

HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE

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Course Description

Purpose: Most Christians understand that the Bible they hold in their hands is the inspired Word of God. Yet very few have a general understanding of the origin of the Bible. The purpose of this class, therefore, is to show the student how the Bible came to be and why it can be accepted as the unerring, authoritative Word of God.

Issues covered: This eight-week course is devoted to the following issues:

- 1) Key terms relating to the Bible (Inspiration, Canonization, Transmission and Translation)
- 2) What the Bible was written on
- 3) Time period Bible was written in
- 4) Languages of the Bible
- 5) How the books of the Bible came to be recognized as Canon
- 6) Differences between the Hebrew, Protestant and Roman Catholic Bibles
- 7) The Apocryphal Books
- 8) Textual criticism
- 9) Old Testament manuscripts our Bible is based on
- 10) New Testament manuscripts our Bible is based on
- 11) Early translations of the Bible
- 12) The English Bible to 1611
- 13) Recent English translations
- 14) Is the King James version the only version Christians should use?

Course requirements: Everyone is welcome to attend all the classes even if they are not able to do the reading or the short projects. Also, one does not need to be a member of Indian Hills Community Church to attend. For those who wish to get the most out of this class the following is recommended:

- 1) *Come to class and read the course handouts* Our class sessions rely primarily on the course handouts. New handouts will be given out weekly. If you miss a week you can pick up back copies the next class period or pick up the notes from Room 104-105.
- 2) Read *How We Got the Bible* by Neil R. Lightfoot. You can purchase a copy from Sound Words. We will also have a copy of this book on reserve in the School of the Shepherd's Library.
- 3) Two take-home projects will be given out (probably around weeks 3 and 6). All the answers will be available in your class notes.

Introduction to “How We Got the Bible”

I. Why a class on how we got our Bible?

A. *To be informed* If we claim the Bible as the Word of God we should have a basic understanding of how it came to be.

B. *To give a defense* 1 Peter 3:15 states, “but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” Christians should be able to explain intelligently the basis of the Christian faith. This certainly would include our trust in the Bible.

C. *To have greater assurance* A study of “how we got our Bible” will give you greater assurance that the Bible you hold in your hand is accurate and truly represents what God originally gave to the prophets.

II. **The four main links in the revelatory process** The study of *How We Got Our Bible* can be summarized into four main sections—Inspiration, Canonization, Transmission and Translation.

A. *Inspiration* The first link in the chain of revelation is inspiration. Inspiration deals with what God did, namely, breathing out the Scriptures. Inspiration is what gives the Bible its authority.

B. *Canonization* The second link, canonization, deals with how the inspired books of God came to be recognized as Holy Scripture. Inspiration tells us how the Bible received its authority; canonization tells us how these books came to be accepted by men.

C. *Transmission* The third link, transmission, deals with how the original autographs of the Bible were copied and whether these copies accurately reflect the original autographs.

D. *Translation* The fourth link, translation, discusses the translation of the Bible into other languages and whether the Bible in our language accurately reflects what the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts said.

Revelation: God Has Spoken

I. Definition The word “revelation” comes from the Greek word *apokalupsis*, which means “disclosure” or “unveiling.” “Revelation has to do with disclosing, uncovering, or unveiling what previously was hidden, making known what had been secret. When used theologically. . . revelation refers to God’s deliberate manifestation of his plans, his character, and himself” (William B. Nelson, Jr., “Revelation,” in *The Oxford Companion To The Bible*, p. 649.).

II. Categories of Revelation There are two avenues through which God has taken the initiative to reveal Himself—General and Special revelation.

A. General revelation General revelation deals with “the truths God has revealed about Himself to all mankind through nature, providential control, and conscience” (Paul Enns. *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 645). General revelation, though not adequate to procure salvation, reveals certain truths about God’s nature to all humanity.

1. **Nature** God has revealed important truths about Himself and the guilt of man through nature.

a. **Psalm 19:1-6** “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.” Nature reveals God’s glory and the facts that He exists.

b. **Romans 1:18-21** “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” Creation also shows that God is all-powerful and that the whole human race is guilty of sin and without excuse.

2. **Providence** God has revealed Himself through providential control.

a. **Matthew 5:45** God has graciously given people the sunshine and rain they need to function.

b. **Acts 14:15-17** God has graciously provided food, rain and gladness for people.

c. **Daniel 2:21** God’s control is seen through the raising up and removing of world rulers.

3. **Conscience** God has given man an intuitional knowledge concerning Himself in the heart of man. According to Romans 2:14-15, every person has the Law of God “written in their hearts” thus knowing right from wrong.

B. Special revelation Special revelation is narrower in focus than general revelation. Special revelation involves the various means God used to communicate His message. By way of contrast, though general revelation is available to everyone, special revelation is available only to those who have access to biblical truth. Hebrews 1:1 tells us that “God . . . spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways.” The avenues of special revelation God has used include:

1. The Lot The casting of lots sometimes communicated God’s will to man (Proverbs 16:33; Acts 1:21-26).

2. The Urim and Thummim The Urim and Thummim were two precious stones on the breastplate of the high priest that were sometimes used to determine the will of God (Ex. 28:30; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8; 1 Sam. 28:6).

3. Dreams God used dreams to communicate at various times in the Old Testament (Gen. 20:3; 31:11-13, 24; 40-41).

4. Visions Sometimes God used visions as He did with Isaiah and Ezekiel (Isa. 1:1; 6:1; and Ezek. 1:3).

5. Audible voice God sometimes spoke with an audible voice (1 Sam. 3:4; Luke 9:35).

6. Theophanies Before the incarnation of Christ, God sometimes manifested Himself, often as the Angel of the Lord, to communicate His divine message to the people (Gen. 16:7-14; Ex. 3:2; 2 Sam. 24:16; Zech. 1:12).

7. Angels Angels at times carried God’s message to people (Dan. 9:20-21; Luke 2:10-11; and Rev. 1:1).

8. The Prophets Old Testament and New Testament prophets received direct revelation and brought God’s message to mankind (2 Sam. 23:2; Zech 1:1; and Eph. 3:5).

9. Miracles and Events God used sign miracles and events such as the deliverance of Israel to reveal Himself.

10. Jesus Christ “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son” (Heb. 11:1-2). Special revelation centers in Jesus Christ.

a. **John 1:1** He is the “Word” because He is the complete revelation of the Father.

b. **John 1:18** He reveals what the Father is like.

c. **John 5:36-37** He reveals the Father’s compassion.

d. **John 6:63; 14:10** He reveals that the Father gives eternal life through the Son.

e. **Matthew 11:27** He determines who will know the Father.

f. **John 14:9** To know Jesus is to know the Father.

11. The Bible The Bible serves as the most inclusive of all the avenues of special revelation for it encompasses the other avenues of special revelation. Plus, though special revelation centers in the person of Christ, all that can be known about Jesus Christ is known through the Bible. In a very real way, then, it can be said that special revelation is restricted solely to the Bible.

a.2 **Timothy 3:16-17** Scripture reveals all the doctrine, rebuke, correction and guidance that is needed for godly living.

b.2 **Peter 1:21** The Scripture reveals all that God has chosen to reveal to man through human authors directed by the Holy Spirit.

Inspiration: The God-breathed Scriptures

The most basic question about the nature of the Bible centers in its claim to be “inspired” or to be the “Word of God.” What is meant by “inspiration” is the subject of this section.

I. Necessity of inspiration “Inspiration is necessary to preserve the revelation of God. If God has revealed Himself but the record of that revelation is not accurately recorded, then the revelation of God is subject to question. Hence, inspiration guarantees the accuracy of the revelation” (Enns, p. 159).

II. Definition and meaning of inspiration The English word “inspiration” in its theological usage comes from 2 Timothy 3:16. The word is used to translate the Greek term *theopneustos* which means “God-breathed.” “Inspiration may be defined as the Holy Spirit’s superintending over the writers [of Scripture] so that while writing according to their own styles and personalities, the result was God’s Word written—authoritative, trustworthy, and free from error in the original autographs” (Enns, p. 160).

III. Differences between inspiration and revelation Revelation concerns the origin and giving of truth while inspiration relates to the reception and recording of truth. “Inspiration is the means God used to achieve His revelation in the Bible. Inspiration involves man in an active sense, whereas revelation is solely the activity of God. . . . Inspiration as a total process includes both the prophet and the product of his pen” (Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 1986. pp. 39-40).

IV. Elements of inspiration Several important elements belong in a proper definition of inspiration.

A. Divine element The prime mover in inspiration is God. God the Holy Spirit superintended the writers, ensuring the accuracy of the writing. Though men are involved in the process, the Bible originated with God and was authorized by Him.

1. 2 Timothy 3:16 “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable”

2. 2 Peter 1:20-21 “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” Concerning the divine element in prophecy, Herman Hoyt states, “This [1:21] means that prophecy not only did not originate with man but also even the function of communicating did not originate in his own will. If left to himself, the prophet would not have conveyed the message. It was, therefore, necessary for God to bring the prophetic message to men through the prophet, the Holy Spirit accomplishing the task by bearing him along” (Herman A. Hoyt, *Studies in 2 Peter*. Winona Lake: BMH Books. p. 49).

B. Human element Though the Bible comes from God the human writers played an important role in the overall process of inspiration. As they wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit, they used their own individual writing styles. “In inspiration, then, God is the primary cause, and the prophets are the secondary causes. Thus the divine influence did not restrict human activity but rather enabled the human authors to communicate the divine message accurately” (Geisler and Nix, p. 39).

V. Inspiration clarified

A. *What is inspired—the writer or his writings?* “The person as well as his pen is under the direction of the Holy Spirit in the total process of inspiration. Nevertheless, the New Testament reserves the word “inspiration” only for the product of that process, that is the writings, of graphe [Scripture] (2 Tim. 3:16)” (Geisler and Nix, p. 41).

B. *What is inspired—the autographs or the copies?* Inspiration applies specifically to the original autographs of the Bible not to copies and translations. This should not cause concern about whether the Bible one holds is truly the Word of God. As Geisler says, “Even when the accuracy of a reading in the original *text* cannot be known with 100 percent accuracy, it is possible to be 100 percent certain of the *truth* preserved in the texts that survive. It is only in minor details that any uncertainty about the textual rendering exists, and no major doctrine rests on any one minor detail. A good translation will not fail to capture the overall teaching of the original. In this sense, then, a good translation will have doctrinal authority, although actual inspiration is reserved for the autographs” (Geisler and Nix, p. 44).

VI. Results of inspiration

A. *An Inerrant Bible* The result of the divine-human authorship is a message without error. If God is true (Rom. 3:4) and the Bible comes from God (2 Tim. 3:16), then the Bible must be true in all its parts. That is why the Bible is said to be *inerrant*. “Inerrancy is the view that when all the facts become known, they will demonstrate that the Bible in its original autographs and correctly interpreted is entirely true and never false in all it affirms, whether that relates to doctrine or ethics or to the social, physical, or life sciences” (Paul D. Feinberg in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell. Grand Rapids: Baker. p. 142).

B. *A verbal revelation* Inspiration applies to the words of Scripture not just to the ideas. As 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 states, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, *combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words*” (Emphasis mine). Verbal inspiration can also be seen in the many “it is written” statements (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10) and the fact that Jesus said not even the smallest part of a Hebrew word or letter could be broken (Matt. 5:18).

C. *A Bible inspired in all its parts (Plenary)* All parts of the Bible are equally inspired. Thus, the Bible is fully inspired in all its parts. As 2 Timothy 3:16 says, “*All Scripture* is inspired by God” (emphasis mine). This includes matters pertaining to science and history.

D. *An unbreakable Word of God* The Bible is unbreakable or infallible. Jesus said in John 10:35, “the Scripture cannot be broken.”

E. *An authoritative standard* Jesus and the Apostles used the Scriptures as the final authority in all matters (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; Acts 17:2).

VII. False views of inspiration

A. *Natural inspiration* This view holds that there is no supernatural element involved in the writing of Scripture. The writers of the Bible were men of unusual religious insight writing on religious subjects in the same way men like Shakespeare wrote literature. HOWEVER, Scripture is clear that God was supernaturally involved in inspiring the books of the Bible.

B. *Spiritual illumination* “The illumination view suggests that some Christians may have spiritual insight that although similar to other Christians is greater in degree. In this view any devout Christian, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, can be the author of inspired Scripture. Adherents to this view suggest it is not the writings that are inspired, rather it is the *writers* who are inspired” (Enns, p. 161). HOWEVER, the Bible claims that its own writings are inspired.

C. *Partial or dynamic inspiration* This view holds that the parts of the Bible related to matters of faith and practice are inspired, but matters relating to history, science or chronology may be in error. HOWEVER, who decides which parts of the Bible are in error and which parts are not? PLUS: how can doctrine be separated from history when much of doctrine is based on historical factors? How can the Bible be trustworthy in one area but not another?

D. *Conceptual inspiration* This view holds that only the concepts or ideas of the writers are inspired not the words. Thus error can occur as the human puts God’s ideas into his own words. HOWEVER, the Bible affirms verbal inspiration (see 1 Cor. 2:12-13).

E. *Divine dictation* “The dictation theory is the teaching that God actually dictated the Bible to the writers. Passages where the Spirit is depicted as telling the author precisely what to write are regarded as applying to the entire Bible” (Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker. 1985, p. 207). HOWEVER: if this theory were true how does this explain the differences in writing styles of the various authors? If this theory were true we would expect that the style of all the books of the Bible would be uniform.

F. *Neo-orthodox opinion* According to this view, the Bible in written, verbal form is not the revealed Word of God. However, it can *become* the Word of God if it points a person to an experiential encounter with Christ. HOWEVER, the Bible is the objective authoritative Word of God whether a person believes it or not. It does not “become” the Word of God; it “is” the Word of God.

Structure and Divisions of the Bible

I. Definitions

A. *Bible* “Bible” is the name commonly used to designate the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. These sixty-six books make up one book—the Bible. The English word *Bible* came originally from the name of the papyrus or byblos reed used extensively in antiquity for making scrolls and books. The term, *biblion* thus meant “book” or “scroll.” By the second century A.D. Greek Christians called their sacred Scriptures *ta Biblia* (“the books”). The singular translation came into English via Latin and Old French as “Bible.” The term “Bible” is often used synonymously with “Scripture” and “Word of God.”

B. *Testament* The Bible is one book but it is divided into two parts called Testaments. The term, “Testament” (*berith* in Hebrew and *diatheke* in Greek) means “covenant. The Old Testament was written and preserved by the Jewish Community before the time of Christ and the New Testament was composed by the followers of Christ during the first century A.D.

