## Canon of Scripture

Having established that God reveals Himself primarily through inspired speech recorded in inspired books, the question then arises, “Which books contain God’s revelation?” The world is full of books of religious content, and even if we limited ourselves to writings espousing the Christian faith, they are numerous as well. What criteria will enable us to distinguish truly inspired books? Which ones should be included in the Bible?

Our topic is the “canon” of Holy Scripture. The word “canon” goes back to the Greek term κανών (*canon*), which originally designated a stick used for measurement. It was also used to describe a standard or norm in various contexts.[[1]](#footnote-1) In a theological sense, the canon is the books that contain God’s revelation and are authoritative for establishing Christian faith and practice.

Amazing as it may seem, the great majority of sincere believers in Jesus are apparently indifferent to the question of which books the Bible should contain. It is simply assumed that in its early years, the Church flawlessly determined the contents of the canon, or that God sovereignly acted to ensure that the canon included only truly inspired books, and no others.

Yet, the fact that at the present time various Christian denominations accept different lists of biblical books challenges these assumptions. This shows that, first, some Christian denominations errored in their choice of canonical books and, second, God did not sovereignly oversee the selection of books so as to ensure unanimity among all Christian groups. Another factor complicates the picture as well. If the Church possesses the ability to infallibly define the canon, does it also have the ability to inerrantly interpret it, as the Eastern Orthodox and Catholics claim?

It is unfounded for any Christian denomination to simply assume that their preferred canon is correct. On what do they base their assurance? Filson appropriately comments, “The Church is never prohibited from asking whether this is the right canon. The Church is never prohibited from asking an honest question.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

### A. Definition of Canon and Errant Conceptions

**1. Two Sides to the Question**

When formulating a definition of “canon,” one must consider both human and divine factors. People do not give books an inspired status, only God does. All that people can do is to attempt to recognize their divine origin and acknowledge their authority. Bruce Metzger masterfully expresses this distinction when he speaks of the canon both as a “collection of authorized books” and as an “authorized collection of books.” The first expression emphasizes the divine factor – God authorized the books, and the Church simply collects them. The second emphasizes the human factor – the Church “authorizes” them in the sense of recognizing their divine origin and authoritative status.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Therefore, it is imperative to distinguish the inspiration of biblical books from their acknowledgement by the Church. Geisler and Nix express it this way: inspiration concerns *what* God has revealed, while the canon concerns *how* that revelation is recognized. The first is exclusively God’s work, while the second involves the participation of God’s people.[[4]](#footnote-4).

So then, from the perspective of the divine factor in the canon’s determination, the canon began to exist with the composition of the first canonical book. As soon as any subsequent inspired book was penned, it immediately (from God’s perspective) entered the canon of Holy Scripture. When the last inspired book was completed, the canon (again, from God’s perspective), was closed. In relation to the New Testament, B. B. Warfield expresses this idea as follows: “The Canon of the New Testament was completed when the last authoritative book was given to any church by the apostles.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

**2. Canon and Scripture**

In theology today, many are embracing the misguided idea that “canon” and “Scripture” are different things. This theory is called the “exclusive canon,” and one of its chief proponents is Albert Sundberg. He feels that “Scripture” refers to any composition that early Christians considered authoritative, while “canon” refers to the final, concrete list of books, to which no changes could be made.[[6]](#footnote-6) Similarly, Ulrich and Harnack propose that biblical books began their “pilgrimage” to canonicity progressively. At first, God’s people simply respected their lofty contents, then started using them in worship, then started appealing to them as authorities, and finally canonized them.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Other commentators have criticized Sundberg’s approach for the following reasons.[[8]](#footnote-8) First, as we shall see later, Israel and the first-century Church treated books regarded as Scripture with total respect, considering them the very Word of God. A “canonical” regard for these books, then, began much sooner than Sundberg supposes. Second, as Kruger rightly asserts, “If they were able to say that certain books in their library were Scripture, then that implies they would have been able to say that other books in their library were not Scripture.”[[9]](#footnote-9) It follows, therefore, that from the very start of the canonical process, there existed an element of “exclusiveness.”

Third, it is misguided to think that when the canon was “officially” closed, the canonical books somehow acquired more authority in the Church than they already had. It is commonly understood that church leaders did not create the canon, thereby conferring authority on the books, but simply recognized the books already considered authoritative (that is, canonical) by the local congregations.

Others advance a more plausible position. They suggest the notion of a *progressive canon*, which means that in the course of time, God’s people sequentially acknowledged truly inspired writings as canonical. From the moment the first writings were acknowledged, the canon began to exist (from the human perspective). This early collection of books served as a “base canon,” to which other books later were added.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**3. Canon and Adaptability**

In discussing the nature of the canon, some thinkers emphasize the existential value of these books, that is, how their readers found them meaningful. For example, Ryle feels that God’s people chose the canonical books because of their religious value.[[11]](#footnote-11) We may certainly affirm that the Scriptures have a positive effect on their readers. Yet, some go to the extreme to say that the canonical books were chosen *exclusively* for this reason, i.e., they were preserved and canonized because of their ability to edify.

In addition, others add that in the course of time, later editors of the biblical materials adapted them in order to make them more relevant to contemporary readers. McDonald, for example, claims, “To make them continually relevant and adaptable to the contemporary needs of the church, the scribes or tradents found ways to modify, alter, and interpret the sacred texts.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Consequently, the books that were easier to adapt found a place in the biblical canon.

The most well-known and influential of such thinkers is James Sanders. He states that Old Testament books remained in circulation in Israel only if their contents were continually “updated” to adapt to new conditions.[[13]](#footnote-13) If a certain book lacked such flexibility, it fell out of use.[[14]](#footnote-14) Additionally, Sanders finds in Scripture not a few contradictions, which confirms his suspicion that the text has undergone many changes.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Is there value in this position? First, we agree that truly inspired writings have the capacity to speak to various people in various circumstances at various times. They possess this ability, though, due not to the creativity of their authors, but to their divine inspiration. Geisler and Nix express it well: “A given book is not canonical because it was found to be valuable. Rather, it was found to be valuable because it was determined to be canonical by God. In other words, a book is not inspired because it is inspiring; it is inspiring because it is inspired.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

Furthermore, we strongly disagree with the thesis that in the course of time the contents of biblical books changed in order to address contemporary issues. The goal of the canon is to serve as a *standard*, which is actually the meaning of the term. A standard, by definition, does not change. The Word of God serves as the standard for all people of all times in all places. It summons all to submit to its authority, embrace its values and conform to its norms. A canonical writing is an authoritative writing. It does not change in order to adapt to changing times, but calls its readers to return to the basic truths established by God. Sander’s ideas reflect the views not of the Early Church, but of modern thinkers who embrace a humanistic and existential worldview.

**4. Canon and the Spirit**

James Smith advances the theory that the Church should not be guided by a written canon of Scripture.[[17]](#footnote-17) In his opinion, in the early years of Christianity, the Church was a “charismatic community,” where believers did not so much read the Word of God, but heard it, particularly through the ministry of prophets (see 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 14:26). The rise of the canon extinguished prophetic ministry in the Church. At the same time, Smith does not assert that written works played no role at all in the life of the Early Church. Yet, he rejects the idea that they played a dominant role.

In response to Smith, we may say that, just as he does not completely reject the role of Scripture in the Early Church, we do not completely reject the roles of the Spirit or of prophetic ministry in it. These activities are vital to the healthy functioning of the Church. We stand with Smith in his desire to see spiritual gifts and prophetic ministry restored to the Church. Nonetheless, we part ways with him concerning the question of authority in the Church and assert that every spiritual manifestation should be in harmony with God’s written Word and be submitted to its authority.

We see that Paul, in instructing the Church at Corinth about spiritual gifts, demonstrated his authority over the prophetic ministry. Therefore, the prophetic ministry of the Corinthian church must submit to his apostolic order: “If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone does not recognize {this,} he is not recognized.” This apostolic testimony and authority is still in force, now in written form through the New Testament. In fact, how does Smith know about the role of spiritual gifts in the Church, except by reading the authoritative teaching of the New Testament?

We also argue that Jesus Himself, together with His disciples, followed a written standard (the Old Testament) and often appealed to it to confirm their teaching. Finally, if the Church is led purely by the Spirit without Scripture, then who has the right to decide between conflicting claims by parties, who all claim to have heard from the Spirit? In such cases, it usually turns out that the “more spiritual” church leaders make the final call, which results in the reestablishment of an episcopal form of church government, a form rejected by the Reformation.

**5. Canon and Control**

Another deviation in conceiving the canon claims that the canon was created to exercise control over God’s people. It was a political maneuver by the rabbis of Israel and the Early Church to exercise their authority over rebellious factions within the people of God. Christoph Markschies claims, “The process of canonization can in general terms be summarized as ‘the process by which texts are made binding for a group by a particular elite.’”[[18]](#footnote-18)

On the one hand, we agree that establishing the canon is a means of exercising control by defining certain standards and norms. However, in the case of the biblical canon, the one exercising control is not the rabbis of Israel or the church clergy, but the Lord God. The authority that stands behind the canon is not human, but divine. Additionally, as we will soon see, this is not a case of congregational leadership imposing a foreign standard on God’s people, but rather a recognition of what was already generally accepted by them.

Carlston advances a view similar to Markschies, that we must welcome the variety of views that existed in the Early Church. We must not endorse only one “version” of Christianity and suppress all the rest by enforcing a canon of Scripture. He feels that “heresy” is not a deviation from the norm, but a manifestation of the variety inherent to Christianity.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Yet, did Jesus preach various “versions” of the gospel? Do all “versions” of Christianity deserve a place? Jesus and His disciples declared one truth, and the task of the Church is to define and preserve that revelation, while rejecting and refuting all competing views. This the Church did in establishing the canon of Scripture.

