, Professor of Theology, Western Seminary, in *Evangelicals and the Canon of the New Testament,* www.bible.org/docs/theology/biblio/canon.htm, as of September 29, 2000.

[233] *Luther's Works*, 35:394.

[234] Cardinal Cajetan who opposed Luther at Augsburg expressed doubts about the canonicity of Hebrews, James, II/III John and Jude. Erasmus questioned James, Hebrews, II Peter and Revelation.

[235] The Council of Florence (1439-1443) rendered an opinion on the contents of the canon. However, as late as 1488, the Epistle to the Laodiceans was included by Alfric, archbishop of Canterbury, in the Bohemian Bible.

However, even today, there are holdouts – whether by intent or simple lack of resolution. The 39 Articles adopted by the Church of England in 1563 list the works of the Old Testament canon but omit any statement of a New Testament canon. Of greater note is the fact that no canon is specifically recognized to this date by Lutheran confessional statements.

***Post Modern Canon Perspectives:*** In the modern world of the early 21st century, detailed discussions of how the New Testament canon was formed are not readily found in popular religious literature. In part, this is because there is, as yet, no clear path to definitive acceptance of the current 27 New Testament books.

However, there are a few voices of questioning. Even from what might be regarded as fundamentalist or evangelistic circles, the need for theological and historical integrity can inspire second guessing – as exemplified by the following observation:

> The canon of the New Testament *was not closed historically* by the early church. Rather, its extent was debated until the Reformation. Even then, it was closed in a sectarian fashion. Therefore the question must be asked, is it then heresy for a person to question or reject a book of the present canon? There have been repeated reevaluations of the church's canon. This happened during the initial sifting period, and it is beginning to happen again now. In such instances the fringe books of the canon have been repeatedly questioned. If an individual believer should come to question or reject a book or books of the accepted canon, should that person be regarded as a heretic, or accepted as a brother whose opinions are not necessarily endorsed?[236]

Heretic or not, one who suggests that the canon requires re-evaluation in this new millennium runs the risk of, at the least, quizzical looks. Few have yet been willing to clearly and forcefully articulate the case.

***The Case for Reconsideration:*** The historical case for reconsideration rests on four points:

- The acknowledgement that New Testament works were *gradually collected;* they did not fall into place at one single point in time.
- The New Testament did not come into being through any formal ecclesiastical council, process of peer review or clearly divine process; rather, they *came to be regarded* as inspired scripture over time.
- There is more to the story than is suggested in saying that *no act of human authority imposed* a particular set of books on the rest of Christendom. Actually, the evidence suggests otherwise. Key figures in closing the canon were Athanasius, followed shortly by Jerome and Augustine. While there was no

[236] James M. Sawyer, Ph.D., *Evangelicals and the Canon of the New Testament* (San Jose, Western Seminary), from internet site www.Bible.org/docs/theology/biblio/canon.htm, as of September 29, 2000.

formal action, no one came forward any longer to question their mantle of authority in what had become a hierarchical, authoritarian church with increasingly little room for dissent.

- Despite the mantle of orthodox sanction, there have been *voices of dissent* along the way. Notables have included both Martin Luther and even Luther's opponent Erasmus. As noted, even among evangelicals, an occasional questioning voice may be heard from time to time.

Rather than ignoring these voices, is it time that these voices be heard and considered more actively?

***The Implications of Reconsideration:*** Re-opening the canon is disconcerting not simply because the *ground rules* for adding or deleting books would be difficult to establish. More fundamentally, reconsideration is unsettling because of the implications for Christian faith and orthodoxy.

Consider some of the practical questions to be addressed:

- Should the less widely accepted books of the early church – such as Hebrews, James, Revelation – be deleted? Or should *minority* views be preserved, though recognized as such?
- Should rejected books be reconsidered? If so, which ones? Do we go with the more popular books such as II Clement, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle to the Laodiceans? What about writings once widely condemned by the orthodox but recently rediscovered – most notably the Gospel of Thomas? Should these be included as added minority or heterodox viewpoints?
- What are the theological implications of de-emphasizing the apocalyptic visions of a II Peter or Revelation? No more hell? Conversely, what are the implications of allowing gnostic thought as represented by the Gospel of Thomas? A Jesus of mystery and wisdom?