II. Old Testament Classifications

A. *Hebrew form* (see chart entitled *Hebrew/Protestant/Catholic Old Testament Categories*, p. 11) The Hebrew Bible is composed of twenty-four books. The earliest division of the Hebrew Bible was twofold—the Law and the Prophets. This is the most common distinction in the New Testament and is confirmed by Jewish usage and the Dead Sea Scrolls. In less ancient times, however, the Jewish Bible was arranged in three sections—1) the Law, 2) the Prophets, and 3) the Writings.

B. *Greek form* The Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek at Alexandria, Egypt (c. 250—150 B.C.). This translation was known as the Septuagint (LXX). The Alexandrian tradition arranged the Old Testament according to *subject* matter and became the basis for our modern classification of the Old Testament—1) five books of Law, 2) twelve books of History, 3) five books of Poetry and 4) seventeen books of Prophecy.

NOTE: The Hebrew classification of the Old Testament totals twenty-four books while the Greek order totals thirty-nine. How can this be? The answer is that the Jews enumerated the Old Testament books differently. The twelve minor prophets were considered one book. 1 and 2 Samuel were considered one book. The same holds true for 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. Though the classifications are different between the Hebrew and Greek forms, the same books are in both forms.

C. *Latin form* “The grouping of books in the Latin Bible (the Vulgate) follows that of the Septuagint (LXX), or Greek version. Jerome, who translated the Latin Vulgate (c. 383-405), was familiar with the Hebrew division, but Christendom as a whole had come to favor (or be associated with) the Greek version; thus it was only natural for him to adopt its fourfold classification.” (Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press. 1986. p. 26)

D.English form Following the Latin Vulgate, which had been the standard Bible for a thousand years, Wycliffe's first English Bible followed the fourfold division of its Latin precursor. All subsequent English versions follow this fourfold division (Law, History, Poetry and Prophecy).

III.New Testament classification (see chart entitled *New Testament Classification*, p. 12)
The books of the New Testament have been classified into four groups: 1) Gospels, 2) History, 3) Epistles and 4) Prophecy.

IV.Chapter and verse divisions The earliest Bibles have no chapter and verse distinctions. Stephen Langton, a professor at the University of Paris, divided the Bible into chapters in 1227. Later, Robert Stephanus, a Paris printer, added verses in 1551 and 1555.

Hebrew/Protestant/Catholic Old Testament Categories

Hebrew Bible (24 books)

The Law

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

The Prophets

Joshua
Judges
Samuel
Kings
Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
The 12 Minor Prophets

The Writings

Psalms
Proverbs
Job
Song of Solomon
Ruth
Lamentations
Ecclesiastes
Esther
Daniel
Ezra-Nehemiah
Chronicles

Protestant Bible (39 books)

The Law

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

The Writings

Psalms
Proverbs
Job
Song of Solomon
Ruth
Lamentations
Ecclesiastes
Esther
Daniel
Ezra-Nehemiah
Chronicles

Poetry/Wisdom

Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon

Prophecy

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel
Daniel

Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

Roman Catholic Bible (46 books)

The Law

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

History

Joshua
Judges
Ruth
1 and 2 Samuel
1 and 2 Kings
3 and 4 Kings (Chron)
Ezra
Nehemiah
*Tobit
*Judith
Esther
*1 Maccabees
*2 Maccabees

Poetry/Wisdom

Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon
*Wisdom of Solomon
*Ecclesiasties
(Sirach)

Prophecy

Isiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
*Baruch
Ezekiel
Daniel
Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

*Apocrypha books accepted as canonical by Roman Catholic Church

--The Roman Catholic Church also accepts as canonical additions to Daniel (*Song of the Three Young Men*; *Susanna*; and *Bel and the Dragon*) and additions to Esther.

New Testament Classification

Gospels (4)

1. Matthew
2. Mark
3. Luke
4. John

History (1)

1. Acts

Epistles (21)

Pauline (13)

1. Romans
2. 1 Corinthians
3. 2 Corinthians
4. Galatians
5. Ephesians
6. Philippians
7. Colossians
8. 1 Thess
9. 2 Thess
10. 1 Timothy
11. 2 Timothy
12. Titus
13. Philemon

General (8)

14. Hebrews
15. James
16. 1 Peter
17. 2 Peter
18. 1 John
19. 2 John
20. 3 John
21. Jude

Prophecy (1)

1. Revelation

Time Period of Bible

The time span for the writing of the Bible covers approximately fifteen-hundred years.

Old Testament (1445—400 B.C.)

Genesis (1445)
Exodus (1445)
Leviticus (1445)
Numbers (1405)
Deuteronomy (1405)

Joshua (1405—1385)
Judges (1043)
Ruth (1000)
1 and 2 Samuel (1000—900)
1 and 2 Kings (561—538)
1 and 2 Chronicles (450—430)
Ezra (457—444)
Nehemiah (425)
Esther (475)

Job (lived in patriarchal times)
Psalms (1450—500)
Proverbs (950)
Ecclesiastes (931)
Song of Solomon (960)

Isaiah (740)
Jeremiah (561)
Lamentations (586)
Ezekiel (570)
Daniel (536)
Hosea (750)
Joel (830)
Amos (760)
Obadiah (845)
Jonah (780)
Micah (735)
Nahum (661—612)
Habakkuk (609)
Zephaniah (635)
Haggai (520)
Zechariah (520—518)
Malachi (430)

New Testament (A.D. 50—100)

Matthew (50)
Mark (50)
Luke (60-61)
John (80-90)

Acts (63)

Romans (56)
1 Corinthians (54-55)
2 Corinthians (55-56)
Galatians (48)
Ephesians (61)
Philippians (62)
Colossians (61)
1 Thessalonians (51)
2 Thessalonians (51)
1 Timothy (62)
2 Timothy (64)
Titus (63)
Philemon (61)

Hebrews (65)
James (45)
1 Peter (65)
2 Peter (67)
1 John (85)
2 John (90)
3 John (90)
Jude (70)

Revelation (95)

The Making of the Bible

I. The Bible and early writings

A. *Bible not the oldest book* “Our Bible is a very old book, but it is by no means the oldest book in the world. Discoveries made within the last century show that writing was a well-established art in many countries long before the beginnings of the Hebrew nation in the land of Palestine” (Neil Lightfoot, *How We Got the Bible*, p. 14).

B. *The beginning of writing* “The earliest known examples of writing carry us into the ancient land of Egypt and into Mesopotamia. We do not know exactly when or where writing began. . . . What is known is that an early Sumerian limestone tablet is extant, a written text which is dated about 3500 B.C. What is also known is that Egyptian hieroglyphs were in a developmental stage at least by 3000 B.C. In Palestine itself letters written by governors of cities date to about 1400 B.C.” (Lightfoot, p. 14).

C. *Implication of other early writings on the Bible* It was formerly held by some liberal critics that Moses could not have written the first five books of the Bible since writing was unknown in the days of Moses. Now, however, we know that writing was generally practiced many centuries before Moses. This argument, then, is no longer valid.

II. Writing materials of Bible times The ancient people of Palestine and adjoining countries used many kinds of materials for writing purposes. The Bible makes reference to some of these materials.

A. *Stone* In almost every area the earliest material on which writing has been found is stone.

1. The Ten Commandments The earliest writing material mentioned in the Old Testament is stone. The Ten Commandments were written on stone (Ex. 31:18; 34:1, 28).

2. Joshua and the memorial stones After Israel crossed the Jordan, stones with the Law written on them were set up as a memorial (Deut. 27:2-3 with Josh. 8:30-32).

B. *Clay* The predominant writing material of Assyria and Babylonia was clay. Huge libraries of clay tablets have been discovered from these areas. Clay material is referred to in Ezekiel 4:1 when Ezekiel was told to draw a plan of Jerusalem on a tile.

C. *Wood* The use of wooden tablets was common in Greece, Egypt and Palestine. The tablets mentioned in Isaiah 30:8 and Habakkuk 2:2 were probably wooden.

D. *Leather* “For hundreds of years leather or animal skins played an important role in the history of the Bible. Leather is not specified in the Old Testament, but it was unquestionably the principal material employed for literary purposes by the Hebrews.” (Lightfoot, p. 16) (See Jeremiah 36:23).

E. Papyrus Papyrus was the most important writing material during the inter-testamental and New Testament times. In fact, it is almost certain that the original New Testament letters were penned on papyrus sheets.

1. What was papyrus? Papyrus sheets came from papyrus reeds that grew in abundance along the Nile river in Egypt. Papyrus reeds “were manufactured into a writing material by cutting the leaves into long thin strips, laying these pieces criss/cross upon each other and saturating them with a calcium solution. The product was the equivalent of the best handmade paper” (G. S. Wegener, *6,000 Years of the Bible*, New York: Harper and Row, 1963, p. 58).

2. Papyrus rolls Papyrus rolls were the “books” of the ancient world until the second century. These “rolls” were thirty feet long and nine to ten inches high. Writing was usually done on one side of the scroll (one exception is Revelation 5:1).

3. Papyrus codex By the second century the papyrus roll gave way to the papyrus codex. A codex manuscript is simply a book. Papyrus sheets were put together in the form of a book instead of joining them side by side to make a roll.

F. Vellum or parchment Vellum and parchment (used interchangeably) refers to animal skins dressed for writing purposes. Because of the high price of papyrus, vellum became a less expensive substitute. By the fourth century vellum replaced papyrus. The use of vellum is significant because this was the material used to make copies of the New Testament for over a thousand years (fourth century—Middle Ages). The two most valuable New Testament manuscripts, the Vatican and Sinaitic manuscripts, are made of high-quality vellum.

G. Paper The production of paper stretches back to the second century B.C. with the Chinese. The secrets of paper making, though, were not widely made known until the middle of the eighth century when Arabs captured some Chinese men who were skilled in making paper. By the time of the thirteenth century paper was being used in much of Europe. A considerable number of Biblical manuscripts, especially from the East, were written on paper. (Lightfoot, p. 20)

III. Languages of the Bible The Bible was originally written in three languages—Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.

A. Hebrew Almost all of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew.

1. Semitic language “Hebrew is of a large family of languages known as Semitic, and is akin to such languages as Aramaic, Syriac, Akkadian (Assyrian-Babylonian) and Arabic” (Lightfoot, p. 29).

2. Much different from English Unlike Greek in which many of the letters and words are recognizable to English speaking people, Hebrew is a “strange” language in that it is written backwards (from our standpoint) from right to left, it has many sounds that differ from English forms, and has a vocabulary unrelated to English words. Plus, the Hebrew alphabet is without vowels.

B. Aramaic Though most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, some portions were written in Aramaic. Aramaic sections of the Old Testament include: 1) two words as a place-name in Genesis 31:47, 2) one verse in Jeremiah 10:11, 3) six chapters in Daniel (2:4b—7:28) and several chapters in Ezra (4:8—6:18; 7:12-26).

1. Similarities to Hebrew Aramaic is a kindred language to Hebrew. In fact, anyone not trained in the languages of Hebrew and Aramaic would not be able to tell the difference between these two languages in the Old Testament because they look so similar.

2. Beginning of Aramaic among the Jews Aramaic became the language of the common people in Palestine after the time of the exile (ca. 500 B.C.). Nehemiah 8:8 suggests that the Jews of Ezra's time did not know pure Hebrew well enough to understand the Law, thus needing a translation into the familiar Aramaic.

3. The primary language of Christ Aramaic was spoken by the Jews several centuries before Christ and was the primary vernacular of Palestine during the time of Christ. As Bruce says, "It [Aramaic] was thus the language commonly spoken in Palestine in New Testament times, the customary language of our Lord and His apostles and the early Palestinian church" (F.F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, Westwood: Revell, 1963, p. 56).

4. Aramaic expressions found in the New Testament

a. *talitha cumi* (little girl, get up) in Mark 5:41

b. *ephphatha* (be opened) in Mark 7:34

c. *Eli, eli lama sabachthani* (My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?) in Matthew 27:46

d. Jesus addressed God as *Abba* (Aramaic for Father) (see also Rom. 8:15 and Gal. 4:6)

e. *Maranatha* ("Our Lord, come!") in 1 Corinthians 16:22

C. Greek Though Aramaic was the common language of Christ and the early Christians, Greek was the language of the New Testament.

1. Common Greek More precisely, the language of the New Testament is properly called Hellenistic or *Koine* (common) Greek. New Testament Greek was the language of the "common" man.

2. Why did God choose Greek? Probably because the language chosen for the universal proclamation of the Gospel would need to be one that was most widely known throughout the nations. This language was Greek. As Lightfoot states, "since the gospel was to be proclaimed to every creature. . . the New Testament writers made use of a language that was known everywhere. Greek in the first century, as English is today, was the 'universal' language" (Lightfoot, p. 31).

D. Are these three languages dead? Contrary to many people's opinions these languages are not dead languages. Hebrew is the spoken language of the state of Israel. Aramaic is spoken in Damascus and Syria. Greek is spoken by millions of people today, though, obviously, it is quite different from the Greek of the New Testament. F.F. Bruce says, "But there is much less difference between modern Hebrew and Biblical Hebrew, between modern Greek and Biblical Greek, than there is between modern English and English as spoken in 1066." (p. 33)

Canonicity: Determining and Discovering the God-inspired Books

I. Introduction to Canonicity

A. *Significance of canonicity* “If the Scriptures are indeed inspired by God then a significant question arises: Which books are inspired? Historically, it was important for the people of God to determine which books God had inspired and which ones were recognized as authoritative” (Enns, p. 170).

B. *Difference between inspiration and canonicity* “Inspiration indicates how the Bible received its *authority*, whereas canonization tells how the Bible received its *acceptance*. It is one thing for God to give the Scriptures their authority, and quite another for men to recognize that authority” (Geisler and Nix, p. 203).

C. *What does “canon” mean?*

1. Original meaning The original meaning of “canon” can be traced to the ancient Greeks who used the term in a literal sense. To them, a *kanon* was a rod, ruler, staff or measuring rod. Thus, a *kanon* was a standard for measurement. This literal meaning provided the basis for a later, extended use of the term. The word eventually was extended to mean a rule or standard for anything.

2. In regard to the Bible In theological usage, “canon” refers to authoritative Scripture. As F.F. Bruce says, “When we speak of the canon of scripture, the word ‘canon’ has a simple meaning. It means the list of books contained in scripture, the list of books recognized as worthy to be included in the sacred writings of a worshipping community. In a Christian context, we might define the word as ‘the list of the writings acknowledged by the Church as documents of the divine revelation.’” (*The Canon of Scripture*, p. 17).

2.

3. Usage in early church The term “canon,” in reference to the books of Scripture, developed with the early church fathers. The first clear application of this term to the Scriptures is attributed to Athanasius in A.D. 367. (F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, p. 17).

II. **Determining the canon** Who or what determined which books were canonical?

A. *God determines the Canon* Canonicity is determined by God. A book is not inspired because men made it canonical; it is canonical because God inspired it. Thus, canonicity is determined by inspiration.