**6. Canon and Textual Variants**

This final topic concerns not so much an improper understanding of the canon, as much as a clarifying of its nature. The fact is that we observe differences between the manuscripts that preserve the canonical books, and they are quite numerous (we will discuss textual variants in greater detail later in this volume). If the contents of a biblical book are in question, then how can we consider it canonical? In what form or with which contents can it be considered so?

Here we must separate two issues: the status of the book, and its contents. From God’s point of view, as soon as an inspired book is written, He already determines it canonical. At that time, there is no question as to its contents. If, in the course of time and as a result of copying, the contents change, the canonical status of the book itself does not change. One must merely restore it, as much as possible, to its original condition.[[20]](#footnote-20)

### В. The Old Testament Canon

**1. What the Old Testament Says**

The Old Testament itself gives us clues as to how the canonical process began. If we accept the Old Testament narrative as accurate, we see that the entire process began with God Himself, who gave Moses the Ten Commandments, written on tablets of stone, which were then stored in the ark of the covenant (Deut 9:10-10:5). Eventually, Moses wrote down all the commandments that God gave Him on Mount Sinai (Ex 24:4-7). Toward the end of his life, Moses wrote down the final version of God’s law and entrusted it to Israel’s leaders for safekeeping (Deut 31:9, 24-26).[[21]](#footnote-21) Subsequently, Moses’ books were preserved in the temple (see 2 Kings 22:8).[[22]](#footnote-22)

The Mosaic authorship of the Torah (or “Pentateuch”) is confirmed by the numerous mentions of it in subsequent Old Testament books.[[23]](#footnote-23) The canonical character of his writings is shown in that Israel was obligated to observe the Torah[[24]](#footnote-24) and was forbidden to alter its contents.[[25]](#footnote-25) Twice, the Torah’s authorship is ascribed not to Moses, but to God.[[26]](#footnote-26) Several times, the Scriptural formula “it is written” is associated with Moses’ writings. Consequently, from that time on, all other writings making a claim to be God’s revelation had to line up with the teachings of the Torah.

The question arises, “Why did the people of Moses’ time accept the claim that he received his revelation from God? Geisler and Nix feel that the miracles given him from God convinced that generation of the genuineness of his ministry. In addition, the entire nation received a divine visitation on Mount Sinai (Ex 19). The eyewitness testimony of that generation continued to effect generations to come, which established Moses’ authority in Israel.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Because of the divine origin of the Torah, God’s people immediately accepted it as God’s authoritative Word, that is, they “canonized” it. If any work was acknowledged as God’s authoritative Word, then it possessed the status of “canon,” even if Israel at that time did not think in such categories.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Not only Moses, but also other biblical figures left behind written works. Toward the end of his ministry, Joshua added material to the Torah (Josh 24:26). He also “wrote there on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written, in the presence of the sons of Israel” (Josh 8:32). Samuel wrote the “ordinances of the kingdom” in “the book,” which he “placed before the LORD” (1 Kings 10:25).[[29]](#footnote-29) Bergen rightly concludes that the ancient documents, penned by Moses, Joshua and Samuel, comprised the beginning of the Old Testament canon.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The books of the prophets demonstrate that God’s revelation continued to be preserved in written form (see Isa 30:8; Ezek 43:11; Hab 2:2; Dan 7:1). The most striking example is Jeremiah’s recording of his prophecies (Jer 25:13; 29:1; 30:2; 36:2-4, 27-28).[[31]](#footnote-31) It is notable that Daniel appealed to the book of Jeremiah in order to learn the time when Israel would return to Palestine (Dan 9:2). The author of 2 Chronicles also cited Jeremiah (see 2 Chr 36:21 and Jer 25:11).[[32]](#footnote-32)

Also interesting is that in Jer 26:18-19, Jeremiah cites an earlier prophet, Micah. Micah, in turn, has common material with Isaiah (see Micah 4 and Isa 2). We also see commonality between Isa 2:4 and Joel 3:10; Joel 3:16 and Amos 1:2; and Joel 2:32 and Obadiah 17. Jonah cites the Psalter (Jonah 2:4 from Ps. 42:7).[[33]](#footnote-33) So then, even in ancient times these sources were already available in written form.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Moreover, the Hebrew canon locates the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings in the “Prophets” section, reflecting the belief that they were written by prophets, which underscores their divine and authoritative character. Harris confirms that tradition by noting that the author of Chronicles cites prophets that wrote history.[[35]](#footnote-35) The following Old Testament writers were specifically identified as prophets: Joshua (1 Kings 16:34), David (Acts 2:30), and the sons of Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman (1 Chr 25:1-5).[[36]](#footnote-36) Harris also notes an important characteristic of biblical narrative.

At the end or beginning of certain books, we sometimes observe concluding or introductory words, which connect the given book with the preceding or subsequent one. For example, Moses certainly did not write the account of his own death (Deut 34:5-12), but, most likely, the next canonical writer, Joshua, did. The first verse of the book of Joshua, in fact, seamlessly connects the two books: “Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, that the LORD spoke to Joshua…” Furthermore, Judges 2:7-9 overlaps with Joshua 24:29-31. The book of Ruth finds its context in the book of Judges: “Now it came about in the days when the judges governed…” (Ruth 1:1). Additionally, the genealogy of 1 Chronicles traces back to Adam and unites the entire Old Testament history. The books of Chronicles themselves are an expansion of the previously written books of Samuel and Kings. Finally, the final words of 2 Chronicles serve as an introduction for the subsequent book of Ezra.[[37]](#footnote-37)

We conclude from this observation that at least some of the Old Testament writers were conscious of the fact that their works were a continuation God’s revelation and the description of His activity in Israel. In other words, they consciously participated in the development of the Old Testament canon. In addition, even in Old Testament times, there already existed a set of holy books. Daniel found the writings of Jeremiah “in the books” (Dan 9:2).[[38]](#footnote-38)

**2. The Jewish Determination of the Canon**

**а. Structure of the Hebrew Bible**

It seems appropriate to study how the Jews established their Old Testament canon, especially in the light of the apostle Paul’s words that the Jews were “entrusted with the oracles of God” (Rom 3:2). On this basis, Nichole concludes, “God entrusted his OT oracles to the Jews (Rom 3:2), and they were providentially guided in the recognition and preservation of the OT.”[[39]](#footnote-39)

Which books exactly do the Jews acknowledge as Scripture? The Hebrew Bible has 24 books, which are equal in content to the 39-book canon of Protestantism. The difference between the two canons consists in the division of the books. One book in the Hebrew canon could represent several books in the Protestant one.

The Hebrew canon has three divisions: Law, Prophets and Writings, containing the following books respectively:

* Law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
* Prophets:
  + Early Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel (our 1-2 Samuel), Kings (our 1-2 Kings)
  + Later Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Minor Prophets (12 separate books for us)
* Writings: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Job, Ruth, Ezra-Nehemiah (two separate books for us), Esther, Lamentations, Daniel, Chronicles (2 separate books for us)

It is interesting to note that in antiquity the term “canon” was not used. Instead, the Jewish Mishna and Talmud referred to canonical books as those that “make the hands unclean.” Yet, the origin of this expression is unknown.

**b. The Appearance of the Tripartite Structure**

In the introduction to the apocryphal book *Sirach*, written by the grandson of its author in 132 BC, we read of “the Law and the Prophets and the others who followed after them,” “the Law and the Prophets and the other books of our fathers,” and “the Law itself, and the Prophecies, and the rest of the books.” Jesus also hinted at this tripartite structure: “All things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Lk 24:44). We assume that by the term “Psalms” Jesus meant the third division, i.e., the “Writings.” Finally, the famous first-century Jewish historian, Josephus, comments,

For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another [as the Greeks have], but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life (*Against Apion*, 1:38-40).

**c. More on the Number of Books and Composition of the Hebrew Canon**

The first indication of the number of books in the Hebrew canon is found in the writings of Josephus (first century AD) in his book *Against Apion*, as we noted above. Several things are worth noting here, especially his enumeration of only 22 books.

Many assume that Josephus combined several books (maybe imitating the tradition of his day), namely Ruth with Judges, and Lamentations with Jeremiah. In recounting the Jewish canon of his day, Origin (2nd-3rd century AD) did the same: “Judges and Ruth, among them in one book,” and “Jeremiah, with Lamentations and the epistle in one.”[[40]](#footnote-40) Some hold to the theory that Josephus was influenced by the Septuagint, in which these pairs of books appear side by side.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Unlike the enumeration found in Josephus, the apocryphal book *4 Ezra* (100 AD) indicates (indirectly) a canon of 24 books.

So in forty days were written ninety-four books. And it came to pass when the forty days were fulfilled, that the Most High spake unto me saying: “The twenty-four book that thou hast written publish, that the worthy and unworthy may read (therein): but the seventy last thou shalt keep, to deliver them to the wise among thy people” (*4 Ezra* 14:44-46).

The Talmud boasts the most well-known enumeration of Old Testament books, found in the tractate *b. Baba Bathra* 14b. It is important to note that, although the Babylonian Talmud was written in the sixth century AD, it contains so-called *baraitas*, which are taken from earlier sources.[[42]](#footnote-42) The citation in *Baba Bathra* is from a *baraita*, and its date of composition is estimated to be the end of the second century AD. This tract lists the following 24 books:

* Law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
* Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Minor Prophets
* Writings: Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles

The present Hebrew Bible contains the same books, divided as noted above. This means that this structure remained unchanged for the remainder of Jewish history to this day.