Simply because the road is challenging is no reason not to proceed. As John's Jesus said, "… you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."[237]

### *What About the Old Testament?*

A question similar to that asked of the New Testament can be raised for the Hebrew Scriptures. Quite simply, that question is: should the Old Testament canon remain closed?

Issues surrounding a determination of what should be accepted versus rejected have been evident for about 1,600 years. Writing in *The City of God* from the depths of a collapsing 5th century Roman Empire, Saint Augustine well describes the difficulty:

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[237] John 8:32.

> For some (Old Testament) writings which are said to be theirs are quoted by those who, according to their own humour, loosely believe what they please. But the purity of the canon has not admitted these writings, not because the authority of these men who pleased God is rejected, but because they are not believed to be theirs. Nor ought it to appear strange if writings for which so great antiquity is claimed are held in suspicion, seeing that in the very history of the kings of Judah and Israel containing their acts, which we believe to belong to the canonical Scripture, very many things are mentioned which are not explained there, but are said to be found in other books which the prophets wrote, the very names of these prophets being sometimes given, and yet they are not found in the canon which the people of God received. Now I confess *the reason of this is hidden from me;* only I think that even those men, to whom certainly the Holy Spirit revealed those things which ought to be held as of religious authority, might write some things as men by historical diligence, and others as prophets by divine inspiration; and these things were so distinct, that it was judged that the former should be ascribed to themselves, but the latter to God speaking through them: and so the one pertained to the abundance of knowledge, the other to the authority of religion. In that authority the canon is guarded. So that, if any writings outside of it are now brought forward under the name of the ancient prophets, they cannot serve even as an aid to knowledge, because it is uncertain whether they are genuine; and on this account they are not trusted, especially those of them in which some things are found that are even contrary to the truth of the canonical books, so that it is quite apparent they do not belong to them.[238]

Despite a momentary lapse into bewilderment, Augustine does lay out some tests for ascertaining which books should be *excluded* from the Old Testament canon. Rules for exclusion appear to include:

- Prior exclusion from the Hebrew Scriptures by Jewish sources – though for Augustine this is not a hard and fast rule.
- A separation between writings that should be viewed as works of divine inspiration versus those deemed as of only historical interest – even if written by the same individual.
- Writings recently discovered – because of the difficulty in establishing authenticity.

### *What Is Scripture?*

And so we return to the fundamental question. What writings of Judaism and Christianity should be viewed as sacred – inspired by and imbued with the divine?

[238] Augustine, *The City of God*, XVIII. 38.

For both the Old and New Testaments, there is no *black box.* Scripture did not materialize *deus ex machina* (God out of a machine).

Rather, we know that writings viewed as scriptural were prepared over time by multiple authors. Decisions about which writings should be in or out of a canon were made by humans – and vigorously debated.

The very need for Hebrew Scriptures and then a New Testament was driven by heresy. Those who dared to challenge the orthodoxy of the day stimulated, first, the creation of a set of Hebrew scriptures and, later, a New Testament canon.

Is the process of deciding which writings – whether historical or contemporary – are inspired over? Or is there room to reinvigorate the discussion?

We close again with the words of Jesus as quoted by the non-canonical Gospel attributed to Thomas: "Those who seek should not stop seeking until they find, When they find, they will be disturbed. When they are disturbed, they will marvel, and will rule over all."[239]

The time to decide which writings are inspired – whether historical or contemporary – is not over. It is time to reinvigorate the discussion – so that we can again be disturbed, then marvel, then rule again in justice over an earthly kingdom entrusted to our good stewardship.

[239] Thomas 1-2.