B. *Distinction between determination and discovery* Understanding canonicity involves two related but separate issues: 1) Canonicity is *determined by God* and 2) Canonicity is *discovered by man*. A failure to keep this distinction leads to confusion. How a book received its authority is determined by God. How men discover and recognize that authority is another matter altogether.

C. False views concerning canonicity

1. Old Age determines canonicity Canonicity is not determined by the antiquity of a book. (This view was held by J. G. Eichorn (1780). He believed all books composed after Malachi's time were excluded from consideration. Thus, he believed all Jewish books before Malachi were considered canonical.)

a. **There are many books that are older than some of the books of the Bible that are not considered "canon."**

(1) Book of Jasher (Joshua 10:13)

(2) Book of the Wars of the Lord (Numbers 21:14)

(3) Books of the Jewish Apocrypha

b. **Many of the canonical books were received into the canon shortly after they were written.** Moses' writings were considered as authoritative while he was still living (Deut. 31:24-26). Daniel accepted Jeremiah's book as canonical (Dan. 9:2). Peter considered Paul's letters to be Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16).

2. Hebrew language determines canonicity Hitzig (ca. 1850) believed the use of the Hebrew language was the Jewish test for canonicity. However, books such as Ecclesiasticus, Tobit, and 1 Maccabees were rejected even though they were composed in Hebrew (see Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 78).

3. Agreement with the Torah (Law) determines canonicity The Torah, though, is not the standard of canonicity (though all canonical books will agree with the Torah). Plus, Jewish fathers believed their Talmud and Midrash agreed with the Torah, but they were never believed to be canonical.

4. Religious value determines canonicity The very fact that a book is canonical guarantees that it will have religious value. But religious value does not necessarily make a book canonical. Many books with religious value have been written that have not been accepted into the Bible.

5. The Church determines canonicity (often associated with Roman Catholicism) According to this view, the church *determines* the canonicity of the books of the Bible. A book is canonical because the church declares it to be so. (It must also be noted that since the Roman Catholic Church sees itself as the determiner of the canon, it sees itself as having an authority to interpret the books of the canon that others do not have.) The following points, however, argue against this view:

a. **God determines whether a book is inspired and thus canonical—churches and councils do not.** Men do not determine which books are canonical. God does. God gives the books of the Bible their divine authority. God's people *recognize* this authority but they do not *determine* its authority. As J. I. Packer has said, "The Church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity" (*God Speaks to Man*, p. 81).

b. **Canon determined immediately** The books of the Bible became canon the moment they were written. They did not need to wait for the church's sanction to become canon. They were canon the moment they were written.

c. **This view confuses the two related but separate issues: 1) the canon's nature (determination) and 2) the canon's discovery.** James White in his book, *The Roman Catholic Controversy*, rightly points out how some people confuse the nature of the canon with how people come to know the contents of the canon. He uses an example to illustrate this:

“I have written eight books. The action of my writing those books creates the canon of my works. If a friend of mine does not have accurate or full knowledge of how many books I have written, does that mean there is no canon of my books? No, of course not. In fact, if I was the *only one* who knew how many books I had written, would that mean that the canon of my books does not exist? The point is clear. The canon is one issue, and it comes from God's action of inspiring the Scriptures. Our knowledge of the canon is another. Our knowledge can grow and mature, as it did at times in history. But the canon is not defined by us nor is it affected by our knowledge or ignorance” (James R. White, *The Roman Catholic Controversy*, Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996. p. 94).

Development of the Old Testament Canon

I. The Canon of the Hebrew Bible

A. *The twenty four books recognized as canonical* (See chart on page 11.) (Remember that these twenty-four books correspond exactly to the books in our English Protestant Bibles which numbers thirty-nine. The difference is in the enumeration of the books.)

1. The Law (5) Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.
2. The Prophets (8) Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve.
3. The Writings (11) Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles.

B. *Origin of three-section division* The division of the Hebrew Bible into three sections (not four or five, as in Greek, Latin, and English translations), known as the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, can be traced back to the second century B.C., when it is three times referred to in the prologue of Sirach, added by the Greek translator of the book in about 130 B.C. (Roger T. Beckwith, "Canon of the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament," in *The Oxford Companion To The Bible*, pp. 100-101). Jesus referred to this division in Luke 24:44 when He said "the Law of Moses and the Prophets and Psalms must be fulfilled."

II. The growth and formation of the OT canon

A. *Progressive collection of OT prophetic books (as recorded in the OT)* From the beginning, the inspired writings of the Old Testament were collected by the Jews and revered as sacred and divinely authoritative.

1. Moses put the Book of the Covenant, including the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1—23:33), into writing and the people agreed to obey it (Ex. 24:3-8). The Book of the Covenant became part of the Book of Exodus and immediately was accepted at the Word of God.
2. The Book of Deuteronomy was immediately stored by the Ark in the Tabernacle after Moses wrote it (Deut. 31:24-26). Later it, with the rest of the Law of Moses, was moved to the Temple (2 Kings 22:8).
3. Joshua added his words and set them up in the sanctuary of the Lord (Josh. 24:26).
4. Daniel refers to "the books" which contained the "law of Moses" and the prophets (Dan. 9:2, 6, 11).

B. *Later OT books quote earlier OT books as authoritative*

1. The books of Moses, which were immediately recognized as canonical, are cited throughout the Old Testament from Joshua (1:7) to Malachi (4:4).
2. The events of Joshua are referred to in Judges (1:1, 20-21; 2:8).

3. The books of Kings cite the life of David as told in the books of Samuel (1 Kings 3:14; 5:7; 8:16; 9:5).
4. Chronicles reviews Israel's history from Genesis through Kings including material from Ruth (1 Chronicles 2:12-13).
5. The ninth chapter of Nehemiah reviews Israel's history as recorded from Genesis through Ezra.
6. 1 Kings 4:32 refers to Solomon's proverbs and songs.
7. Daniel cites Jeremiah 25 (Daniel 9:2).
8. Jonah recites parts from the Psalms (Jonah 2).
9. Ezekiel mentions both Job and Daniel (Ezekiel 14:14, 20).

NOTE: "Not every book is cited by a later one, however; but enough are cited to demonstrate that there was a growing collection of divinely authoritative books available to and quoted by subsequent prophets." (Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *From God to Us*, Chicago: Moody, 1974. p. 81).

C. Prophetic continuity A prophetic chain links the books of the Old Testament together.

1. Moses wrote the Pentateuch
2. Joshua, the author, of Joshua and perhaps the very end of Deuteronomy (which records Moses' death), took over for Moses in writing inspired Scripture.
- 2.
3. Samuel wrote of the history of David (1 Chron. 29:29).
4. Nathan, Ahijah and Iddo wrote of the history of Solomon (2 Chron. 9:29).
5. Shemaiah and Iddo wrote of the history of Rehoboam (2 Chron. 12:15).
6. Iddo wrote of the history of Abijah (2 Chron. 13:22).
7. Jehu wrote about Jehoshaphat's reign (2 Chron. 20:34).
8. Isaiah wrote of Hezekiah's reign (2 Chron. 32:32).
9. Unnamed prophets wrote about Manasseh's reign (2 Chron. 33:19).
10. Jeremiah wrote just prior to and during the Babylonian exile.
11. Daniel and Ezekiel continued the prophetic ministry during the exile.
12. Ezra, after the exile, returned from Babylon with the books of Moses and the prophets. (Ezra 6:18; Neh. 9:14, 26-30).

13. Nehemiah completed the chronology of OT prophetic continuity.

NOTE: “Each prophet from Moses through Nehemiah contributed to the growing collection which was preserved by the official prophetic community stemming from Samuel.” (Geisler and Nix, *How We Got Our Bible*, p. 83).

III. Factors contributing to the recognition of certain books as canonical

A. *Tradition* The well-established tradition that many of the books came from Moses or one of the other acknowledged prophets.

B. *Spiritual authority of the books themselves* — as they were used in public or private reading and in exposition.

C. *Recognition in the Temple as sacred*

D. *Conviction of leaders and people* The opinions of religious leaders and common convictions of the people about the books were considered.

E. *Jesus and the Apostles* “For Christians, there was the additional consideration that Jesus himself and his apostles, in the pages of the New Testament, often refer to the Jewish scriptures in general, and to many of the individual books as having the authority of God” (Beckwith, p. 100).

IV. **End of OT canonical era** Malachi, the last Old Testament book, was written around 430 B.C. The Old Testament canon era, then, as determined by God, lasted from 1445 B.C. to 430 B.C. (See *Time Period of the Bible* chart on page 13.). Evidences that the OT canon ceased at the time of Malachi include:

A. *Josephus* According to the Jewish historian, Josephus (A.D. 37-95), the Hebrew OT was complete and no more canonical writings were composed after the reign of Artaxerxes (464—424 B.C.) (The time of Malachi.):

“From Artaxerxes (the successor of Xerxes) until our time everything has been recorded, but has not been deemed worthy of like credit with what preceded, because the exact succession of the prophets ceased. . . . For though so long a time has now passed, no one has dared to add anything to them, or to take anything from them, or to alter anything in them” (Josephus, *Against Apion* I. 8.).

NOTE: Rationalist higher critics claim that portions of Scripture such as Daniel, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and many of the Psalms were compiled many years after Malachi. According to Josephus, though, no additional material was ever included in the canonical twenty-two books during the centuries between 425 B.C. and A.D. 90. This presents a problem to those who challenge the traditional authorship of these books (Archer, p. 73).

B. *The Talmud* The Jewish Talmud states, “After the latter prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel.”

C. *New Testament* The New Testament never quotes any OT book as authoritative after the time of Malachi.

V. Recognition of the Old Testament as completed canon When were all the books of our Old Testament canon recognized as canonical?

A. New Testament “Good evidence exists in the New Testament which shows that by the time of Jesus the canon of the Old Covenant had been fixed” (Lightfoot, p. 106).

1. Luke 24:44 The canonical writings, according to Jesus, are composed of the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. This threefold division is equivalent to the three divisions of the Hebrew scriptures—the Law, the Prophets and the Writings.

2. Martyrs of the Old Testament Jesus once spoke of the time “from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zachariah” (Luke 11:51; cf. Matt. 23:35) when referring to the martyrs of the Old Testament. The first martyr of the Old Testament was Abel and the last martyr was Zachariah (cf. 2 Chron. 24:20-21). Since Chronicles is the last book in the Hebrew Bible, Jesus was making a comprehensive statement covering the known Old Testament (Genesis—Chronicles).

B. Josephus (A.D. 37-95) Josephus, in his *Against Apion* stated, “We have not tens of thousands of books, discordant and conflicting, but only twenty-two containing the record of all time, which have been justly believed to be divine.” (I.8). (NOTE: “It is the opinion of most scholars that Josephus in deriving his number of twenty-two books joined Ruth to Judges and Lamentations to Jeremiah; and remembering that the Jews enumerated their books differently. . . the twenty-two books mentioned by Josephus equal our present thirty-nine books” (Lightfoot, p. 108)).

ALSO: “It is unlikely that Josephus’s classification of the books was his own; he probably reproduces a tradition with which he had been familiar for a long time, having learned it either in the priestly circle into which he was born or among the Pharisees with whose party he associated himself as a young man” (Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, pp. 33-34).

C. Council of Jamnia (A.D. 90) This council met to discuss the canonicity of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and Esther. Some have said that this council determined the limits of the Old Testament canon, and thus, the Old Testament canon was not finalized until A.D. 90. But as Bruce says, “The upshot of the Jamnia debates was the firm acknowledgment of all these books as Holy Scripture.” And after warning us not to “exaggerate the importance of the Jamnia debate” he said, “The books which they decided to acknowledge as canonical were already generally accepted, although questions had been raised about them” (Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, pp. 97-98). Thus, the Council of Jamnia did not include any new books as canonical, it simply reaffirmed those books already considered canonical.

D. Bishop Melito of Sardis (A.D. 170) “Bishop Melito of Sardis (in modern Turkey) was pressed by a friend to obtain ‘an accurate statement of the ancient books as regards their number and their order.’ Melito did, and as a result, gave a now famous list of the Old Testament books. Except for its lack of Esther, this list matches today’s Jewish and Protestant Old Testament” (Bruce Waltke in “How We Got Our Old Testament,” in *Christian History*, issue 43, Vol. XIII, No. 3, p. 32).

E. *Early church fathers*

E.

1. Third century A.D. In the third century A.D., Origen confirmed the testimony of Josephus on the number of books in the Hebrew canon. The books Origen listed correspond to the thirty-nine books of the Protestant Old Testament.

2. Fourth century A.D. “In the fourth century eight prominent Church fathers, Athanasius of Alexandria, Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius of Cyprus, Amphilocius of Asia Minor, and Gregory Nazianzus of Cappadocia, Hilary of France, Rufinus of Italy, and Jerome have left us lists all of which agree with the Hebrew canon except for very minor variations. . .” (R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957, p. 189).

F. *Conclusion* The “evidence implies that by the beginning of the Christian era the identity of all the canonical books was well known and generally accepted” (Roger T. Beckwith, “The Canon of the Old Testament,” in *The Origin of the Bible*, p. 61.).

Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

I. The issue Many books were written during the Old Testament era. Which ones are canon and which ones are not? How do we classify the many writings of the Old Testament era?

II. Old Testament arrangement overview Not all books written during the Old Testament era are Scripture. How are the different books classified? They can be classified into four categories.

A. *Homologoumena* — Books accepted by all

B. *Antilegomena* — Books disputed by some

C. *Pseudepigrapha* — Books rejected by all

D. *Apocrypha* — Books accepted by some

III. The Homologoumena (Books accepted by all)

A. *Nature* “The Homologoumena are books which once they were accepted into the canon were not subsequently questioned or disputed. They were recognized not only by early generations but by succeeding generations as well” (Geisler and Nix, p. 257).

B. *Number* The Homologoumena comprise *thirty-four* of the thirty-nine books in the Protestant Old Testament. The only books that are not part of the Homologoumena in the Protestant Old Testament are Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Ezekiel and Proverbs.

IV. The Antilegomena (Books disputed by some)

A. *Nature* The Antilegomena are the several books that were initially and ultimately considered canonical but were, at one time, disputed by some of the Jewish community.

B. *Number* Five canonical books of the Old Testament fall into this category.

1. Song of Solomon The school of Shammai (first. cent. A.D.), as well as some others, expressed doubt about the canonicity of the Song of Solomon. The basic reason was that the book seemed sensual to some. The view of Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph (c. A.D. 50—132), however, prevailed as is evidenced in his statement, “God forbid!—No man in Israel ever disputed about the Song of Songs that it does not render the hands unclean [i.e. is not canonical]” (Geisler and Nix, p. 259).