**d. What about the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphic Books?**

After the works presently accepted in the Old Testament canon, other writing of religious content appeared on the scene. They are now known as the apocryphal and pseudepigraphic books, and many are contained in the present version of the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible). The apocryphal books are as follows (for a summary of their contents and their evaluation, see Appendix 1):

* Tobit
* Judith
* The Wisdom of Solomon
* Sirach
* Baruch
* 1-2 Maccabees
* Additions to Daniel (Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, The Prayer of Azariah, and the Song of the Three Children)
* The Epistle of Jeremiah
* Additions to Esther

Sometimes the Apocrypha includes: *1 Esdras* (in the Septuagint called *Esdras A*), *2 Esdras*, *The Prayer of Manassas*, *3-4 Maccabees*, *Psalms of Solomon*, or *Psalm 151*.

Pseudepigraphic books are generally characterized by pseudonymic authorship (as are some of the Apocrypha as well). Here is only a small listing (for a summary of the contents of more prominent pseudepigraphic books and their evaluation, see Appendix 1):

* Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs
* The Book of Enoch
* The Ascension of Moses
* The Martyrdom of Isaiah
* The Testament of Job

Nonetheless, the Jews do not accept apocryphal and pseudepigraphic books as Scripture for the following reasons. First, their teaching at times differs from the accepted books. Second, these writings sometimes originated from sectarian groups. Third, most of them were composed not in Hebrew, but in Greek.[[43]](#footnote-43) Finally, after Malachi, no other prophet arose in Israel, inspired to bring authoritative revelation from God. Josephus writes about this:

It is true, our history hath been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time (*Against Apion*, 1.41).

In addition, *1 Maccabees* (second century BC) also speaks of a period when there was no such prophet in Israel: “And there was great tribulation in Israel, such as was not since the time that a prophet appeared unto them” (*1 Macc.* 9:27. Also, see 4:46 and 14:41). The Jewish Talmud holds to this tradition as well: “For our Rabbis have taught: When Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi died, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel” (*b. Sotah,* 48b)[[44]](#footnote-44). The absence of inspired prophets implies the absence of authorized authors of Holy Scripture.

Philo, who lived in Alexandria (where the Septuagint was translated) in the first century AD, although he did not list an Old Testament canon, nonetheless never cited an apocryphal and pseudepigraphic book.[[45]](#footnote-45) Furthermore, in the early second century, the scholar Aquila made a new translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek. His translation, though, contained only the already accepted 24 books of the Hebrew canon without apocryphal or pseudepigraphic additions.[[46]](#footnote-46)

**3. The Closure of the Old Testament Canon**

Although it is indeed helpful to discover how the Jewish people handled the question of the Old Testament canon, the surest way to define it, as we shall soon see, is by discovering how Jesus and His apostles related to this question. If we are able to clearly determine their understanding of the Old Testament, we will have a perfect example to follow.

Nonetheless, before we undertake this task, it is necessary to inquire whether or not a fixed Old Testament canon already existed in Jesus’ time. If one did exist, then we can embrace His canon with confidence. If not, then our task of determining the contents of God’s Old Testament revelation becomes much more difficult. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate the time when the Old Testament canon was closed.

**a. At the Time of Ezra?**

A longstanding tradition, held by some Church Fathers, declares that Ezra, along with the so-called “Great Synagogue,” gave final definition to the Old Testament canon.[[47]](#footnote-47) The Mishna puts it this way: “Moses received Torah at Sinai and handed it on to Joshua, Joshua to elders, and elders to prophets. And prophets handed it on to the men of the great assembly” (*m. Abot*, 1.1).

As mentioned above, some Church Fathers echoed this tradition, but the Reformers rejected it.[[48]](#footnote-48) One must note an inconsistency in this view – the canonical book of Malachi was written after the time of Ezra. Additionally, notable figures, such as Josephus, Philo and the apocryphal writers, make no mention of this theory.[[49]](#footnote-49)

**b. The Liberal View?**

Herbert Ryle conducted the classic analysis of the canon from the liberal point of view in the 19th century.[[50]](#footnote-50) Ryle, along with other liberals, believe that the Torah was completed in the seventh century BC, and that it was used as canonical Scripture only from the time of king Josiah in that same century (see 2 Kings 22:8). Furthermore, according to the classic liberal understanding of the Old Testament canon, the Prophets became canonical in 200 BC, and the Writings in 100 AD.

In refuting the liberal view, we can note several weak points. First, Israel unquestionably preserved documents containing the writings of Moses and the Prophets, the Psalms of David, the Proverbs of Solomon, etc.[[51]](#footnote-51) The fact that they preserved these writings, made by the heroes of God’s people, reveals that they valued and cherished them.[[52]](#footnote-52) What prevented Israel, then, from “canonizing” them earlier?

Second, the Old Testament abounds with citations of the Law of Moses[[53]](#footnote-53) and of the covenant that God made with Israel. Many of these citations were made *before* king Josiah’s reign, that is, before the time when the Torah was supposedly completed and endorsed.[[54]](#footnote-54) From the very beginning of Old Testament history, God continually summoned His people back to the standard of the Torah, which implies its early existence.

Finally, contrary to the liberal view on the composition of the Torah, Jesus and His apostles unwaveringly testified of its Mosaic authorship.[[55]](#footnote-55) The authority of Jesus and His chosen representatives far exceeds the authority of any modern liberal scholar.

**c. At the Council of Jamnia?**

Many feel that the Old Testament canon was formalized at a council held in Jamnia (Palestine) at the end of the first century AD. Yet, all the information we possess about that council comes from the Mishna and Talmud. According to those sources, the participants discussed only the status of Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon.[[56]](#footnote-56) We are not informed that the rabbis discussed any other book or finalized a canon there. These are simply assumptions.[[57]](#footnote-57)

Harris insightfully comments that in subsequent canonical discussions, the rabbis never appeal to Jamnia, which one would expect if the canon was fixed there and then.[[58]](#footnote-58) In fact, the debates over Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon, and Esther as well, continued until the end of the second century. Therefore, it is problematic to conclude that the canon was formally finalized at Jamnia.

**d. Before the Time of Jesus?**

Does the evidence suffice to show that a fixed Old Testament canon already existed at the time of Christ? Prominent Hebrew scholar Emmanuel Tov claims that the Hebrew biblical text was standardized (that is, other textual variants were removed) no later than the second century BC, and it remained in that form from then on.[[59]](#footnote-59) This implies that prior to the standardization of the text, the books that required standardization were already acknowledged, that is, the Old Testament canon was closed.

We must also take into consideration the abundance of New Testament references to “Scripture.” This term was used both by Jesus (Matt 26:54; Luke 24:27), and by the Pharisees of His time (John 5:39). The term was employed in the synagogues of the Jewish diaspora as well (Acts 17:2, 11).[[60]](#footnote-60) Clearly, in Jesus’ time there existed a concrete set of acknowledged holy books, that is, “Scripture.”

In addition, we must include the testimony of Josephus, mentioned earlier, who listed the 22 holy books acknowledged by the Jews. He also relates that this was not a new invention, but “during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them” (*Against Apion,* 1.42). He then adds, “But it becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their very birth, to esteem those books to contain divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them.” Finally, we recall the frequent mention of the Jews of that time that after the prophecies of Malachi, the work of the Spirit in inspiring Scripture ended.

It appears that evidence suffices to claim that when Jesus and the apostles speak of “Scripture,” they had in mind a specific, definite group of writings, which were known to all, the contents of which could not be altered.[[61]](#footnote-61)

**4. Jesus and His Apostles’ View**

**а. Their Use of the Hebrew Canon**

Since Jesus is God and His disciples were handpicked by Him, we may consider their view on the contents of the Hebrew Bible accurate and authoritative. We will demonstrate that they considered the 24 books of the present Hebrew Bible (equal to the 39 books of the Protestant canon) to be inspired Scripture, and no others.

First, we note that Jesus and His apostles often employed the term “Scripture” (for example, Matt 26:54; Jn 5:39; Acts 17:2, etc.). This indicates that they acknowledged a certain group of books to be inspired. Even in debates with their opponents, they appealed to “Scripture,” which shows that the Jews in general agreed as to the contents of the Hebrew canon.[[62]](#footnote-62) Since the standard held to at the time of Jesus was acceptance of the 24 books listed earlier, we can confidently conclude that Jesus sanctioned this choice.