2. Ecclesiastes One of the main objections to Ecclesiastes was that it was skeptical and that its talk of life being “vanity” was not fitting of Holy Scripture. This doubt about the book, however, is more of an interpretive issue than one concerning inspiration. The thrust of the book is that life lived apart from God is vanity. That is why at the conclusion of the book, Solomon can say, “Fear God and keep His commandments. . . for God will bring every act to judgment” (Eccl. 12:13-14). As with the other Antilegomena, this book, too, was accepted as canon.

3. Esther Esther was doubted by some because the name of God is absent from the book. People wondered how a book that did not mention God could be inspired. God’s sovereignty and providence, however, is prevalent throughout the book as He protected His people from extermination. Josephus and the Mishnah cite Esther as Scripture.

4. Ezekiel “This book was questioned by some because of its apparent *anti-Mosaic* teachings. The school of Shammai thought that the teaching of the book was not in harmony with the Mosaic law, and that the first ten chapters exhibited a tendency toward gnosticism” (Geisler and Nix, p. 261). However, no specific examples have been given to show that Ezekiel contradicts the Mosaic Law or that its chapters tend toward gnosticism. As Beckwith has observed, “evidence in favour of the canonicity of Ezekiel is so ample and so early that the book is something of an embarrassment to those who hold the common view about the date of the closing of the canon.” (Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon in the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism*, p. 86).

5. Proverbs Some claimed that Proverbs was not inspired because it supposedly contradicts itself (see Proverbs 26:4-5). Many rabbis, though, claimed that when interpreted correctly, Proverbs did not contradict itself. Support for Proverbs from the Pharisaic, Essene and Christian community strongly vouch for its canonicity.

V. **The Pseudepigrapha** (Books rejected by all)

A. *Nature* The term *pseudepigrapha* means writings attributed to fictitious authors. The Pseudepigrapha are books that are clearly spurious and inauthentic. Many of these works claim to have been written by biblical authors, but in reality were written between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200. Most of these books are made up of dreams, visions and revelations in the apocalyptic style of Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah (Geisler and Nix, pp. 262-63).

B. *Number* The actual number of Pseudepigrapha books is unknown. According to Bruce Metzger, “The number of Jewish and Jewish-Christian pseudepigraphic writings must once have been great. Jewish legend ascribes to Enoch no fewer than 366 such works, and 2 Esdras (14:46) tells of 70 secret books that are discriminated from the 24 canonical ones.” Some researchers of the Pseudepigrapha have listed more than 200 pseudepigrapha titles—many of these no longer extant. (Bruce M. Metzger, “The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p. 170 fn. 3). For our purposes, 18 are worthy of mention. (List taken from Geisler and Nix, p. 263.).

B.

1. The Book of Jubilee (Legendary) A midrashic expansion of biblical history from Creation to the First Passover.

2. The Letter of Aristeas (Legendary) Supposedly an eyewitness account of the translation of the Old Testament into Greek by seventy-two elders at the instruction of Eleazar the high priest. Scholars say this book was written between 200 B.C. and A.D. 33.

3. The Book of Adam and Eve (Legendary)

4. The Martyrdom of Isaiah (Legendary)

5. 1 Enoch (Apocalyptic) This book is cited in Jude 1:14-15 and is the longest of the surviving Jewish pseudepigraphic writings. It is a composite work, written by various authors in Aramaic during the last two centuries B.C. “Professing to embody a series of revelations granted to Enoch, the seventh from Adam, the anonymous authors discuss such matters as the origin of evil, the angels and their destinies, the nature of Gehenna and Paradise, and various astronomical and cosmological fancies” (Metzger, p. 171).

6. The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (Apocalyptic) A work based on Jacob's words to his sons in Genesis 49.

7. The Sibylline Oracle (Apocalyptic)

8. The Assumption of Moses (Apocalyptic)

9. 2 Enoch, or The Book of the Secrets of Enoch (Apocalyptic) "The book relates Enoch's travels through the seven heavens and the divine revelations that he received concerning creation, the history of the world, hell, and paradise. Its composition is dated by most scholars in the first half of the first Christian century" (Metzger, p. 173).

10. 2 Baruch, or The Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch (Apocalyptic)

11. 3 Baruch, or The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch (Apocalyptic)

12. 3 Maccabees (Didactical) This book has nothing to do with the Maccabees but probably received its name since it claims to describe events during the Maccabean period. The book contains impossibilities and exaggerations and was written shortly before or during the beginning of the Christian era.

13. 4 Maccabees (Didactical) This work is a Greek philosophical treatise addressed to Jews on the supremacy of reason over the passions (Metzger, p. 172). It was written between 150 B.C. and A.D. 70.

14. Pirke Aboth (Didactical)

15. The Story of Ahikar (Didactical)

16. The Psalms of Solomon (Poetical) Eighteen in number, these psalms were composed in the middle of the first century B.C. These psalms speak of the coming age when God will send His Messiah, of the house of David, to purge Jerusalem, subdue Gentile nations and rule in righteousness.

17. Psalms 151 (Poetical)

18. The Fragment of a Zadokite Work (Historical)

VI. The Apocrypha (Books accepted by some)

A. *Nature* “The word *apocrypha* has come into the English language from the Greek and basically means *hidden*. It was used very early in the sense of *secretive* or *concealed*, but was also used in reference to a book whose origin was doubtful or unknown. Eventually the word took on the meaning of non-canonical, and thus for centuries the non-canonical books have been known as *apocryphal* books. Yet in Protestant circles ‘the apocrypha’ is the normal designation for those extra books which are found in the Catholic Old Testament” (Lightfoot, p. 115). To summarize, *Apocrypha* can refer to:

1. “Something hard to understand” or “hidden”

2. All noncanonical books A general designation for all the books (including the pseudepigrapha) outside the Hebrew canon. The use of the term “apocrypha” to mean “noncanonical” goes back to the fifth century A.D. with Jerome (R.K. Harrison, “Old Testament and New Testament Apocrypha,” in *The Origin of the Bible*, p. 84).

3. The fifteen works found in the Alexandrian Canon and Septuagint that were not part of the Hebrew (Palestinian) Canon “‘The Apocrypha’ is the designation applied to a collection of fourteen or fifteen books (or parts of books) not included in the Masoretic Hebrew Bible, which were written during the last two centuries before Christ and the first century of the Christian era” (Metzger, p. 161).

4. Old Testament books and additions found in the Catholic Bible that are not found in the Protestant Bible (Post-Reformation meaning).

B. *Confusion over the Apocrypha: Palestinian or Alexandrian Canon?* The confusion over the Apocrypha revolves around the two traditions of the Old Testament canon. The *Palestinian Canon* contains the twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible (thirty-nine in English) while the *Alexandrian Canon* contains the additional fifteen books we call the Apocrypha. (The Alexandrian Canon arose in Alexandria, Egypt where the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into the Greek Septuagint (LXX)).

C. *The fifteen books of the Apocrypha* (as noted by the Revised Standard Version (1957)):

1. The First Book of Esdras (150—100 B.C.) (not included in Catholic Bible) This work begins with a description of the Passover celebration under King Josiah and relates Jewish history down to the reading of the Law in the time of Ezra. It reproduces with little change 2 Chronicles 35:1—36:21, the book of Ezra and Nehemiah 7:73—8:13a. It also includes the story of three young men, in the court of Darius, who held a contest to determine the strongest thing in the world. 1 Esdras has legendary accounts which cannot be supported by Ezra, Nehemiah or 2 Chronicles.

2. The Second Book of Esdras (c. A.D. 100) (not included in Catholic Bible) Differs from the other fifteen books in that it is an apocalypse. It has seven revelations (3:1—14:48) in which the prophet is instructed by the angel Uriel concerning the great mysteries of the moral world. It reflects the Jewish despair following the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

3. Tobit (c. 200—150 B.C.) The Book of Tobit describes the doings of Tobit, a man from the tribe of Naphtali, who was exiled to Ninevah where he zealously continued to observe the Mosaic Law. This book is known for its sound moral teaching and promotion of Jewish piety. It is also known for its mysticism and promotion of astrology and the teaching of Zoroastrianism (*The Bible Almanac*, eds. Packer, Tenney and White, p. 501).

4. Judith (c. 150 B.C.) Judith is a fictitious story of a Jewish woman who delivers her people. It reflects the patriotic mood and religious devotion of the Jews after the Maccabean rebellion.

5. The Additions to the Book of Esther (140-130 B.C.) 107 verses added to the book of Esther that were lacking in the original Hebrew form of the book.

6. The Wisdom of Solomon (c. 30 B.C.) This work was composed in Greek by an Alexandrian Jew who impersonated King Solomon.

7. Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach (c. 180 B.C.) This book is the longest and one of the most highly esteemed of the apocryphal books. The author was a Jewish sage named Joshua (Jesus, in Greek) who taught young men at an academy in Jerusalem. Around 180 B.C. he turned his classroom lectures into two books. This work contains numerous maxims formulated in about 1,600 couplets and grouped according to topic (marriage, wealth, the law, etc. . .).

8. Baruch (c. 150-50 B.C.) This book claims to have been written in Babylon by a companion and recorder of Jeremiah (Jer. 32:12; 36:4). It is mostly a collection of sentences from Jeremiah, Daniel, Isaiah and Job. Most scholars are agreed that it is a composite work put together by two or more authors around the first century B.C.

9. The Letter of Jeremiah (c. 300-100 B.C.) This letter claims to be written by the prophet Jeremiah at the time of the deportation to Babylon. In it he warns the people about idolatry.

10. The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men (2nd— 1st century B.C.) This section is introduced to Daniel in the Catholic Bible after Daniel 3:23 and supposedly gives more details of the fiery furnace incident.

11. Susanna (Daniel 13 in the Catholic Bible) (2nd — 1st century B.C.) In this account, Daniel comes to the rescue of the virtuous Susanna who was wrongly accused of adultery.

12. Bel and the Dragon (Daniel 14 in the Catholic Bible) (c. 100 B.C.) Bel and the Dragon is made up of two stories. The first (vv. 1-22) tells of a great statue of Bel (the Babylonian god Marduk). Supposedly this statue of Bel would eat large quantities of food showing that he was a living god who deserved worship. Daniel, though, proved it was the priests of Bel who were eating the food. As a result, the king put the priests to death and allowed Daniel to destroy Bel and its temple. In the second story (vv. 23-42), Daniel, in defiance of the king, refuses to worship a great dragon. Daniel, instead, asks permission to slay the dragon without “sword or club” (v. 26). Given permission, Daniel feeds the dragon lumps of indigestible pitch, fat and hair so that the dragon bursts open (v. 27).

13. The Prayer of Manasseh (2nd or 1st century B.C.) (Not in Catholic Bible) This work is a short penitential psalm written by someone who read in 2 Chronicles 33:11-19 that Manasseh, the wicked king of Judah, composed a prayer asking God's forgiveness for his many sins.

14. The First Book of the Maccabees (c. 110 B.C.) "The First Book of Maccabees is a generally reliable historical account of the fortunes of Jewish people between 175 and 134 B.C., relating particularly to their struggle with Antiochus IV Epiphanes and his successors. . . . The name of the author, a patriotic Jew at Jerusalem is unknown" (Metzger, p. 169). The book derives its name from Maccabeus, the surname of a Jew who led the Jews in revolt against Syrian oppression.

15. The Second Book of the Maccabees (c. 110-70 B.C.) This book is not a continuation of 1 Maccabees but an independent work partially covering the period of 175-161 B.C. This book is not as historically reliable as 1 Maccabees.

D. Roman Catholic inclusion of the Alexandrian list Of the fifteen books mentioned in the Alexandrian list, twelve were accepted and incorporated into the Roman Catholic Bible. Only 1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh were not included.

NOTE: Though twelve of these works are included in the Catholic Douay Bible, only seven additional books are listed in the table of contents. The reason is that Baruch and the Letter of Jeremiah were combined into one book; the additions of Esther were added to the book of Esther; the Prayer of Azariah was inserted between the Hebrew Daniel 3:23 and 24; Susanna was placed at the end of the book of Daniel (ch. 13); and Bel and the Dragon was attached to Daniel as chapter 14.

E. Reasons for rejecting the Apocrypha as canon There are many reasons why the Apocrypha should not be accepted as Holy Scripture:

1. The Apocryphal books were never included or accepted into the Hebrew canon Since the Old Testament is a collection of Jewish history and Law, it is very significant that none of these books were accepted by any Jewish community in or outside of Palestine (Lightfoot, p. 120). Josephus gives strong historical testimony to the fact that the Jews only recognized those books that make up the thirty-nine books of the Protestant Old Testament (see note V.B. on page 27).

2. Jesus, the Apostles and the New Testament writers never quote the books of the Apocrypha as Scripture Jesus never refers to the Apocrypha. The apostles in their preaching mention many Old Testament events but never refer to any incidents or characters from the Apocrypha. The New Testament writers quote extensively from all over the Old Testament but nowhere quote from the Apocrypha as Scripture (NOTE: An allusion to 2 Maccabees 7 may occur in Hebrews 11:35.).

NOTE: What about Jude's reference to the book of Enoch (and possibly The Assumption of Moses) in Jude 14-15? First, it should be noted that the Book of Enoch is classified as part of the Pseudepigrapha (see p. 31). Thus it is rejected as canonical by Jews, Protestants and Catholics. Enoch is "apocrypha" in the broad sense of being an Old Testament era book that was not part of the Hebrew canon. But it is not "Apocrypha" in the narrower sense of being one of the Old Testament books included in the Alexandrian Canon or the Catholic Bible. It is correct, then, to say that Jesus and the Apostles never quote from the Apocryphal books. Second, Jude's quotation of Enoch does not mean that Jude accepted Enoch as inspired. As Edward Pentecost says, "If Jude quoted the apocryphal book, he was affirming only the truth of that prophecy and not endorsing the book in its entirety." (Edward C. Pentecost, "Jude" in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 922). It should be remembered that the New Testament also quotes from heathen poets such as Aratus (Acts 17:28); Menander (1 Cor. 15:33) and Epimenides (Titus 1:12). Thus, a truthful quote from a secular source does not make the whole source inspired or worthy of being added to the canon.

3. Most of the Old Testament Apocryphal books were written during Israel's post-biblical period Josephus and the Talmud declared that after the time of Malachi (430 B.C.) no more inspired Scripture was being given (see point IV. A and B, p. 26). All of the Apocryphal books, though, with the possible exception of 2 Esdras, were written after 430 B.C.

4. Many Jewish and Christian scholars rejected the Apocrypha as Scripture "These books were not accepted as Scripture by such Jewish writers of the first century as Philo and Josephus; the Jewish council at Jamnia (c. A.D. 90); and by such eminent Christian writers as Origen and Jerome. About A.D. 400 the great Christian scholar Jerome, whose translation of the Latin Vulgate remains the basis of the official Roman Catholic Bible, strongly maintained that these books were "apocryphal" and were not to be included in the canon of Scripture" (Lightfoot, p. 120).

"Although some individuals in the early church had a high esteem for the Apocrypha, no council of the entire church during the first four centuries favored them, and there were many individuals who vehemently opposed them" (Geisler and Nix, p. 268).

5. The Apocrypha includes many historical and geographical inaccuracies For example, in the Book of Judith, Holofernes is described as the general of "Nebuchadnezzar who ruled over the Assyrians in the great city of Ninevah" (1:1). However, Holofernes was a Persian general and Nebuchadnezzar was king of the Babylonians in Babylon.

William Green has stated, "The books of Tobit and Judith abound in geographical, chronological, and historical mistakes, so as not only to vitiate the truth of the narratives which they contain, but to make it doubtful whether they even rest upon a basis of fact" (William Green, *General Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon*, p. 195).

6. Some of the Apocryphal books teach unbiblical or heretical doctrines

a. **Prayers for the dead** 2 Maccabees 12:45-46 promotes prayers for the dead which conflicts with passages such as Hebrews 9:27 and Luke 16:25-26.

b. **Salvation by works** Tobit 12:9 teaches salvation by works—something the Bible strongly teaches against (see Romans 4-5; Gal. 3:11).

NOTE: The two above doctrines were heavily disputed during the Reformation era. As Geisler and Nix say, “the addition of books that support salvation by works and prayers for the dead at that time—only twenty-nine years after Luther posted his Ninety-five Theses—is highly suspect” (Geisler and Nix, p. 269).

7. Late date for acceptance “The Council of Trent (1545-63) was the first official proclamation of the Roman Catholic Church on the Apocrypha, and it came a millennium and a half after the books were written, in an obvious polemical action against Protestantism” (Geisler and Nix, p. 269).

8. There is no claim within the Apocrypha itself that it is the Word of God Unlike many of the books of the Old Testament, the Apocryphal books do not claim divine authority.

8.

F. *Value of the Apocrypha* Even though the Apocryphal books are clearly not part of the Canon of Scripture, that does not mean that all of the books should be dismissed as having no value. Some of the books give important historical and cultural information. For example, 1 Maccabees gives valuable historical information concerning the Jews during the era of 175-134 B.C., particularly their struggles with Antiochus Epiphanes.

Development of the New Testament Canon

I. The Canon of the New Testament

A. *The twenty-seven books recognized as canonical* (See chart on page 12.)

1. Gospels (4) Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

2. History (1) Acts

3. Epistles (21)

a. **Pauline** (13) Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon

b. **General** (8) Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude

4. Prophecy (1) Revelation

B. *Time period* Unlike the Old Testament that was written over a thousand year period, the entire New Testament Canon was written within fifty years (See *Time Period of the Bible* chart, p. 13).

C. *Geographic region* Although the New Testament Canon was written in a much shorter period of time than the Old Testament Canon, the geographic range of the New Testament Canon is far wider. This greater distance may explain why some books of the New Testament took longer to be universally recognized as canon.

D. *Early use of "New Testament"* "Tertullian, an outstanding Christian writer in the first two decades of the third century, was one of the first to call the Christian Scriptures the 'New Testament.' That title had appeared earlier (c. 190) in a composition against Montanism, the author of which is unknown" (Milton Fisher, "The Canon of the New Testament," in *The Origin of the Bible*, p. 66).

II. The process of determining the New Testament Canon

A. *Reasons for collection* The following are reasons for the collection of the New Testament books in the early church era.

1. Access to inspired books The early church was interested in collecting those books that were inspired and thus, prophetic. The works written by the apostles and prophets were considered valuable and worthy of preservation.

2. Guidelines for faith and practice The early church needed to know which books should be read in the churches as the Word of God and which books could be used to determine God's will for doctrine and living.

3. Defense against other religions and philosophies “As the Christian movement was confronted with philosophical and religious trends current in the Mediterranean world of its time, the need for an authentic expression and preservation of the foundation of its belief became the basic motivation toward the realization of the New Testament canon. This grew more acute after the demise of the first generation of eyewitnesses” (Andrie B. Du Toit, “Canon,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p. 102).

4. Heretical threats The early church needed to know exactly which books were canonical because certain heretics were coming up with their own canons. Around A.D. 140, the heretic—Marcion, had his own “canon” that excluded most of the New Testament canonical writings we possess. Marcion believed that only Luke’s Gospel and ten of Paul’s epistles were inspired Scripture. Montanists and gnostic groups were also threats to the early church.

5. Persecutions Diocletians’s persecution of Christians from A.D. 303-306 included the confiscating and destroying of New Testament books. This persecution motivated the church to sort through and settle on which books were really Scripture and which books were worth suffering for.

B. *Phases of New Testament collection*

1. 1st phase—Creation and Spread of the New Testament books (A.D. 50-95) In this period the various New Testament books were written and they also began to be copied and disseminated throughout the churches.

1.

a. **New Testament**

(1) *1 Thessalonians* (A.D. 51) “I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren” (1 Thess. 5:27). In 2:13 Paul also states that the Thessalonians accepted his message “not as the word of men” but as “the word of God.”

(2) *1 Corinthians* (A.D. 54-55) “. . . the things I write to you are the Lord’s commandment” (1 Cor. 14:37).

(3) *Colossians* (A.D. 61) Paul’s letter to the Colossians was to be read in other churches (Col. 4:16).

(4) *Revelation* (A.D. 95) Blessings are promised to all who read and heed the words of the prophecy given to the apostle John (Rev. 1:3). The Book of Revelation was also to be spread throughout the “seven churches” (Rev. 1:11).

(5) *1 Timothy* (A.D. 62) Paul, in 1 Timothy 5:18, quotes Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7 as “Scripture.” Thus, Paul saw Luke’s Gospel as Scripture and saw this New Testament Gospel on equal par with the Old Testament Pentateuch.

(6) *2 Peter* (A.D. 67) In 2 Peter 3:15-16, Peter refers to Paul's letters as part of the "the Scriptures." Since Peter's letter is a general one it implies that widespread knowledge of Paul's letters was known before A.D. 70.

b. Oral tradition "From the beginning, the proclamation about the death and resurrection of Jesus, as well as the teaching of Jesus, circulated among the Christian churches in oral form. Some of the tradition was down quite early (ca. 35-65), but much of it remained in oral form for a considerable period of time" (Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, p. 139) The early Christians took oral tradition very seriously. Eusebius quoted Papias as saying, "For I did not suppose that information from books would help me so much as the word of a living and surviving voice."

b.

c. Clement of Rome "In A.D. 95 Clement of Rome wrote to the Christians in Corinth using a free rendering of material from Matthew and Luke. He seems to be strongly influenced by Hebrews and is obviously familiar with Romans and Corinthians. There are also reflections of 1 Timothy, Titus, 1 Peter, and Ephesians" (Fisher, pp. 69-70).

2. 2nd phase—Growing recognition and collection into groups of the New Testament books (A.D. 96-150) Within this period all of the Gospels and all of Paul's letters were known and recognized in the churches. Some of the smaller letters took more time to be accepted as authoritative because of questions about authentic authorship. But as questions about authorship were answered, they, too, were universally accepted as Scripture. As Fisher states, "This demonstrates that acceptance was not being imposed by the actions of councils but was rather happening spontaneously through a normal response on the part of those who had learned the facts about authorship" (Fisher, p. 70).

a. Clement, Polycarp and Ignatius These three church fathers of this era used the majority of the New Testament in a free manner thus showing that most of the New Testament was accepted without argument. In the writing of these three men only Mark, 2 and 3 John, Jude and 2 Peter are not clearly referred to (Fisher, p. 70). These men also made a clear distinction between their own writings and the inspired apostolic writings.

(1) *Polycarp* (c. A.D. 110) Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John, quotes from Matthew, John, the first ten letters of Paul, 1 Peter and 1 and 2 John.

(2) *The Epistle of Ignatius* (c. A.D. 115) This work corresponds in several places to the Gospels and incorporates language from some of Paul's letters.

b. Papias (c. 70-163) Papias's work, *Interpretation of the Oracles of the Lord* (c. 120) includes material from the four Gospels.

c. The Epistle of Barnabas (c. A.D. 130) This work uses the first "it is written" statement in reference to a New Testament book (Matthew 22:14).

d. Gospel of Truth (A.D. 140) This recently discovered gnostic work treats many of the New Testament books as authoritative. Citations come from the Gospels, Acts, Paul's letters, Hebrews and Revelation.

e. The Marcion Canon (A.D. 140) The heretic, Marcion, determined his own canon selecting only Luke (minus chapters 1 and 2 that he considered too Jewish) and ten of Paul's epistles.

f. **Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 140)** Justin Martyr, around the end of this period, stated that the apostolic writings were on a par with those of the Old Testament prophets. He referred to all four Gospels, most of Paul's letters, 1 Peter and Revelation.

g. **Pseudo-Barnabas (A.D. 70-130)** This work which claims the name Barnabas, includes Matthew, Mark, Luke, Ephesians, 2 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, 1 Peter and 2 Peter.

h. **Summary of this period** "By the middle of the second century every book of the New Testament was referred to, as authoritative (canonical), by at least one of these fathers" (Geisler and Nix, p. 288). (For more information on specific quotes of all the New Testament books during this period see Geisler and Nix, pp. 288-91).

3. 3rd phase—Compiling of the canon (A.D. 150-190) During this era, the formal idea of a canon takes shape. Most books of the New Testament are clearly recognized as canon—only a few need further scrutiny.

a. **Irenaeus (c. A.D. 170)** This disciple of Polycarp (who was discipled by John) is the first early church father to quote almost every book of the New Testament. He quoted or considered authentic twenty-three of the twenty-seven books—omitting only Philemon, James, 2 Peter and 3 John.

b. **Tatian (c. A.D. 170)** A pupil of Justin Martyr, Tatian made a harmony of the four Gospels known as the *Diatessaron*. Other gospels had surfaced by this time but he recognized only the four traditional ones.

c. **The Muratorian Canon (c. A.D. 170)** All the New Testament books except Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter were a part of the original copy of this document.

c.

d. **The Old Latin translation (c. A.D. 200)** Translated before A.D. 200 this translation served as the Bible of the Western church. This Latin version has all of the New Testament books except Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter.

4. 4th phase—Formation of the canon continues (Third century A.D.)

a. **Origen (A.D. 185-254)** Origen wrote commentaries and homilies on most of the New Testament books, emphasizing their inspiration.

b. **Dionysius of Alexandria (pupil of Origen)** Notes that the Western church accepted Revelation but had doubts about Hebrews. The opposite was true in the Eastern church where Hebrews was accepted and Revelation was questioned. Dionysius supported James and 2 and 3 John but not 2 Peter or Jude.

5. 5th phase—Closing of the canon (fourth century)

a. **Eusebius (A.D. 270-340)** This Bishop of Caesarea and church historian, early in the fourth century, set forth his estimate of the canon in his work *Church History*. He classified the status of the canon during this time.

(1) *Universally accepted* The four Gospels, Acts, the Letters of Paul, Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 John and Revelation.

(2) *Accepted by most (including Eusebius) but disputed by some* James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John and Jude.

(3) *Rejected* The Acts of Paul, the Didache and the Shepherd of Hermas.

b. **Athanasius (A.D. 296-373)** With his *Festal Letter* for Easter in 367, Athanasius gave the first full and final declaration on the extent of both Old and New Testament canons. The twenty-seven books he listed as New Testament Canon are the same twenty-seven books in our Bibles today. He also said, “Let no one add to these; let nothing be taken away.”

c. **Council of Hippo (A.D. 393)** This was probably the first church council to lay down the limits of the canon of Scripture (Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, p. 323). The limits of the canon as discussed here were approved by Augustine and verified what was set down by Athanasius.

d. **Council of Carthage (A.D. 397)** The findings of Hippo were reiterated at this council.
CANON IS CLOSED

e. **Jerome (early 5th century)** In a letter dated 414, Jerome appears to accept the New Testament books as fixed. Jerome, personally thought the Letter of Barnabas should have been included in the canon but is content to accept what had already come to be the consensus. “Jerome confirms that by the beginning of the fifth century, the canon of the New Testament had achieved a kind of solemn, unshakable status; it could not be altered, even if one had different opinions” (Carsten Peter Thiede, “A Testament is Born, in *Christian History*, issue 43, p. 29).

III. Criteria used by early church in discovering the New Testament Canon

A. *Inspiration* As with the Old Testament, canonicity of New Testament writings was based on inspiration. Only those works that had been inspired by God were to be part of the canon.

B. *Apostolic authority* Every New Testament book has apostolic authority since they were written by apostles or close associates of the apostles or Jesus.

1. Matthew — an apostle

2. Mark — a close associate of the apostle Peter

3. Luke — a close associate of Paul

4. John — an apostle

5. Paul — an apostle

6. Peter — an apostle

7. James — a half-brother to Jesus and leader of the church in Jerusalem.

8. Jude — a half-brother to Jesus.

9. The writer of Hebrews — though unknown to us today, was associated with the ministries of the apostles (Hebrews 2:3-4).

NOTE: Points A and B are not synonymous. Not everything the apostles wrote was inspired. All inspired writings were written by an apostle or associate of an apostle but not all writings of the apostles were inspired.

C. *Apostolic era* “If a writing was the work of an apostle or someone closely associated with an apostle, it must belong to the apostolic age. Writings of later date, whatever their merit, could not be included among the apostolic or canonical books” (Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, p. 259). This is one of the reasons the highly regarded *Shepherd of Hermas* was not included.

D. *Orthodoxy* No works could be canon that contradicted the apostolic faith—the faith set forth in the undisputed books. For example, the Gospel of Peter was challenged by Bishop Serapion because it hinted at the Docetic view that Christ did not really suffer. The church also did not accept any works that were known to be pseudonymous.

E. *Universal church recognition* “A work which enjoyed only local recognition was not likely to be acknowledged as part of the canon of the catholic church. On the other hand, a work which was acknowledged by the greater part of the catholic church would probably receive universal recognition sooner or later” (Bruce, p. 261).

New Testament Antilegomena, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

I. New Testament classification As with the Old Testament (see p. 29) the following fourfold classification of the New Testament includes:

A. *Homologoumena* (books accepted by all)

B. *Antilegomena* (books disputed by some)

C. *Pseudepigrapha* (books rejected by all)

D. *Apocrypha* (books accepted by some)

II. The Homologoumena (books accepted by all) Twenty of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament had no serious questions about their inspiration. This includes all of the books from Matthew through Philemon, plus 1 Peter and 1 John.

III. The Antilegomena (books disputed by some) Seven books of the New Testament were disputed in regard to their canonicity.

A. *Hebrews* This book was questioned because of its anonymity. In the East, where it was believed to be written by Paul, it was readily accepted. The church in the West was more slow to accept it because of questions about its authorship. Through the influence of Jerome and Augustine in the fourth century, the West finally accepted Hebrews as canonical.