It is interesting to note Jesus’ words in Luke 24:44, where He delineated the sections of the Hebrew canon: “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (the Psalms being the most prominent work in the “Writings”). This delineation confirms Jesus’ endorsement of the Hebrew Bible of His time. His disciples, of course, would follow His example. In addition, Dempster observes that Jesus explained to two of His disciples “the things concerning Himself in *all* the Scriptures” (Lk 24:27). The word “all” may imply that the canon was indeed closed at that time.[[63]](#footnote-63)

Moreover, the New Testament contains references to all the Old Testament books except Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Ezra-Nehemiah, Obadiah, Nahum and Zephaniah. The final three books, though, were found in the Hebrew book “Minor Prophets,” which the Jews considered one book. We can explain the absence of references to the others by assuming that the New Testament writers had no need to refer to them.[[64]](#footnote-64)

**b. The Use of Non-Canonical Books in the New Testament**

It is true that the New Testament writers do glean material from non-canonical literature.[[65]](#footnote-65) We can highlight the following clear examples:

* Heb 11:35-38 from *2 Macc.* 6:18-7:42, *4 Macc.* 5:3-18:24 and *Martyrdom of Isaiah*, 5:1
* Jude 9 assumedly from a lost section from *The Testament of Moses* (this reference is missing in the parallel passage in 2 Pet 2)
* Jude 14-15 from *1 Enoch* 1:9 (this reference is missing in the parallel passage in 2 Pet 2)
* Acts 17:28; Tit 1:12; 1 Cor 15:33 from Greek poets.[[66]](#footnote-66)

In addition, scholars sometimes posit that New Testament authors also drew more indirectly on intertestamental literature for certain thoughts or ideas (see details in Appendix 2). However, concerning this last point, we must consider the following. Similarity in content does not automatically imply borrowing of material. Other reasons may explain the overlap: (1) both authors are independently expressing the same idea, (2) both authors drew from a common source, or (3) both authors may be reflecting a generally accepted principle. DeSilva suggests that such borrowing may occur more unconsciously, than consciously: “In many cases, it could be asserted that the thought of an Apocrypha text has entered the Jewish culture and thus been carried less directly into the mind of the author.”[[67]](#footnote-67)

Even if some New Testament authors did borrow material from intertestamental writers, it does not follow that they endorsed the inspiration of these works in total. Truth may indeed exist outside of Scripture, and its inclusion in Scripture confirms its validity. Even Paul at times quoted Greek poets, but he would never have considered their works, as such, to be inspired.[[68]](#footnote-68)

However, unlike citations from canonical books, we do not see in any reference to non-canonical material the conventional formulations that refer to inspired books, like “it is written,” “Scripture says,” etc. According to rabbinic tradition, quotations from Scripture were preceded, in general, by such formulations.[[69]](#footnote-69)

We encounter yet another difficulty in that the New Testament contains quotes designated as “Scripture,” but their sources are unknown. Such is the case in: Jn 7:38; Lk 11:49; 1 Cor 2:9; Matt 2:23; Jam 4:5; Eph 5:14. How can we explain this? The usual response is that here we are dealing with paraphrases or combinations of more than one Old Testament reference. In viewing these options, though, the reader may still come away unconvinced:

* Jn 7:38 from Isa 58:11 or Zech 14:8
* 1 Cor 2:9 from Isa 64:4[[70]](#footnote-70)
* Eph 5:14 from Isa 26:19; 51:17; 52:1; 60:1[[71]](#footnote-71)

Even if a throughout explanation remains elusive, the apparent absence of these sources does not disturb our present understanding of the canon. A problem certainly would arise is the alleged sources for these quotations appeared.

**c. Other Objections**

Critics advance a number of other objections to the claim that Jesus and His apostles established the Old Testament canon for us. First, they feel that using Scripture (New Testament) to defend Scripture (Old Testament) is circular reasoning. Do we not need an outside source beside the Bible to confirm its inspiration? However, here we are appealing to the New Testament not as inspired Scripture, but as a reliable historical source for Jesus and His apostles’ view of the Old Testament canon.

We have good reasons to trust the historical reliability of the New Testament. First, is the abundance of ancient copies of the New Testament and the close agreement between their contents. This means that alteration of the New Testament’s contents over time is unlikely. Second, in many cases, archeology has confirmed the historicity of New Testament narrative. Third, the New Testament contains the testimony of eyewitnesses of the events it records.

Throughout the New Testament we encounter one view – that Jesus and His apostles considered the Old Testament a reliable, inspired source of God’s revelation. Even liberal theologians, who often reject the historicity of the New Testament narrative, do not challenge the New Testament presentation of how Jesus and the apostles viewed Scripture. Liberals conventionally dispute the New Testament’s claim to miracles and end-time prophecies.

Other critics advance the idea that, in His use of Scripture, Jesus simply condescended to the conventional understanding of His audience, but in reality held a different view of the Old Testament. Yet, here we must acknowledge that we nowhere find any indication that Jesus held a different view. This “argument from silence” is unconvincing. In fact, even when Jesus was alone in the wilderness, being tempted by the devil, He appealed to the Old Testament as the Word of God (see Matthew, chapter 4). Additionally, in other cases where Jesus disagreed with His contemporaries, He did not hesitate to challenge their understanding, such as about order in the temple (see Jn 2:13-22) or working on the Sabbath (see Matt 12:1-8).

A third objection goes as follows: Jesus and His disciples held a false view of the canon. Such an idea is clearly mistaken. Jesus, being God in the flesh, would not be mistaken in His judgment. Even though He became man, His humanity did not introduce any imperfection into His being. Although Jesus submitted to the limitations of human nature, when He did not know a fact, He openly admitted it (see Matt 24:36). Everything that He knew, He knew precisely and accurately.[[72]](#footnote-72) Moreover, Jesus asserted that He always spoke the truth (Jn 8:45-46).

Still another challenge – Jesus supposedly cited Old Testament texts only to illustrate His teachings, but did not really believe in Old Testament historicity. Verkler wisely suggests that Jesus’ arguments become much more convincing if He was referring to real events in Old Testament history.[[73]](#footnote-73) For example, if Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were only legends, then how could Jesus cite Exodus 3:6 in defense of the teaching of the resurrection of the dead? How could He effectively move rebellious cities to repentance if the following will not occur: “The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah” (Matt 12:41)?

Finally, some feel that the Gospels do not give us a true picture of Jesus of Nazareth, but simply a legendary figure created by the Early Church. Verkler responds that it is much more likely that the Early Church derived their understanding of Scripture from Jesus, than that the Early Church created a figure that echoed *their* view.[[74]](#footnote-74) Also important – all the Gospel writers give the same account of Jesus’ attitude toward Scripture.

**5. The Church’s Definition of the Canon**

**a. Early Lists of Canonical Books**

After the New Testament period, we observe significant changes in the Church’s understanding of the Old Testament canon. Melito of Sardis (second century) composed the earliest enumeration of Old Testament books, which Eusebius preserved in his *Church History*:

Accordingly when I went East and came to the place where these things were preached and done, I learned accurately the books of the Old Testament, and send them to thee as written below. Their names are as follows: Of Moses, five books: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, Deuteronomy; Jesus Nave, Judges, Ruth; of Kings, four books; of Chronicles, two; the Psalms of David, the Proverbs of Solomon, Wisdom also, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Job; of Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah; of the twelve prophets, one book; Daniel, Ezekiel, Esdras (*Church History*, 4.26.14).

If we assume that Jeremiah includes Lamentations and that Ezra includes Nehemiah, then the only difference from the Talmud (*b. Baba Bathra*, 14b) is the exclusion of Esther.[[75]](#footnote-75)

However, 20 years later, Origin released another listing, which Eusebius also preserved:

The twenty-two books of the Hebrews are the following:… Genesis… Exodus… Leviticus… Numbers… Deuteronomy… Jesus, the son of Nave… Judges… Ruth, among them in one book… First and Second of Kings, among them one, Samuel… Third and Fourth of Kings in one… Chronicles, the First and Second in one… Esdras, First and Second in one… the book of Psalms… the Proverbs of Solomon… Ecclesiastes… the Song of Songs… Isaiah… Jeremiah, with Lamentations and the epistle in one… Daniel… Ezekiel… Job… Esther… And besides these there are the Maccabees (*Church History*, 6.25.2).

Origen speaks of 22 books in the canon, but lists only 21. One may assume that he accidentally omitted the Minor Prophets. Immediately after the canonical books, Origen mentions the books of the Maccabees, but separates them from the canon. Unlike Melito, Origen includes Esther and the *Epistle of Jeremiah*.

We must seek to clarify the discrepancies between the canons of Melito and Origen with the listing found in the Talmud (*b. Baba Bathra*, 14b). Melito travelled to Palestine in order to accurately ascertain the Jewish canon. Origen claims to have related the canonical books “as the Hebrews have handed them down” (Eusebius, *Church History,* 6.25.1). Nonetheless, in light of: (1) the careful preservation of tradition by the Jews, (2) the tendency of the Church to expand the canon (see below), and (3) the differences between Melito and Origen themselves, we conclude that the Talmud contains the correct enumeration of the Old Testament canon among the Jews in the second century.

One must also wonder why no early Christian writer, with the possible exception of Jerome, mentioned the tripartite structure of the Hebrew canon, even though writers like Melito and Origen claimed to have received their information from the Jews.[[76]](#footnote-76)

Other Church Fathers claimed to have connections with Jews of their day as well. Yet, all of them (together with Josephus) speak of 22 canonical books, not the typical Jewish enumeration of 24. Even then, they did not always list the same 22 books. For example, Cyril of Jerusalem included in his canon of 22 books *1 Baruch* and the *Epistle of Jeremiah*, but Epiphanius of Salamis included *2 Baruch, 2 Ezra, 3 Ezra* and the *Epistle of Jeremiah.*[[77]](#footnote-77) Clearly, the connection the Fathers had with the Jews did not result in a correspondence of canons, neither with the Jews, nor with one another.

**b. The Septuagint Question**

The Septuagint – the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament – contains books absent in the Hebrew Bible. One must note, though, that no New Testament writer ever cited one of the non-canonical books of the Septuagint with the expression “it is written” or its equivalent. This indicates that not all the books in the Septuagint are necessarily canonical.

Along with this, we observe that from the earliest days of post-apostolic Christianity, the works of the Fathers abound in quotations from apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature. As a result, a number of these works eventually found their way into the Old Testament canon of the Church. We ask, then, “What role did the Septuagint have in the formation of the Church’s expanded canon?”