B. *James* James was slow to be accepted by the church because of its statements on the relationship of faith and works which seemed to differ from Paul's epistles. Luther questioned its canonicity on this basis. Eusebius, Jerome and Augustine and the rest of the church, however, finally recognized its complementary nature to Paul's letters and hence its canonical status.

C. *2 Peter* 2 Peter was the most disputed book in the New Testament. Its dissimilarity with 1 Peter and the claim that it was a second century work have caused many to doubt its authenticity. These objections, though, were overcome and the testimony of Origin, Eusebius, Jerome and Augustine on its authenticity won out.

D. *2 and 3 John* These books were questioned because of their limited circulation and private nature. They simply did not enjoy the wider circulation of the other books of the New Testament. The strong similarities with 1 John, though, gave strong testimony that these letters were written by John the apostle.

E. *Jude* Jude's authority was questioned mainly because of its references to the pseudepigraphic work, Enoch. Quotation, however, of a secular source does not make a book noncanonical.

F. *Revelation* This book was clearly accepted in the early church but became questioned later because of its teaching of a millennium. This, however, was an interpretation matter, not an inspiration matter.

IV. The Pseudepigrapha (books rejected by all) The first few centuries of the Christian era saw the production of numerous fanciful and heretical works that were neither genuine or valuable. “These books indicate the heretical teaching of gnostic, docetic, and ascetic groups, as well as the exaggerated fancy of religious lore in the early church” (Geisler and Nix, p. 301). It has been estimated that there were about three hundred books of this nature. The following are well-known pseudepigraphic works:

A. *The Gospel of Thomas* (early second century) This gnostic gospel is a mixture of authentic sayings of Jesus and Gnostic teachings which only the enlightened few are supposed to be able understand. In this gospel Jesus fashioned twelve sparrows from clay and made them fly. He also cursed a young boy who withered like a tree. Eusebius (c. 260-340) said that this work should be “cast aside as absurd and impious” because its style and content clearly show it not to be apostolic (“Books That Almost Made It,” in *Christian History*, issue 43, p. 31).

B. *The Gospel of the Ebionites* (second century) Made by a Jewish sect of Christians who stressed the law of Moses, the Gospel of the Ebionites teaches that Jesus was a mere man who God adopted at His baptism.

C. *The Gospel of Peter* (second century) This docetic work denied the humanity of Christ.

V. The Apocrypha (books accepted by some) None of these works are in modern versions of the Bible but they were sometimes quoted by the Fathers and appeared in some Bible translations.

A. *Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas* (c. A.D. 70-130) Quoted as Scripture by Origen and Clement of Alexandria, this work parallels Hebrews in style but is allegorical and mystical in nature.

B. *Shepherd of Hermas* (c. A.D. 115-140) This work was the most popular of all the noncanonical books. It is a picturesque allegory about a shepherd (Jesus) who gives moral guidance through visions and mandates to a man named Hermas. It was considered Scripture by Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria (See “Books that Almost Made It,” p. 30).

C. *Didache* (c. A.D. 100-120) This work was held in high regard by the early church and gives the opinion of the early church of the second century on the essential truths of Christianity.

D. *Apocalypse of Peter* (c. A.D. 150) This apocalypse gives picturesque descriptions of heaven and hell.

E. *The Acts of Paul* (A.D. 170) This is the story of the conversion and testimony of an Iconian lady, Thelca, based on Acts 14:1-7.

F. *The Gospel According to the Hebrews* (A.D. 65-100)

G. *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* (c. A.D. 108)

Texts and Manuscripts of the Old Testament

I. Hebrew manuscripts throughout history

A. *The Old Testament Canon era (1450-400 B.C.)* Old Testament books were copied by hand for generations on highly perishable papyrus and animal skins. The survival of the Old Testament Scriptures in spite of persecutions and exiles shows the determination of the Jewish scribes to preserve the Old Testament books (Bruce K. Waltke, "The Textual Criticism of the Old Testament," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 212). No copies of this era are extant today.

B. *The Talmudic era (c. 400 B.C. —A.D. 500)* This era produced a flood of manuscripts that were used in the synagogues and for private use. The copies for synagogue use were made with extreme caution and were considered "sacred." By the time of the Maccabean revolt (168 B.C.) the Syrians had destroyed most of the existing manuscripts of the Old Testament (Geisler and Nix, p. 354).

C. *The Masoretic period (c. A.D. 500-1000)* During this period, various Jewish scholars arose dedicated to the preservation of the Old Testament text. This group became known as the Massoretes because of their acknowledged dependence on the authoritative traditions (Massorah) of the text. Centered in Tiberias, this school began around A.D. 500 and continued on for five centuries. Their contributions are many. In addition to adding vowel points to the Hebrew text (all Hebrew letters are consonants), they also sought ways and methods to eliminate copying mistakes (Lightfoot, p. 91).

II. Surviving Hebrew manuscripts Until the Dead Sea Scrolls discoveries, the earliest existing Hebrew manuscripts were dated around A.D. 1000.

A. *The Cairo Codex (A.D. 895)* Includes the Former and Latter prophets.

B. *The Leningrad Codex of the Prophets (A.D. 916)*

C. *British Museum Codex of the Pentateuch (10th— 11th century)*

D. *Leningrad Codex (A.D. 1008)* This is the oldest known manuscript of the entire Old Testament.

NOTE: Before 1947, Old Testament versions were based on these three partial and one complete manuscript from around A.D. 1000.

E. *Aleppo Codex (c. A.D. 950)* Originally a complete Old Testament. Most of it has survived.

F. *Others* Many other manuscripts exist but the above mentioned were the main witnesses to the original Old Testament text.

G. *Dead Sea Scrolls* The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1948, are extremely important in that they include Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament written around 200-100 B.C.—more than a thousand years earlier than the previously earliest manuscripts! The Dead Sea Scrolls include one complete book (Isaiah) and thousands of fragments which, together, represent every Old Testament books except Esther. W.F. Albright has called these scrolls, "The greatest manuscript discovery of modern times."

H. *Why don't earlier copies of the Hebrew Bible exist?* “One may wonder why copies of the Hebrew Bible are late in comparison with the New Testament materials and especially so when it is recalled that the Old Testament was completed several centuries before the first New Testament book was written. The answer is not difficult to find. The Jewish scribes looked upon their copies of the Scriptures with an almost superstitious respect, which led them to give a ceremonial burial to any copy which was old or became worn. Their motive was to prevent the improper use of the material on which the sacred name of God had been inscribed. But however noble their intentions, this ancient custom has deprived us of the early Hebrew manuscripts which we might otherwise have, and thus has lengthened the gap between the available copies of the text and the Old Testament autographs” (Lightfoot, p. 90).

III. Other Old Testament witnesses The most important witnesses to the Old Testament are the Hebrew manuscripts. But other sources are helpful.

A. *Samaritan Pentateuch* (c. 400 B.C.) This manuscript of the Hebrew text covers the first five books of Moses.

B. *Septuagint* (c. 250 B.C.) This Greek translation of the Old Testament spans the entire Old Testament. It was quoted often by the apostles and New Testament writers.

C. *Aramaic Targums* Aramaic translations came into existence after the exile.

D. *Syriac Peshitta* Begun in the middle of the first century A.D. the Peshitta is in close agreement with the Massoretic text.

E. *Latin Vulgate* (A.D. 390-405) Unlike the Old Latin version (A.D. 150) that based its translation on the Greek Septuagint, the Vulgate, composed by Jerome, was translated directly from the Hebrew.

F. *Biblical quotations from the Talmud* (A.D. 200-500)

G. *Origen's Hexapla* (3rd century A.D.)

IV. Reasons for trusting our Old Testament If the oldest Hebrew manuscripts (before consideration of the Dead Sea Scrolls) are dated around A.D. 1000, how can we be sure they accurately reflect what the original writers of Scripture wrote centuries earlier?

A. Meticulous care of Jewish Scribes The lack of manuscript evidence could be a cause for alarm if it were not for the extreme care of the Jewish scribes who made copies of the Old Testament. The Jewish scribes conscientiously sought perfection in the transcription of the text. According to the Talmud, rigid regulations were laid down for making copies of Old Testament texts:

A.

1. The copyist was required to sit in full Jewish dress after a complete bathing.
2. Only a certain kind of ink could be used.
3. Rules governed the spacing of words.
4. No word or letter could be written from memory.
5. Lines and letters were methodically counted.
6. If a manuscript was found to have even one error it was destroyed. (This helps explain why only a few manuscripts survived.)

NOTE: "This strict set of regulations which governed the early Jewish scribes is a chief factor which guarantees the accurate transmission of the Old Testament text" (Lightfoot, pp. 97-98).

B. The work of the Massoretes (A.D. 500-1000) The Massoretes took meticulous precautions to avoid copying mistakes and detect scribal errors. As Lightfoot says, "The Massoretes were textual critics of the first rank. They examined and appraised carefully all the textual materials available to them, and on the basis of their abundant evidence set down in writing the form of the text which had been received at least several centuries before their time. Indeed, their labors were so productive and their contributions so large that our Hebrew text today is often referred to as 'the Massoretic text'" (Lightfoot, p. 92).

C. Confirmation of the Dead Sea Scrolls "With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars have Hebrew manuscripts one thousand years earlier than the great Masoretic Text manuscripts, enabling them to check on the fidelity of the Hebrew text. The result of comparative studies reveals that there is a word-for-word identity in more than 95 percent of the cases, and the 5 percent variation consists mostly of slips of the pen and spelling" (Geisler and Nix, p. 382). As F.F. Bruce says, "The new evidence confirms what we had already good reason to believe—that the Jewish scribes of the early Christian centuries copied and recopied the text of the Hebrew Bible with the utmost fidelity" (F.F. Bruce, *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 61-62).

Texts and Manuscripts of the New Testament

I. Introduction to New Testament manuscripts

A. No original autographs The New Testament books were written in the latter half of the first century A.D. Soon after the books were written, the original autographs perished. But God has preserved His Word through copies of the New Testament called manuscripts—all written in Greek.

B. Comparison between Old Testament and New Testament manuscript evidence The integrity and accuracy of the Old Testament text is largely the result of the extreme care taken by the rabbinical scholars in the transmission process. Though very few Old Testament manuscripts are known, we know they are of very high quality. The reliability of the New Testament text, however, rests on a different basis—the vast multitude of existing manuscripts.

C. Number of manuscripts The number of New Testament manuscripts written in Greek between the second and fifteenth centuries that we currently possess is 5,366. Because of the vast number of manuscripts, the New Testament is undoubtedly the best-attested book from the ancient world.

D. Grouping of manuscripts Most manuscripts do not contain the entire New Testament because a hand-produced copy of the whole New Testament was too bulky for practical use. Four categories were generally followed when making copies of the New Testament 1) the four Gospels, 2) Acts and the General epistles, 3) Pauline epistles and 4) Revelation.

E. Types of manuscripts New Testament manuscripts are made up of three major types.

1. Papyrus Many of the earliest witnesses to the New Testament were written on papyrus material (see page 15). This was the material that the New Testament was written on.

2. Uncials The manuscripts of this group are the earliest and most important. Uncial manuscripts were written with all capital letters and no spaces between letters. 362 uncial manuscripts are in existence.

3. Minuscule (cursives) The minuscule script was a development of the cursive hand and differs from uncials by its use of smaller forms of letters. The small letters could be written more quickly and required less space. The minuscules did not make their debut until the ninth century and thus are of less value because of their dates” (Lightfoot, pp. 36, 49).

II. Important New Testament manuscripts

A. *Uncial manuscripts on Papyrus (2nd — 3rd centuries)* There are eighty-eight papyri manuscripts of portions of the New Testament. These very early and important witnesses of the New Testament include most of the New Testament. The following are the more significant papyri witnesses.

1. P52 (c. A.D. 110-125) “According to most scholars, the closest copy to an autograph is a papyrus manuscript designated P52, dated around 110-125, containing a few verses of John 18 (31-34, 37-38). This fragment, only twenty to thirty years removed from the autograph, was part of one of the earliest copies of John’s Gospel.” (Philip W. Comfort, “Texts and Manuscripts of the New Testament,” in *The Origin of the Bible*, p. 179) It should also be noted that P52 confirms the traditional belief that the Gospel of John was written before the end of the first century A.D.
2. P87 (c. 125) Contains a few verses of Philemon.
3. P77 (c. 150) Contains a few verses of Matthew 23.
4. P32 (c. 175) Has portions of Titus 1 and 2.
5. P45 (late second century) Contains portions of all four Gospels and Acts.
6. P46 (c. 200) Has almost all of Paul’s epistles and Hebrews;
7. P47 (third century) Contains Revelation 9-17.
8. P66 (c. 175) One of the earliest witnesses to the New Testament is this almost complete copy of the Gospel of John.
9. P72 (c. third century) Earliest copy including Jude and 1 and 2 Peter.
10. P75 (c. 175-225) Contains large portions of Luke 3 through John 15.

B. *Uncial manuscripts on vellum and parchment (4th— 9th centuries)* The most important manuscripts of the New Testament are the great uncial codices that date from the fourth and following centuries.

1. Codex Vaticanus (B) (c. 325-350) This fourth century manuscript is widely acknowledged as being the most important witness on the New Testament text. This manuscript has been located in the Vatican Library in Rome since 1481 but its contents were not made available for all until 1889. It is rare in that it contains, in Greek, practically all of the Old and New Testaments. It does not include the Pastoral epistles and Hebrews 9:15—Revelation. In spite of its gaps it is considered to be the most exact copy of the New Testament known. Printed texts of the Greek New Testament today rely heavily on Codex Vaticanus.

2. Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph) (c. 340) Codex Sinaiticus is of near-equal value to Codex Vaticanus and is also an important witness to the New Testament text because of its age, accuracy and completeness. It is known as Codex Sinaiticus because it was discovered by the great textual critic, Constantine Tischendorf at St. Catharine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai in 1844. Tischendorf first discovered Sinaiticus while stumbling upon portions of it in a waste basket awaiting destruction by fire. Codex Sinaiticus contains over half of the Old Testament and all of the New Testament except for Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11.

NOTE: Vaticanus and Sinaiticus rank as the two most important manuscript witnesses to the New Testament.

3. Codex Alexandrinus (A) (c. 450) This Alexandrian manuscript, composed by scribes in Alexandria, Egypt, ranks second only to Vaticanus and Sinaiticus as a superior New Testament witness. It is a near complete manuscript of the Bible with very little missing except for portions from Matthew, John and 2 Corinthians. Codex Alexandrinus was originally to be offered as a gift to King James of England. But since James died before he received it, it was presented to his successor Charles I in 1627. Alexandrinus was not known of early enough to be of help to the translators of the 1611 King James Version.

4. Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (C) (c. 345) This document is a palimpsest—a manuscript in which the original writing has been erased and written over. Through chemicals and hard work, the original writing underneath can be read. It has material from every book of the New Testament except 2 Thessalonians and 2 John. Its age makes it a very valuable witness. It was not until 1845 that a full edition of this manuscript was published.

5. Codex Bezae (D) (c. 450 or 550) This is the earliest known biblical copy in two languages, Greek and Latin. It contains the Gospels and Acts with a small section of 3 John in Latin.

NOTE: Of these five very important manuscripts only one, Codex Bezae was available to the translators of the 1611 King James Version. Revised versions, today, are based on these earlier and better manuscripts.

C. Minuscule Manuscripts (9th — 15th centuries) Because of their late dates, minuscule manuscripts do not possess the high quality of the earlier uncials. These minuscule manuscripts, though, make up the majority of New Testament manuscripts. There are 2,795 manuscripts and 1,964 lectionaries in minuscule script (Compare with 362 manuscripts and 245 lectionaries in uncial script.).

III. Other New Testament witnesses

A. *Lectonaries* A lectionary is a manuscript arranged in sections for the purpose of being read in a public worship service. Most lectionaries are of the Gospels but some include Acts and the Epistles. 2,200 lectionaries have been discovered.

B. *Versions* As the New Testament message spread, it was translated into other languages.

1. The Old Syriac This translation of the New Testament was in circulation in Syria around A.D. 400 (Geisler and Nix, p. 292).

2. The Old Latin The Old Latin version was translated around A.D. 150 and served as the Bible of the Western church. "Some of the Old Latin copies are as old as the celebrated Vatican and Sinaitic Manuscripts. The Old Latin is by far the most important of the Latin versions since it reaches back very close to the time when the last books of the New Testament were written" (Lightfoot, p. 54).

3. The Peshitta This Syriac translation has been in use since the fifth century.

4. The Latin Vulgate This work, begun by Jerome in A.D. 384, became the standard Bible for more than a thousand years and was made the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church.

C. *Early Christian writers* Many volumes of literature exist from the era of the early church fathers. Many of their writings are filled with quotations from the New Testament. These men possessed copies of the New Testament which are older than our manuscripts today. As Bruce Metzger says, "so extensive are these citations that if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone in reconstructing practically the entire New Testament" (Lightfoot, p. 56).

Textual Criticism

I. Introduction to textual criticism (applies to both Old and New Testaments)

A. *Defined* “Textual criticism (which in the past was sometimes referred to as lower criticism) is the attempt to determine the original text of the biblical books” (Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 83). It is concerned with finding out what the original texts (autographs) of the Bible actually said.

1. Criticism not used negatively “Because at times the word ‘criticism’ can mean ‘finding fault with,’ it is important to note that when it is used here it means ‘evaluation,’ the analysis of something with the intent of determining its value” (Bruce M. Metzger, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p. 739).

2. Not to be confused with “Higher Criticism” Higher criticism involves judgments on the genuineness of the biblical texts (i.e. date, unity and authorship). The findings of higher criticism are often subjective and in most cases are not based on a high view of the Word of God.

B. *Necessity of textual criticism* Since the original manuscripts of the Bible are not extant how can we know that the books in the Bible accurately reflect what the original authors wrote? This process of determining what the original authors wrote is the task of textual criticism. The textual critic seeks to weed out the bad readings from the original text.

C. *Sources of textual criticism* There are three classes of sources scholars use in determining what the original writers of Scripture said.

1. Hebrew and Greek manuscripts
2. Ancient translations into other languages
3. Quotations made by rabbis and church fathers

II. Textual variations There are two general mistakes made in the copying process:

A. *Unintentional errors* “Mistakes of the hand, eye, and ear are of frequent occurrence in the manuscripts, but usually pose no problem because they are easy to pick out. Often a scribe with a copy before him mistakes one word for another, and so by chance copies down the wrong word. . . Errors of omission and addition are common in all the manuscripts. Words sometimes are omitted by a copyist for no apparent reason, simply an unintentional omission. More often, however, omissions are due to the similar appearance of words at a corresponding point several lines above or below the manuscript” (Lightfoot, p. 61).

1. Examples A scribe may write the word “Jesus” twice or accidentally skip a line when copying. A scribe may make a mistake because of dim lighting or because he tried to write from memory.

2. HOWEVER Because of the numerous manuscripts available, most textual variations are easily spotted and accounted for. The textual critic, by comparison of many manuscripts, can detect and explain these errors without hesitation. It should also be noted that though unintentional alterations in the text are many, the vast majority of them are of little consequence.

B. *Intentional errors* A more serious problem happens when a well-meaning scribe tries to correct what he perceives to be an error.

1. Ex. Luke 11:2-4 the account of the Lord's prayer in Luke 11:2-4 was made to agree with the more popular version in Matthew 6:9-13.

2. John 19:14 The change from "sixth hour" to "third hour" in John 19:14 in some manuscripts was an attempt to correct what the scribe considered to be an inaccuracy.

3. 1 John 5:7 This clear statement on the Trinity in the Authorized Version (King James) was clearly added to bolster the biblical view of the Trinity.

4. Mark 16:9-20 Early manuscript evidence and internal evidence within the Book of Mark strongly indicate that Mark 16:9-20 was not a part of Mark's original Gospel and that the Gospel really ends at verse 8. Because this ending at verse 8 seems so abrupt, early scribes probably felt the necessity to add material about the resurrection to the end of Mark's Gospel.

5. John 7:53-8:11 As James White says, "The evidence against the originality of this pericope is extensive and wide-ranging, including both external and internal elements" (James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy*, p. 262). It is best to take this story as a true account that happened in the life of Jesus but one that was not originally a part of John's original Gospel.

C. *How significant are the textual variations?* When all the variants of all the manuscripts are accounted for, the number of variants to the New Testament text is 200,000. How sure can we be that our biblical text has not been corrupted? The answer is that the vast majority of variants are very minor and affect, in only a very few cases, the meaning of a text. None of the variants have an impact on any major doctrine of Scripture.

1. Westcott and Hort These excellent textual critics believed that only one-sixtieth of the variants in the New Testament rise above the level of "trivialities," or could be called "substantial variations." Even before the recent manuscript findings this would amount to a text that is 98.33 percent pure.

2. Ezra Abbott According to his estimates the text is 99.75 percent pure.

3. A.T. Robertson He believed that only a "thousandth part of the entire text" was of any real concern. That would make the New Testament 99.9 percent free from real concern for the textual critic (Geisler and Nix, p. 474).

4. Sir Frederic Kenyon "The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries."

History of the English Bible

I. Introduction to translation

A. *Defined* “Translation is the process of beginning with something (written or oral) in one language (the source of language) and expressing it in another language (the receptor language)” (Raymond Elliott, “Bible Translation,” in *The Origin of the Bible*, p. 233). In regard to the Bible it involves taking the Bible message, written originally in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, and putting it into other languages.

B. *Variety of translations* “The Bible—in whole or in part—has been translated into everything from Afrikaans to Zulu and more than 1,900 languages in between. By 1989, according to the American Bible Society, there were complete Bible translations in 314 languages (including all of the world’s major tongues), New Testament translations in 715, and translations of at least one book of the Bible in 890. The most widely translated book is the Gospel of Mark, available in 800 different languages and dialects. . . . Every year between 16 and 20 new languages or dialects receive their own Bible translations” (*Readers Digest ABC’s of the Bible*, p. 300).

II. Introduction to the English Bible

A. *“English Bible” defined* “The Bible played a central part in English Christianity from its earliest days. But when we speak of the *English Bible*, we are not merely thinking of the Bible in England, but of the Bible in the English language” (F.F. Bruce, *History of the English Bible*, p. 1).

B. *Precursor to the Bible in English* “The Bible which was known and used in the earliest English Church, as in the British and Irish Churches even earlier, was the Latin Bible. From the fifth century onwards, the Latin Bible came to mean the version made by Jerome between A.D. 383 and 405, the version commonly known as the Latin Vulgate” (*Ibid.*).

III. The history of the English Bible to 1611

A. *The beginning of the Bible in English (Partial versions) (c. 690—1320)*

1. Caedmon (d. c. 680) “An unlearned laborer by the name of Caedmon is reported to have arranged in verse form stories of the Bible on subjects ranging from the creation to the work of the apostles. Although these verses were not really translations, they mark the first known attempt to put the Bible accounts in the native Anglo-Saxon” (Lightfoot, p. 125).

2. Aldhelm (640-709) Aldhelm made the first straightforward translation of portions of the Bible into English. He translated the Psalms into Old English shortly after A.D. 700 (Geisler and Nix, p. 544).

3. Egbert (c. 705) Egbert of Northumbria became the first to translate the first three gospels into English.

4. The Venerable Bede (674-735) Bede, one of the greatest scholars in Europe, translated the Gospel of John into English.

5. Alfred the Great (849-901) Alfred translated part of Exodus and Acts into English.

6. Aldred (c. 950) “A priest named Aldred left his legacy by writing a word-for-word translation of the Latin between the lines of the Latin manuscript of the bishop of Lindisfarne—thus producing an interlinear translation” (Jonathan Underwood, *A History of the English Bible*, p. 68). This manuscript of Aldred is our earliest evidence of an English translation of the New Testament.

7. Aelfric (c. 950-1020) Aelfric translated from the Latin the first seven books of the Old Testament.

8. William of Shoreham and Richard Rolle (1300s) Both these men translated the Psalms into English. Rolle’s edition also contained a verse-by-verse commentary.

B. *The complete English Bible* (Wycliffe—King James) (1382-1611)

1. John Wycliffe (c. 1320-84) John Wycliffe, the “Morning Star of the Reformation,” was responsible for the first full translation of the Bible into English. Clashing often with the Pope and Rome, Wycliffe believed that English speaking people needed their own version of the Scriptures. He said, “Englishmen learn Christ’s law best in English.” With the assistance of some of his students, Wycliffe translated the Bible using Jerome’s Latin Vulgate as the basis for his translation. His work was completed in 1382. In 1388, Wycliffe’s associate, John Purvey, revised Wycliffe’s first version. Wycliffe’s efforts were so despised by the Roman Catholic Church that they issued five papal bulls ordering his arrest, declared him a heretic, burned some of his copies of the Bible, and forty-three years after his death, dug up his remains, burning them and throwing them into a river.

NOTE: Wycliffe’s version came years before the invention of the printing press. Though done by hand, enough copies were made to survive the attempts to have all of Wycliffe’s copies burned. Today 170 copies of Wycliffe’s version exist.

2. Changing times (1396-early 1500’s) This time period brought many revolutionary changes to England and all of Europe that paved the way for printed versions of the Bible in English.

a. The Renaissance brought about the rise of nationalism, exploration, discovery and literary revival.

b. Johannes Gutenberg (1396-1468) invented the printing press. The Gutenberg Bible was published in 1455.

c. Cheap paper was introduced into Europe.

d. In 1458 Greek began to be studied publicly at the University of Paris.

e. The first Greek grammar appeared in 1476. The first Greek lexicon appeared in 1492.

f. The first Hebrew Bible was published in 1488 followed by the first Hebrew grammar (1503) and lexicon (1506).

g. William Caxton (1422-91) brought the new printing method to England.

h. The Protestant Reformation brought attention back to the authority and sufficiency of the Bible.

i. Erasmus’s Greek New Testament was published in 1516.

3. William Tyndale (c. 1492-1536) William Tyndale was a brilliant scholar who studied at Oxford and Cambridge. A student of Erasmus, Tyndale spoke seven languages and was proficient in Hebrew and Greek. Tyndale's aim in life was to give English people a translation of the Bible based not on Latin but on the original Greek and Hebrew. When challenged by a member of the clergy that Englishmen were "better without God's Law than without the Pope's." Tyndale replied, "I defy the Pope and all his laws; if God spares my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scriptures than thou dost." In 1523, Tyndale sought official support for his English translation from the church hierarchy in England but was denied. Under the sponsorship of some wealthy merchants, Tyndale went to Germany where he completed the New Testament in February 1526. Six thousand copies of his New Testament were copied in Worms and by April 1526 they were selling in England. Bishop Tunstall of London, however, bought many of these copies and had them burned. Ironically, the money of Tunstall paid off Tyndale's debts and financed a new and corrected edition. Tyndale reprinted his New Testament many times and in 1530 he published his translation of the Pentateuch, with a revised edition of Genesis appearing in 1534. Tyndale also translated Jonah and all of the books from Joshua to 2 Chronicles. Tyndale translated directly from the Hebrew and Greek and truly is the father of the English Bible. Ninety percent of his words passed into the King James Version and seventy-five percent went into the Revised Standard Version. Eight major English translations of the Bible appeared in the 86 years before the King James Version in 1611 but Tyndale's was the most influential. Tyndale's translations were unpopular with church authorities since his work was unauthorized and he put the Bible into the hands of the common man. Tyndale lived with English merchants in Antwerp in relative safety until he was betrayed and arrested in 1535. After a year and a half of being imprisoned, he was burned at the stake in Brussels on October 6, 1536. His last words were "Lord, Open the King of England's eyes" (Tony Lane, "The Crown of English Bibles, in *Christian History*, Issue 43, pp. 8-9).

4. Miles Coverdale (1488-1569) Miles Coverdale, a friend and associate of Tyndale, was responsible for the publication of the first complete English Bible in printed form in 1535. Coverdale used the translations of Tyndale (the New Testament and Genesis—2 Chronicles) and translated the rest himself. Coverdale, however, in his translations, used the Latin rather than the Hebrew. Within one year of Tyndale's death, complete English Bibles were available to the people.

Thomas Matthew (c. 1500-1555) John Rogers, under the name Thomas Matthew, published his own version in 1537 by combining the Old Testament works of Tyndale and Coverdale along with the 1535 revision of Tyndale's New Testament. This translation also included two-thousand marginal notes. Since he was an associate of the declared heretic, Tyndale, Rogers used the name Thomas Matthew in his version. Rogers was burned at the stake in England under the reign of Mary Tudor.

5. Richard Taverner (1505-1575) Taverner's Bible was a 1539 revision of the Matthew's Bible. He gave a number of improved renderings of the New Testament.

6. The Great Bible (1539) In 1539 another revision of Matthew's Bible was published—the Great Bible. "Edited by Coverdale, it was the first of the English Bibles authorized to be read in the churches. It was the wish of Henry VIII that it go abroad among the people, and in keeping with the king's wish a copy of the Great Bible was placed in every church in the land. People flocked eagerly to the churches to see the Bibles which had been set up for reading, and at times the preachers complained because the people chose rather to read the Bible than listen to their sermons. Tyndale's dying prayer at last had been answered: the Lord had opened the king of England's eyes" (Lightfoot, pp. 129-30).