We will begin by learning how the Jews viewed the Septuagint. As we saw earlier, the rabbis never welcomed intertestamental literature into the collection of inspired books. They recognized exclusively only the 24 books that correspond to the 39 books of the present Protestant canon. This conviction corresponds to the Jewish tradition that after Malachi, the line of divinely authorized prophets came to an end.

It is also significant that in his extensive literary career, Philo of Alexandria (first century AD) never cited an apocryphal or pseudepigraphical work. If an expanded canon existed in Alexandria (the place where the Septuagint was translated), one would expect Philo to cite such books. In addition, the Jews of Alexandria replaced the Septuagint with a new translation by Aquila, which contained none of these non-canonical books.[[78]](#footnote-78)

Moreover, when the Alexandrian Origen listed the books he believed to be accepted by the Jews of his time, he included only one non-canonical book – the *Epistle of Jeremiah*. In his letter to Africanus, he specifically mentions that the Hebrew Bible did not contain *Susanna*, *Bel and the Dragon*, and “thousands of other passages,” where the Septuagint differed from the Hebrew (*Africanus,* 2). Furthermore, Melito’s “Hebrew” canon was also free from additions. Finally, Jerome confirmed that the Jews rejected the Apocrypha, and Augustine related that they did not accept the *Books of Maccabees* or *Judith* as Holy Scripture.[[79]](#footnote-79)

Some scholars express doubt that the Septuagint, in its original form, ever contained apocryphal or pseudepigraphical works at all.[[80]](#footnote-80) They list the following reasons. First, the oldest complete copies of the Septuagint that we possess date back only to the fourth-fifth centuries AD and were preserved not by Israel, but by the Church.[[81]](#footnote-81) On the other hand, we do have a copy of Daniel (papyrus 967, in the collection of Chester Beatty), dated in the third century, that has *Susanna* and *Bel and the Dragon*.[[82]](#footnote-82) Nonetheless, we cannot specifically fix the date when the Apocrypha entered the Greek Old Testament. It is very possible that its inclusion occurred sometime between the first and third centuries AD. It was not the Jews who “flirted” with the Apocrypha, but the post-apostolic Church.

In confirmation of this thesis, we note that in various manuscripts of the Septuagint, the number of non-canonical books differs, and they are situated in various places. This creates the impression that these books were added to the corpus of Old Testament books by various scribes, who arranged them differently. In addition, together with deSilva, we note that the majority of apocryphal and pseudepigraphical books were written in the second century BC, yet the translation of the Septuagint only began in the third century BC. It is unlikely that books so recently composed would find their way into the original Septuagint.[[83]](#footnote-83)

So then, the evidence seems overwhelming that the Jews never acknowledged apocryphal or pseudepigraphical literature as Holy Scripture, neither in Palestine, nor in Alexandria. Not Israel, but the post-apostolic Church took the initiative to eventually canonize them.

Finally, Ryle notes that the majority of Old Testament canon lists, made by Christian writers, more or less follow the order of books found in the Septuagint.[[84]](#footnote-84) This indicates that the Early Church borrowed from the Septuagint its order of Old Testament books as well.

**c. The Church’s Expansion of the Hebrew Canon**

Although in their formal definition of the Old Testament canon, the early Church Fathers showed more restraint, in their theological treatises, even the earliest Fathers (back to Clement of Rome) widely and freely used non-canonical books, usually considering them only helpful for reading.[[85]](#footnote-85) At the same time, they did occasionally refer to them as authoritative writings.

Here are a few examples. **Irenaeus** (2nd c.) borrows material from *1 Enoch* (see *Against Heresies*, 4.16.2) as well as from *Susanna* (ibid, 4.26.3). He quotes verbatim *Wisdom of Solomon,* 6.19 (ibid, 4.38.3) and *1* *Baruch*, 4.36-5.9 (ibid, 5.35.1 - attributing these words to Jeremiah). In the ***Epistle of Barnabas***, 6.7 (2nd c.), *Wisdom of Solomon* is called “Scripture,” and in *Barnabas,* 12.1, a non-canonical citation is attributed to some “prophet” (which some attribute to *1 Esdras,* 5.5). Similarly, in *Barnabas* chapter 16, a non-canonical citation is called “Scripture”: “For the Scripture saith, ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the Lord will deliver up the sheep of His pasture, and their sheep-fold and tower, to destruction.’”

**Clement of Alexandria** (2nd c.), citing *4 Ezra,* 5.35, calls the author “prophet” (*Stromata,* 3.16). **Tertullian** (3rd c.) speaks of *1 Enoch* as Scripture (*On the Apparel of Women*, 1.3; *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 32?).[[86]](#footnote-86) In the preface to **Cyprian’s** (3rd c.) *Exhortation to Martyrdom, Addressed to Fortunatus*, Allert sees allusions to various apocryphal books.[[87]](#footnote-87)

**Origen’s** (3rd c.) treatment of the Old Testament is especially interesting. On the one hand, in his enumeration of the Hebrew canon, he added only one book – the *Epistle of Jeremiah*. On the other hand, he stated that the Church in his day valued other non-canonical writings as well.[[88]](#footnote-88) He personally considered as “Scripture” the *Ascension of Moses* (See *de Principiis*, 3.2.1) and *1 Enoch* (ibid, 4.1.35).[[89]](#footnote-89) Origen justified his approval of certain apocryphal or pseudepigraphical books by claiming that by Divine Providence the Church became aware of them and found them useful.[[90]](#footnote-90) He also suggested that the Jews concealed the apocryphal books, fearing they might somehow cause a scandal.[[91]](#footnote-91)

As far as concrete canonical lists, **Athanasius** (4th c.) included the entire Hebrew canon except Esther, and added *1* *Baruch* and the *Epistle of Jeremiah* (*Festal Letter*, 39.5). **Gregory Nazianzen** excluded Esther as well.[[92]](#footnote-92) Athanasius’ list is duplicated by **Cyril of Jerusalem** (4th c.)[[93]](#footnote-93) (*Catechetical lectures*, 4.35), and the **Council of Laodicea** (363), except that they included Esther.[[94]](#footnote-94) **Hilary of Poitiers** (4th c.) included in his canon *Tobit*, *Judith*, and the *Epistle of Jeremiah*.[[95]](#footnote-95) Another expanded canon is found in **Apostolic** **Canons** (4th c.), which includes *Judith* and *1-3 Maccabees*.[[96]](#footnote-96)

This lack of clarity in the Church’s determination of the canon gave rise to a tripartite system for classifying books in the Early Church: canonical (inspired), ecclesiastical (useful for reading) and apocryphal (in the sense of “heretical”). Athanasius, Rufinus and Eusebius employed such a system.

In the fifth century, the Church abandoned its original hesitancy to alter the Hebrew canon. This is especially notable in the teaching of **Augustine** (4th-5th c.). He added to the Hebrew collection the following: *Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon*, *Sirach*, *1* *Baruch*, *Epistle of Jeremiah*, *1-2 Maccabees*, additions to Daniel (*Susanna*, *Bel and the Dragon, the Prayer of Azariah*) and additions to Esther (10:4-16:24).[[97]](#footnote-97) Subsequent church councils in Hippo (393) and Carthage (397 and 419) confirmed Augustine’s canon.[[98]](#footnote-98)

On the other hand, **Jerome** (4th-5th c.) firmly resisted the tendency to accept the Apocrypha, which resulted in a now famous debate with Augustine. Jerome studied in Palestine, learned the Hebrew tongue, and made a translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew to Latin. Because of his close association with the Jews, Jerome appreciated the importance of preserving the original Old Testament canon. In his introduction to the books of Kings (*Prologus galeatus*), Jerome listed only the 24 books of the Hebrew Bible.

Dempster gives his opinion on why the Church expanded the canon – the influx of Gentiles into the Church weakened ties with the Church’s Jewish heritage.[[99]](#footnote-99) Gallagher feels that the main reason for the Apocrypha’s acceptance was that the Church increasingly employed the criteria of “catholicity” in determining the canon, which involved accepting books because of their wide usage among local congregations.[[100]](#footnote-100) The Apocrypha, in fact, had become very popular.

**d. Present Confessional Positions**

**1) Roman Catholic**

Since the issuing of the official (Clemintine) version of the Latin Vulgate translation in 1592, Catholics recognize the following apocryphal works as inspired Scripture: *Tobit*, *Judith*, *Wisdom of Solomon*, *Sirach*, *1 Baruch*, *1-2 Maccabees*, additions to Daniel (*Susanna*, *Bel and the Dragon, the Prayer of Azariah*) and additions to Esther.[[101]](#footnote-101)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church reveals how Roman Catholicism came to this determination: “It was by the apostolic Tradition that the Church discerned which writings are to be included in the list of the sacred books.”[[102]](#footnote-102) Similarly, Catholic theologian Guido Terreni (13th-14th c.) comments, “From the church’s authority the canonical books derive their power of authority. Through the church the books of the Bible were accepted as authoritative.”[[103]](#footnote-103)

Catholics call these additional books “deuterocanonical.” This does not imply that they are secondary in authority to the other writings, but secondary in a temporal sense in that they entered the canon later. In other words, they come behind the books of the Hebrew canon in time, but not in importance.[[104]](#footnote-104)

**2) Eastern Orthodox**

The question of Old Testament canon in the East is complicated by the fact that there is no universally recognized canonical list.[[105]](#footnote-105) Much depends on the independent practice of the national Orthodox churches.

We observe this same lack of definition in the patristic period. Athanasius, for example, included *1* *Baruch* and the *Epistle of Jeremiah* in his canon, yet excluded Esther. Cyril of Jerusalem and John of Damascus echo Athanasius, but include Esther. At the same time, aside from formal canonical lists, nearly all these Fathers refer in their writings to other non-canonical books as Scripture as well.