7. The Geneva Bible (1560) With the Roman Catholic, “Bloody Mary Tudor,” on the throne in England (1553) some Protestants fled to Geneva where they produced a new translation—the Geneva Bible. The main force behind the Geneva Bible was William Whittingham—a colleague of John Calvin. The Geneva Bible was an improvement to the previous English translations. Its translators were scholars who were able to make revisions from the original languages. It was also the first translation to use chapter and verse arrangement, print each verse as a paragraph and put words not found in the original texts in italics. The Geneva Bible was also small and moderately priced. Its commentary notes presented the views of John Calvin and the Reformation. It was very popular among lay people but was not acceptable to the Church of England because of its Calvinistic bias. A 1595 edition added notes that the beast coming out of the pit in Revelation 11:7 is “the pope which hath his power out of hell and cometh thence” (Lane, p. 9). The Geneva Bible was the Bible of Shakespeare and the Pilgrims of America.

8. The Bishop’s Bible (1568) When Elizabeth came to England’s throne in 1558, she required every parish church to have an English Bible. Since the Geneva Bible was not accepted by the English clergy because of its controversial notes, another more acceptable version came into being—the Bishop’s Bible. Its name came from the fact that most of the translators were bishops. The Bishop’s Bible was basically a revision of the Great Bible. Its quality, though, was not as good as the already very popular Geneva Bible and failed in rivaling the Geneva version. No more copies of the Bishop’s Bible were made after 1602 though it continued to be the official version of the churches until the 1611 King James Version.

9. The Rheims-Douai Version (1609-10) “The zeal of Protestant revisions and editions eventually forced into being a Roman Catholic translation of the Bible. An edition of the New Testament was produced in 1582 at the English college of Rheims; and in 1609-10 the college at Douai issued a translation of the Old Testament. The Rheims-Douai translation was thus the first Roman Catholic edition of the English Bible. It was translated, however, not from the original languages of Scripture, but on the basis of the Latin Vulgate” (Lightfoot, pp. 130-31).

NOTE: What commonly passes as the Douai-Rheims (or more simply the Douai) Bible today is not the version as produced by the 1610 translators. Today’s Douai is a revision by Richard Challoner in the mid-eighteenth century. Challoner was a convert from Protestantism who was brought up on the King James Version. His revision of the Douai brought it into considerable conformity with the diction of the King James Version (F.F. Bruce, “Transmission and Translation of the Bible,” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, v.1, pp. 52-53).

10. King James (“Authorized”) Version (1611) From the time of Tyndale until 1611, seven major English translations were made—the Coverdale Bible, the Matthew Bible, the Taverner Bible, the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, the Bishop’s Bible and the Rheims-Douai Bible. The 1611 King James Version, though, would surpass all these versions and become the standard English Bible for the next 350 years.

a. History of the KJV In 1604, King James I summoned a meeting of representatives from diverse religious groups to discuss the issue of religious toleration. At this meeting, known as the Hampton Court Conference, Dr. John Reynolds of Oxford discussed the desirability of having an authorized version of the English Bible that would be acceptable to all parties within the church. James agreed with Reynolds and called for a version that could be used for both public and private use. According to James, the scholars involved with the new version were to use the Bishop's Bible as the basic version as long as it adhered to the original Greek and Hebrew. They were also to consult the other translations—Tyndale, Matthew, Coverdale, Great Bible and the Geneva Bible. Unlike previous versions, there were to be no notes of comment except what was essential in translating the text. In 1607 the translation formally began. Fifty-four men skilled in Greek and Hebrew were selected and divided into six working companies—two at Westminster, two at Oxford and two at Cambridge. Each group was given detailed instructions and was assigned selected books to be translated. The work of each group was to be examined by the other companies. Thus, this translation was to be the work of the revisers as a whole, not the work of one person or group. The work continued for two years and nine months. In 1611, the first copies of the new version were printed. It was dedicated to the king and on its title page were the words, "Appointed to be read in the Churches." In 1613 a new edition was issued with more than four hundred variations from the original printing. Numerous other changes have taken place in the centuries that have followed. The King James immediately replaced the Bishop's Bible in the churches but still received stiff competition from the popular Geneva Bible. Within a few decades, though, the KJV established itself as the standard for English-speaking people around the world.

b. Reasons for success of the KJV

- (1) Greek and Hebrew scholarship made great strides from the time of Tyndale's translation.
- (2) The KJV was made at a time when literary scholarship was flourishing.
- (3) The KJV translators were able to learn from the other translations before the KJV.
- (4) The KJV was not the work of one man or party.

c. Revisions of the KJV The KJV has been through many editions and has been modernized considerably since 1611. In 1613 a new edition was issued which contained more than four hundred variations from the original printing. Other revisions took place in 1615, 1629, 1638 and 1762. The 1762 revision is what most people now know as the King James Version (*The Bible Almanac*, p. 78).

d. Popularity of the KJV "The King James Version remains the most popular English Bible ever. Its classic language though difficult for some to understand today, has been communicating the will of God for over three and a half centuries. Its majestic style has been quoted, paraphrased, and imitated like no other. Its influence in Christian hymns is unmistakable. Although recent textual developments have shown some weaknesses, the King James Version will likely remain the most popular English translation for many years to come" (Underwood, p. 78).

IV. Weaknesses of the King James Version and the need for more recent translations

“The King James Version of the Bible was based on the best Greek and Hebrew texts available. This contributed immeasurably to its worth, for most English Bibles had been translated from a Latin translation. Thus, the King James took English readers a full step closer to the original message. But that was over 350 years ago. Archeology has contributed much to Biblical studies since that time. And textual criticism has made some significant advances since then as well” (Underwood, p. 79).

A. Balanced view of weaknesses When discussing the weaknesses of the King James Version a word of caution is necessary. The differences between the King James Version and more recent versions are very minor. The King James Version is an excellent version that clearly reveals the will and purposes of God.

B. Weaknesses of the KJV The following weaknesses, though, do show a need for more revised editions of the Bible.

1. The KJV is founded on an inferior textual base The manuscript evidence available to the KJV translators was not as good as the manuscript evidence we have today. “This is especially true with reference to the Greek text for the New Testament. The text underlying the King James [the Textus Receptus] was essentially a medieval text embodying a number of scribal mistakes that had accumulated through the years” (Lightfoot, pp. 137-38).

a. History of the Textus Receptus In 1516, Desiderius Erasmus published a Greek text which came to be known as the Textus Receptus. The Textus Receptus served as the basic guide for the translators of the King James Version. Being an excellent scholar, Erasmus printed a fine text, but he was only able to gather half a dozen Greek manuscripts for his initial work. Plus, the Greek manuscripts used in the Textus Receptus were from the inferior text-type known as “Byzantine.” The Byzantine text-type represents a revision of the New Testament text made in the fourth century A.D. and later. It is also farther removed from the text of the first century than certain earlier text-types which have been distinguished in more recent times (Alexandrian, Western and Caesarean) (Bruce, *History of the English Bible*, p. 127).

b.1 John 5:7-8 and the Textus Receptus 1 John 5:7-8 in the KJV reads, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.” This passage, which is found in the Latin Vulgate, was not in any of the Greek manuscripts that Erasmus used when he first was putting the Textus Receptus together. Erasmus did not want this passage in his text but, under pressure, he consented that if one Greek manuscript could be found including this passage he would include it. A highly suspect manuscript from the house of Henry Standish, an enemy of Erasmus, was found including this passage and thus, Erasmus included this passage in his text. Since the KJV translators used the Textus Receptus, this erroneous text became a part of the KJV.

NOTE: The revisers of the 1611 KJV used the best textual evidence they had available to them. Thus, they are not at fault here. They simply did not have at their disposal the many manuscripts which are now known. “It is important to remember that four of the most valuable witnesses on the New Testament text (the Vatican, the Sinaitic, the Alexandrian, and the Ephraem Manuscripts) were not available when the King James translation was made. Nor were there accessible to the translators many other important manuscripts including the very early papyrus documents” (Lightfoot, p. 138).

2. The KJV has archaic words that are either obscure or misleading today

a. **Obscure** “peradventure,” “aforetime,” “howbeit,” “thine,” and “thou.”

b. **Misleading** “In the seventeenth century ‘allege’ was used for ‘prove,’ ‘communicate’ for ‘share,’ ‘suffer’ for ‘allow,’ ‘allow’ for ‘approve,’ ‘let’ for ‘hinder,’ ‘prevent’ for ‘precede,’ ‘conversation’ for ‘conduct,’ and so forth. These expressions are grossly misleading since they are still in use today but carry different associations” (Lightfoot, p. 138).

3. Errors of translation The KJV sometimes fails to preserve distinctions in the Greek text. For example, the KJV gives the rendering of “hell” for the distinct Greek terms “hades” and “gehenna.”

C. Recent English translations With the discovery of earlier and better manuscript evidence the time had come for updated versions of the English Bible.

1. The English Revised Version (1885) In February of 1870 a motion to consider a revision of the King James was passed by the Convocation of the Province of Canterbury. As a result, sixty-five British scholars, along with American scholars who joined them in 1872, made significant changes from the KJV. The Old Testament scholars corrected mistranslations of Hebrew words. The New Testament scholars made thousands of changes based on better textual evidence. The New Testament was not based on the Textus Receptus but rather on the excellent textual work of men like Westcott and Hort, Tischendorf and Tregelles. On May 17, 1881 their work on the New Testament was issued. Four years later on May 19, 1885, the entire Bible was completed with publication of the Old Testament. Three million copies were sold in its first year of publication, though its popularity was not long lasting because of the immense popularity of the KJV. The English Revised Version was oriented toward British spelling and figures of speech and was not popular in the United States. Scholars who worked on this revision included B.F. Westcott, F.J.A. Hort, J.B. Lightfoot and J.H. Thayer (Philip W. Comfort, “History of the English Bible,” in *The Origin of the Bible*, p. 272).

2. The American Standard Version (1901) Some of the American scholars who worked on the English Revised Version banded together to produce their own revision of the KJV that was more suited to people in the United States. Headed by J.H. Thayer, the American Standard Version was published in 1901 and differed little from the ERV except on points of idiom, spelling and word-order. It naturally was preferred in the United States and enjoyed a wide circulation. The ASV is known for its very accurate and very literal reading of the Old and New Testaments. The ASV, however, did not escape criticism. Though much criticism was simply grumbling from those resisting unfamiliar changes, some felt that too many archaic phrases and words from the KJV remained. Other felt that in the desire to be accurate and literal, the wording of the ASV was too stiff and unnatural and certainly did not carry the poetic beauty of the KJV. Concerning this version Charles Spurgeon once said, “strong in Greek, weak in English.” Nevertheless, English-speaking people were closer than ever to the original message of the Bible.

3. The Revised Standard Version (1952) In 1929, the International Council of Religious Education began work on a revision of the ASV. Two reasons for the revision included 1) the desire to correct the stiffness and unnatural reading of the ASV, and 2) the desire to include the findings of the very important manuscript discoveries such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Chester Beatty Papyri. Work on the RSV began in the summer of 1943 and the complete Bible was published on September 30, 1952. Many welcomed the RSV as a more readable and more reliable rendering of the Old and New Testament texts. Others were critical of the RSV because it altered the wording of many classic passages and it gave new readings for a number of passages with theological implications. For example, the RSV quotes Isaiah 7:14 as saying, “the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.” Conservative Evangelicals protested that “young woman” in this passage should read “virgin,” thus being a prophecy of the virgin birth.

4. The New English Bible (1961) “In October 1946, representatives of the major Protestant churches in Great Britain met at Westminster Abbey to commission a new translation that would be better suited to British readers. The New Testament portion of this New English Bible was released in 1961, exactly 350 years after the publication of the KJV. The complete NEB was released in 1970” (*The Bible Almanac*, p. 79). C.H. Dodd was the director of the project. The NEB was unique from the older revisions in that it was a “free translation” emphasizing a “sense for sense” meaning rather than a “word-for-word” meaning. In breaking with the strict Greek constructions, the NEB was easier to read but in so doing sacrificed accuracy. As Lightfoot says, “no translation of recent years varies more from the standard Hebrew text than does the New English Bible” (Lightfoot, p. 150). The NEB was both praised for its ingenuity and readability and severely criticized for its liberty.

5. The Good News Bible (1966) This translation was heavily influenced by the theory of dynamic equivalence. Its readability made it very popular as evidenced by the 35 million copies sold within the first six years of publication.

6. The Living Bible (1971) Using the American Standard Version as his working text, Kenneth Taylor rephrased the Bible into modern speech with the intent that even a child could understand its message. The Living Bible is a paraphrase and not a translation.

7. The New American Standard Bible (1971) “In the New American Standard Bible, evangelical scholars have attempted to update and clarify the ASV. The NASB’s New Testament translators mainly used Nestle’s improved text based on Westcott and Hort; but they also referred to some of the papyrus manuscripts and recent studies of the New Testament text. Generally, the Old Testament committee used Kittel’s Hebrew text” (*The Bible Almanac*, p. 79). The NASB capitalizes personal pronouns that refer to deity. The NASB has been praised for being accurate and literal and criticized for not being contemporary.

8. The New International Version (1979) The New International Version is a completely new translation of the original languages done by an international group of more than one-hundred scholars. The NIV translators sought to make a version that was midway between a literal rendering (such as the NASB) and a free paraphrase (such as the Living Bible). Their goal was to convey in modern English the thought of the original writers. It is very easy to read but like other versions based on the principle of “dynamic equivalence,” it at times resembles a commentary more than a translation.

9. The New King James Version (1982) “In 1979, Thomas Nelson Publishers issued a new edition of the KJV New Testament. This edition was based on the 1894 edition of the *Textus Receptus*. While it preserved the integrity of the text, it eliminated many archaic expressions that made the old KJV difficult to read. The publisher assembled 119 scholars to work on this new publication. Dr. Arthur Farstad coordinated the work on the New Testament section. ‘We chose to follow the same theory of manuscript selection as was employed by the 1611 translators,’ Dr. Farstad said. In 1982 Thomas Nelson published the complete NKJV Bible, which quickly gained wide acceptance” (*The Bible Almanac*, p. 79).

10. Era of revisions “The last part of the twentieth century (the 1980s and 1990s) seems to be a time for new revisions, not new translations. The general consensus among the consumers is, ‘We have enough translations, don’t give us anymore.’ Most of the publishers seem to be getting the message. Therefore, instead of publishing new translations, they are issuing new, revised editions of existing translations” (Comfort, p. 287).

Recommended Books

1. *A General Introduction to the Bible* by Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix. (Chicago: Moody Press), 1986.
2. *How We Got the Bible* by Neil R. Lightfoot. (Grand Rapids: Baker), 1988.
3. *The Canon of Scripture* by F.F. Bruce. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press), 1988.
4. *The Origin of the Bible* edited by Philip W. Comfort. (Wheaton: Tyndale), 1992.
5. *The King James Only Controversy* by James R. White. (Minneapolis: Bethany House), 1995.

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