The canonical question arose during several church councils. The Synod of Jerusalem in 1672 approved *4 Ezra* (*3 Ezra* in the East), *Tobit*, *Judith*, *Maccabees*, *Wisdom of Solomon*, *Sirach*, *1 Baruch*, the *Epistle of Jeremiah*, *Susanna*, and *Bel and the Dragon*. The Council decreed: “For we judge these also to be with the other genuine Books of Divine Scripture genuine parts of Scripture.”[[106]](#footnote-106) Contrary to this decision, the Large Catechism of the Orthodox Church (1839) recognizes only the books of the Hebrew canon.[[107]](#footnote-107)

Metropolitan Ilarion enumerates for us the present understanding of the canon among Russian Orthodox. The following books are considered “non-canonical”: *Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, 2-3 Ezra, Epistle of Jeremiah, 1 Baruch, 1-3 Maccabees,* the *Prayer of Manassas*, additions to Esther, *Psalm 151*, *Susanna*, *Bel and the Dragon*, the *Prayer of Azariah*.[[108]](#footnote-108)

So then, Russian Orthodoxy, which usually follows the Septuagint, does not recognize some books included in Septuagint, namely *4 Maccabees* and the *Psalms of Solomon.* Yet, they add *3 Ezra* (*4 Ezra* in the West), which is absent in the Greek Old Testament. Also interesting is that the Greek Orthodox Church excludes *3 Ezra,* and *4 Maccabees* is added to the end of the canon, separate from the canonical books.[[109]](#footnote-109)

In Russian Orthodoxy, the term “non-canonical” is a technical term, designating books respected by the church, but not recognized as inspired. Consequently, they are added to the end of the Russian Bible in some editions.[[110]](#footnote-110) Nonetheless, Ilarion comments, “For the Orthodox Church, the main criterion for defining the canonicity of a certain Old Testament book is its usage in the liturgy.[[111]](#footnote-111) Constantelos confirms this claim: “The conscience and practice of the Church in history counts more than theological opinion.”[[112]](#footnote-112)

**3) Reformation Faith**

Luther considered the Apocrypha good and useful for reading, but not Scripture. Along with the reformer Zwingli, he placed them in an Appendix at the end of his translation of the Old Testament, thereby demonstrating their secondary status.[[113]](#footnote-113) In contrast to Luther, John Calvin held a very negative view. In his opinion:

The books commonly called the Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture, and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be in any otherwise approved, or made use of, morethan any other human writing.[[114]](#footnote-114)

Calvin, along with Luther, challenged the Catholic conviction that the Church has the right to establish the canon. The Reformers claimed that the Church’s role is not to authorize biblical books, but to simply recognize their inherent inspired nature.[[115]](#footnote-115)

Several factors likely led to the Reformers’ attitude toward the canon.[[116]](#footnote-116) Due to the European Renaissance, interest in ancient languages arose, including Greek and Hebrew. Because of this, scholars began to look more critically atthe official Bible of the time, the Latin Vulgate, discovering discrepancies between it and the texts in their original languages.[[117]](#footnote-117) Consequently, people began to question the quality of the Vulgate, including the canon it proposed.

Also important is the observation that the teachings found in apocryphal and pseudepigraphical books sometimes run contrary to the gospel. A classic example is *2 Maccabees* 12:44-45:

For if he had not expected the fallen to rise again, it would have been superfluous and silly to pray for the dead – and having regard to the splendour of the gracious reward which is reserved for those who have fallen asleep in godliness – a holy and pious consideration! Hence he made propitiation for the dead, that they might be released from their sin.

**6. Conclusions**

Summing up our discussion of the Old Testament canon, we can conclude that sufficient evidence exists to defend the claim that in the first Christian century there already existed a definite understanding among the Jews as to which books contained the true Word of God and were worthy of “canonization,” however that concept was understood at that time. The list of canonical books can be found in the Talmud, tractate *Baba Bathra*, 14b. This is the “canon” that Jesus and disciples embraced and called “Scripture.”

Even if we allow that uncertainty as to the canonicity of certain books existed among the Jews, it does not follow that the canon was still “open” or “undefined.” The uncertainty of that time concerned (according to Melito and Origen) only the books of Esther and the *Epistle of Jeremiah*. If we include the debates mentioned in the Mishna (*m. Yadayim*, 3.5), the debated books included Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon as well. However, the subsequent debates about these works did not define, but simply clarified and confirmed their status as canonical or non-canonical books (for a discussion of these debates, see Appendix 1).

Since the Lord Jesus and His apostles embraced the Hebrew canon, we can have firm confidence in the conviction that these books, and only these books, contain God’s inspired Word, and are thereby qualified as “canonical.”

Nonetheless, instead of faithfully preserving the Old Testament canon confirmed by Jesus and the apostles, the Early Church from the very beginning of the post-apostolic period gradually altered and distorted the proper understanding of the canon of the Old Testament. Consequently, the Church included in the role of holy books non-inspired works. Only at the time of the Reformation, and by means of it, was the Church able to correct this error.

Let us clarify that, even though the testimony of Jesus and the apostles is decisive to resolve this question, other factors support our conclusion as well. We noted the faithful determination of the canon by Israel, to whom were “entrusted the oracles of God” (Rom 3:2). In addition, we observe in the Jewish handling of the canon a stability and consistency that was lacking in early Christianity. Their stability and constancy strengthens our conviction that they properly preserved the pure Word of God.

### C. The New Testament Canon

**1. New Scriptures on the Way**

Having established that God’s revelation before Christ is found in the 24 books of the Jewish canon (equal in content to the 39 books of the Protestant canon), we can now turn our attention discovering His revelation through Christ and the apostles.

The Old Testament itself gives us definite clues that a new set of inspired books were yet to be written, particularly in connection with the coming of the Messiah. Moses, for example, predicted that God would send another great prophet, whom Israel must heed (Deut 18:18). Jeremiah spoke of a new covenant, which God would establish with His people (Jer 31:31). At the very end of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi foretold God’s visitation to His people (Mal 4:5-6). The Messiah came in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, whose words and deeds brought new revelation from heaven.

Consequently, one may fairly assume that God’s new revelation in Jesus the Messiah would be preserved in new inspired books. Harnack concurs that the New Testament arose due to “the supreme reverence in which the words and teaching of Christ Jesus were held.”[[118]](#footnote-118)

It is curious to note, along with Filson, that as far as we know, the Lord Jesus personally wrote nothing and did not even commission His disciples to record His life history or teachings in written form.[[119]](#footnote-119) Nonetheless, in light of the previous recording of divine revelation in the Old Testament, which Jesus valued and considered inspired, it is safe to assume that He expected His own words and deeds to be preserved in the same way. He claimed, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away” (Mk 13:31).

**2. The Role of the Apostles**

Unlike the Old Testament canon, Jesus gave us no indication as to exactly which books would compromise the New Testament. The New Testament, of course, was written after His ascension. At the same time, Harris insightfully comments, “The Lord Jesus did not, in prophecy, give us a list of the twenty-seven New Testament books. He did, however, give us a list of the inspired authors.”[[120]](#footnote-120) In other words, the Twelve Apostles (excluding Judas Iscariot and including Matthias, see Acts 1:16-26) were appointed and authorized by Jesus to preach and teach in His name.

The following passages confirm this claim. In Mark 3:14 we read, “(Jesus) appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He {could} send them out to preach.” He later commissioned them, “You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8) and, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matt 28:19-20).

Jesus even identified His mission with the mission of the disciples: “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me,” “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (Jn 20:21) and, “If they kept My word, they will keep yours also” (Jn 15:20).[[121]](#footnote-121) The New Testament writers consistently appealed to the testimony of the apostles of Christ as authoritative sources of God’s truth (Lk 1:1-4; 2 Pet 1:16-18; 3:2; Jn 21:24; Heb 2:3; Jude 17). The apostles are even spoken of as the foundation of the Church (Matt 16:18; Eph 2:20; Rev 21:14).

Jesus not only chose the Twelve Apostles, he also promised them special assistance from the Holy Spirit:

* The Holy Spirit “will guide you into all the truth” (Jn 16:13),
* The Holy Spirit “bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (Jn 14:26),
* The Holy Spirit “will disclose to you what is to come” (Jn 16:13).

It is notable that these promises of help from the Spirit correspond to the three aspects of composing Scripture: teaching, history and prophecy.

When one reads the New Testament, it becomes obvious that the apostles understood their position of authority in the Church, given them by the Lord. They understood themselves to be speaking from God and expected the Church to submit to their instruction. For example, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment” (1 Cor 14:37). Moreover, the apostle Paul claimed to have received inspiration from the Spirit and revelation from Him (1 Cor 2:10-13; Eph 3:4-5).[[122]](#footnote-122) He especially appealed to his apostolic authority in his letters to the Thessalonians (1 Thes 2:13; 4:2, 8; 2 Thes 2:15; 3:6, 14-15) and in his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 10:5-6; 12:11-12; 13:10). Some of his letters he personally signed to show that they were genuine apostolic instruction (1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; 2 Thes 3:17; Col 4:18).

Sometimes Paul directed that the entire church should read his letter (1 Thes 5:27), or that the recipient congregation should share it with another congregation (Col 4:16). Geisler and Nix comment on the importance of this directive: “This is a crucial passage, because it indicates that the authority of one epistle included a larger audience than just the one to which it was written.”[[123]](#footnote-123) In addition, those who opposed Paul’s teaching were under a curse (Gal 1:8-9; 2 Thes 3:14-15). Even when Paul (and Peter also) greeted a congregation, they reminded the believers there of their authority, referring to themselves as “apostles.”

John spoke of the authority of the apostles in a similar way. Speaking of apostolic teaching in general (see 1 Jn 1:1-4), he writes: “We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us” (1 Jn 4:6). Loyalty to the apostles must exceed loyalty to local congregational leaders (3 Jn 5-10). John claims to give a faithful description of what he saw on Patmos (Rev 1:2-3), and warned those who would dare to alter the book’s contents (Rev 22:18-19). James’ authority in shown by the fact that his 108 verses contain 54 commands.[[124]](#footnote-124) Peter placed the writings of the apostles on the same level as those of the prophets (2 Pet 3:2).[[125]](#footnote-125)

Not only did the New Testament writers appeal to their own authority, but they also sometimes spoke of the authority of other New Testament writings. For example, in 1 Tim 5:18, Paul refers to Luke 10:7 as Scripture: “For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing’ (from Deut 25:4), and ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages’” (from Lk 10:7). In addition, in 2 Peter 3:16, Peter refers to Paul’s writings as Scripture: “…as also in all {Paul’s} letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as {they do} also the rest of the Scriptures.”

It is also significant that when we read the later New Testament books, we get the impression that their authors sought not so much to impart new revelation, as to preserve the revelation already given. Correspondingly, in such books as the Epistles of Jude, 2-3 John, 2 Peter, 2 Timothy and to the Hebrews, a prominent theme is apostasy from the faith. This shows that the first-century Church was deeply concerned about preserving the apostolic testimony.

In summary, at the end of the Old Testament we encounter an expectation for new canonical books to appear. The writing of such books would certainly accompany the coming of the Messiah, the Son of God, and would preserve His life and teachings. Jesus entrusted the preservation of His new revelation to His apostles, which they proclaimed both orally, and, along with their close associates, in written form. The apostles wrote with authority as from God Himself. They even began to refer to each other’s writing as Scripture. We conclude, then, that all genuine New Testament books must be connected with the Twelve Apostles or their close associates.

This thesis finds further confirmation in the works of the post-apostolic Church Fathers, who ascribed to the apostles’ writings special honor and authority, unlike their more modest regard for their own works.[[126]](#footnote-126)

**3. The Role of Oral Tradition**

In the early years of Christianity, not every congregation had access to all the New Testament books. There was a time in Church history when believers lacked a New Testament as we are privileged to possess it today. The Early Church relied on the Old Testament and the teaching of the apostles, passed on to new generations of believers both orally, and, as congregations possessed them, in individual New Testament books.

The basic teaching of the apostles, passed down as oral tradition, became known as the “rule of faith.”[[127]](#footnote-127) A summary of its contents can be found in the works of Tertullian (*Prescription against heretics*, 13) and Irenaeus (*Against heresies*, 3.4.2). Irenaeus related that this tradition was generally accepted throughout the Church (ibid, 1.10.2). Even in New Testament times, Paul spoke of the passing on of oral tradition (1 Cor 11:2; 15:3; 2 Thes 2:15; 3:6).

Since the post-apostolic Church existed at a time when the memory of the apostles’ teaching was still fresh, it did not sense an urgent need to establish a written canon. On the other hand, if a congregation possessed a written work from one of the apostles, they cherished it and appealed to it as an authoritative source. From the beginning of church history, the writings of the Fathers abound in citations to the apostolic works that they possessed. So then, Christian truth existed in two forms: oral and written.

Eventually, the Church realized the need to treat the question of preserving apostolic teaching with greater care. Memory is not a reliable method to retain material in the long run. Irenaeus comments as follows:

We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, then from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith (*Against heresies*, 3.1.1).

At the same time, Irenaeus informs us that the apostles not only preserved their teaching in written form, but also entrusted it to the church leaders that succeeded them: “For they were desirous that these men should be very perfect and blameless in all things, whom also they were leaving behind as their successors, delivering up their own place of government to these men” (*Against heresies*, 3.3.1).

Consequently, at that time, one could best discover God’s truth in congregations, in which the apostles themselves served and preached. Irenaeus puts it this way: “For how stands the case? Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the most ancient Churches with which the apostles held constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question?” (*Against heresies*, 3.4.1). Tertullian concurs (see *Prescription against heretics*, 21, 36 and *Against Marcion,* 4.5).

Unfortunately, a large segment of the Early Church embraced an extreme position in regard to oral tradition. Even in the fourth century, when the New Testament was already accessible to most if not all congregations, Basil the Great attempted to justify some non-biblical additions to the baptismal ceremony by appealing to oral tradition (see *On the Holy Spirit*, 27.66). To this day, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches rely on church tradition in this way.[[128]](#footnote-128)

On the other hand, only a quick glance at the teachings of Church Fathers reveals a marked deviation from the New Testament, that is, from apostolic teaching. If oral tradition faithfully preserved the apostolic doctrine after the New Testament canon was closed, then how can one explain the great divergence between these two supposed “channels” of God’s revelation? It is clear that the oral preservation of gospel truths played only a temporary role, until the New Testament became accepted by the entire Church and available to individual congregations. In time, oral tradition eventually becomes distorted. It so occurred in the history of the Church.

**4. The Canonical Process**

**a. The Beginning of the Canonical Process**

Next, we will deal with the fascinating question of how the Church determined which books belong in the New Testament canon. Our goal here is not to determine definite criteria for establishing the canon – that will come later. For now, we simply wish to discover from a historical point of view the development of the canonical process in the Early Church and onward. Later, we will attempt to evaluate how correctly the Church defined the canon based on specific criteria for canonization.

Geisler and Nix make an interesting observation that even before the Gospels were written, the first disciples encountered the dilemma of deciding what material to preserve in writing from the total life and teachings of Jesus. The apostle John acknowledged, “Many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe…” (Jn 20:30-31). Similarly, Luke also needed to select limited material from his exhaustive research: “It seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write {it} out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:3-4).[[129]](#footnote-129)

Knox correctly notes that the canonical process began when the books, which were eventually included in the New Testament, were initially accepted as authoritative in the congregations to which they were originally addressed: “These books would have to have been received as prophetic by the first recipients for them to be received as prophetic by any.”[[130]](#footnote-130) The problem of canonization, then, is convincing other congregations, and eventually the entire Church, to receive these writings in the same way.[[131]](#footnote-131)

At the start of the second century, in the patristic works, we see that the Fathers already refer to some New Testament books as Scripture. We encounter numerous examples where they introduce quotations from present New Testament writings with formulas appropriate only to Scripture.[[132]](#footnote-132)

We will give special attention here to Irenaeus, whom Von Campenhausen calls “the first man to know and acknowledge a New Testament both in theory and in practice.”[[133]](#footnote-133) Irenaeus attributed Matthew 10:29-30 to the Lord Jesus (*Against heresies*, 2.26.2). He related that the apostles passed on to us the gospel “in the Scriptures” (ibid, 3.1.1), and that the Christian “rule of faith” was taken from “Scripture” (ibid, 1.9.4). He quoted Galatians 5:21 as Scripture (ibid, 1.6.3) and spoke in general terms of Acts, Luke and the epistles of Paul as “Scripture” (ibid, 3.12.9, 12).

Along with mentions of specific New Testament passages, in the patristic works, we observe an equalization of the New Testament with the Old.[[134]](#footnote-134) For example, Irenaeus spoke of “the entire Scriptures, the prophets, and the Gospels” (*Against heresies*, 2.27.2; 2.35.4), and also of “two covenants” (ibid, 4.9.1; 4.28.1; 4.15.2). Furthermore, Irenaeus testified of the existence of a definite collection of authoritative books, consisting of the teaching of the prophets, the Lord, and the apostles, from which all doctrinal formulations must derive. In his rebuke of false teachers, he relates:

Such, then, is their system, which neither the prophets announced, nor the Lord taught, nor the apostles delivered, but of which they boast… they endeavour to adapt with an air of probability to their own peculiar assertions the parables of the Lord, the sayings of the prophets, and the words of the apostles, in order that their scheme may not seem altogether without support (*Against heresies*, 1.8.1).

Let us investigate the condition of canon in Tertullian’s time (early 3rd c.). He employed the terms “New Testament” and *instrumentum* to refer to a specific set of books.[[135]](#footnote-135) He accused the Gnostic teacher Valentinus of perverting the “Scriptures.” He rebuked Marcion for making “an excision of the Scriptures as suited his own subject-matter,” in that the latter recognized only 10 epistles of Paul and a section of Luke’s Gospel (*Prescription against heretics*, 38). All this points to a recognition of a specific set of New Testament books, accepted in Tertullian’s day. Tertullian also related that even heretics acknowledged the priority of Scripture:

What sort of truth is that which they patronize, when they commend it to us with a lie? Well, but they actually treat of the Scriptures and recommend (their opinions) out of the Scriptures! To be sure they do. From what other source could they derive arguments concerning the things of the faith, except from the records of the faith? (*Prescription against heretics*, 14).

The well-known church historian, Adolf von Harnack, summarizes these observations:

At least as early as the last decade of the second century there existed in the Church of Carthage (not only for Tertullian) a second Canon of Holy Scripture comprising two divisions treated as equal in dignity – Gospels and ‘Apostolus’… in all probability with the ‘Apostolus’ still open – open, that is, for genuine Apostolic works that might yet appear.[[136]](#footnote-136)

So then, from the very beginning of church history, there existed an informal recognition of certain books that faithfully preserved the apostolic teaching and possessed apostolic authority. The warnings of false teachings, present in the New Testament itself, testifies of an early awareness of true doctrine and its distinction from false teaching, which corresponds to the concept of “canonicity”.[[137]](#footnote-137)

This was not, of course, the concept of a “closed canon” that the church of the fourth century embraced. Nonetheless, from the earliest days of Christianity, there existed a “functional canon,” consisting of books that possessed apostolic authority. The “formal” canon, established in the fourth century, did not acknowledge inspired books as much as excluded books unworthy of that status.[[138]](#footnote-138) The canon in the sense of an instrument for acknowledging inspired books existed from the Church’s beginning, yet not in its completed form. Therefore, B. B. Warfield can speak of an “increasing canon” in the Early Church.[[139]](#footnote-139)

**b. The Use of Non-Canonical Books**

One must acknowledge that the works of the Church Fathers contain many citations of non-canonical books. McDonald even relates that the citations from *1 Clement,* the *Pastor of Hermas*, the *Didache*, and the *Epistle of Barnabas* exceed in number the citations from some canonical books.[[140]](#footnote-140)

We even encounter some instances when early Christian writers cite passages from non-canonical books as Scripture. Irenaeus, for example, quoted the *Pastor of Hermas*, *Commandment* 1, with the formula “Scripture declared” (*Against heresies*, 4.20.2). Clement of Alexandria spoke of the Gospel of the Hebrews and (together with Origen) of the *Didache* as Scripture.[[141]](#footnote-141) F. F. Bruce informs us that Cyprian once quoted the *Pastor of Hermas* (*Similitudes* 9.31.5) as Scripture.[[142]](#footnote-142) Finally, we may note some instances where Church Fathers cited “Scripture,” but the sources of the quotations are unknown (see *1 Clement,* 26, 46; *Barnabas,* 6:10; 7:4; 9:8).

Therefore, although the Early Church held to the concept of a specific set of authoritative books that contained the teaching of Jesus and the apostles, initially there was no universal agreement about the contents of that collection. Only in time, the Church was able to evaluate the quality of those books considered for canonicity, and confirm their actual apostolic origin

**c. Further Developments**

In Christian literature of the second-third centuries, we witness indications of which books were already considered canonical by the entire Church. From the time of Irenaeus (2nd c.), it was clear that only four Gospels were considered inspired: “It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds…” (*Against heresies*, 3.11.8). Origen also insisted on these four (*Homily on Luke 1*),[[143]](#footnote-143) as did Tertullian (*Against Marcion*, 4.5). Clement of Alexandria repeatedly quoted all four Gospels, and Tatian used these four to compile his harmony of the Gospels (*Diatessaron*).

Moreover, along with the four Gospels, the earliest books to earn canonical status were the epistles of Paul (except for the Epistle to the Hebrews). Early Christian writers copiously cite them. Even in the mid-first century, Peter could speak of “all his (Paul’s) letters” (2 Pet 3:16), which testifies of an already well-known collection of Paul’s writings that both Peter and his readers knew of.[[144]](#footnote-144) The very oldest collection of all Paul’s epistles (except for the Pastoral Epistles) that we now possess is papyrus 46, copied in the early third century.[[145]](#footnote-145)

Additionally, several other works received early recognition by the Early Church: the Acts of the Apostles, 1 Peter and 1 John. Luke’s authorship of the Acts of the Apostles is confirmed by the Muratonian Canon (170 AD), the Anti-Marcionite prologue to Luke (2nd c.),[[146]](#footnote-146) Origen (3rd c.),[[147]](#footnote-147) and the book itself (cf. Luke 1:1-4 with Acts 1:1). Few doubt the apostolic origins of 1 Peter and 1 John.[[148]](#footnote-148) According to McDonald’s research, “There has been a general agreement in the early churches from the third century regarding the authoritative, or scriptural, status of the four Gospels, Acts, Paul’s epistles, 1 Peter and 1 John.”[[149]](#footnote-149) The remaining books experienced a more strenuous journey to canonization, namely Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2-3 John, Jude, and Revelation.[[150]](#footnote-150) These works are discussed in more detail in Appendix 1.

In the second century, an attempt was made to define a concrete New Testament canon. In the 18th century, the Italian historian Ludovico Antonio Muratori discovered an ancient document listing New Testament books. The document now bears the name the *Muratorian Canon*. It enumerates the following books:

* Gospels of Luke and John (Most likely, the first part of the document, listing the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, is lost. Luke is called the “third Gospel.”)
* Acts of the Apostles
* 13 Epistles of Paul
* General Epistles (Only Jude and 2-3 John are listed. Again, many propose damage to the document with loss of material listing the others.)
* Book of Revelation
* Wisdom of Solomon
* Apocalypse of Peter (with a note, that not all accept it)[[151]](#footnote-151)

What exactly motivated the Church to establish a canon? Many think that the rise of false teachings in the second century (Marcion, Gnosticism, Montanism) compelled the Church to define the accepted books.[[152]](#footnote-152) In the third century, for example, Caius of Rome feared that the Montanists were creating a new Scripture (see Eusebius, *Church history*, 6.20.3).

Others feel that persecution of the Church forced it to determine which books were worth dying for. The Roman emperor Diocletian had ordered the destruction of the Christian Scriptures, as Eusebius records: “It was in the nineteenth year of the reign of Diocletian… that royal edicts were published everywhere, commanding that the churches be leveled to the ground and the Scriptures be destroyed by fire” (*Church history,* 8.2.4).

Filson proposes that the early Christians desired to preserve the apostolic teaching, since all the eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life had already passed into eternity. Therefore, they mimicked the Old Testament practice of preserving God’s revelation in written form.[[153]](#footnote-153) One must also take into account the appearance in the first-second centuries of the codex, a book form, which allowed all the New Testament books to occupy a single volume.[[154]](#footnote-154)

The fourth Christian century witnessed a definite movement to establish a New Testament canon. It is interesting to note that the “canon” of Irenaeus (2nd c.) was compiled not by Irenaeus himself, but by Eusebius (4th c.) from excepts from Irenaeus’ writings (see *Church history*, 5.8.1-8). In fact, Eusebius’ enumeration is not exhaustive, but includes only the four Gospels, 1 John and Revelation. Nonetheless, according the Harris’ research, Irenaeus quoted all the New Testament books, except Philemon and 3 John.[[155]](#footnote-155)

We observe the same phenomenon in the “canon” of Origen, which Eusebius also assembled from the latter’s writings (see *Church history*, 6.15.3-14). The list includes the four Gospels, a reference to the Epistles of Paul in general, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation. Origen expressed doubts about 2 Peter, 2-3 John and Hebrews. Metzger informs us, though, that in his *Homily on Joshua* 7:1, Origen listed all 27 New Testament books, yet Revelation is mentioned only in one Latin copy.[[156]](#footnote-156)

The fourth century writers were active assembling their own canonical lists as well.[[157]](#footnote-157) First for our consideration is the compiler of the “canons” of Irenaeus and Origen – Eusebius of Caesarea (see *Church history*, 3.25.1-7; 3.3.1-6; 2.23.24-25). He accepted as canonical the following: the four Gospels, Acts, the Epistles of Paul, 1 John and 1 Peter. He reports disagreement among the churches about the status of Hebrews and Revelation. Other questionable books included James, Jude, 2 Peter, and 2-3 John. Yet, Eusebius definitely rejected the following: Apocryphal Gospels, Apocryphal Acts, *Pastor of Hermas*, *Apocalypse of Peter*, *Didache*, and *Epistle of Barnabas*.

Concerning Hebrews and Revelation, originally they were each acknowledged by only one part of the universal Church – Revelation in the West, and Hebrews in the East. It is assumed that the Eastern Church hesitated to embrace Revelation due to the Montanist movement, which advanced revelation through prophecy.[[158]](#footnote-158) Some also doubted John’s authorship, especially Dionysius of Alexandria, who noted discrepancies in literary style between Revelation and the other works of John.[[159]](#footnote-159)

The Western Church wavered about endorsing Hebrews due to doubts about Pauline authorship. Tertullian, for example, attributed it to Barnabas (Tertullian, *On Modesty*, 20). On the other hand, the East accepted Paul’s authorship. Clement of Alexandria is an example (see Eusebius, *Church history*, 6.14.2-4). Yet, Origen had his doubts (see *Church history*, 6.15.11-14).

**d. The Final Determination of the New Testament Canon**

Most notable of the canons produced in the fourth century is Athanasius’ 39th Festal Letter (367), where he listed all 27 present New Testament books without additions. Also significant is that in other fourth century lists from the East, we see the same enumeration with the exception of Revelation. It is excluded, for example, by Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catechetical lectures,* 4.36) and Gregory Nazianzen (*Theological verses*, 12). In the West, Jerome, Augustine and Rufinus listed the 27 New Testament books without exclusion.[[160]](#footnote-160) Nonetheless, Jerome acknowledged that some congregations disputed certain books, namely James, Jude, 2 Peter, Hebrews, 2-3 John, and Revelation. Augustine advised believers to rely more heavily on books accepted by the majority of congregations, especially the most prominent ones.

At about the time when Athanasius released his canonical list, several local church councils were held, at which a New Testament canon was recognized. The first of these took place in Laodicea in 360, where the present canonical books were included, except for Revelation (due to the hesitancy in the East to recognize it). Subsequent councils at Hippo (393) and Carthage (397 and 417) acknowledged all 27 books.

Although many attribute to these councils the authoritative establishment of the canon, Shedd wisely reminds us, “The New Testament canon was thus collected and adopted by the custom and usage of the churches, not by conciliar action.”[[161]](#footnote-161) Ferguson shares that opinion: “The councils of the church played little part in the canonization of scripture… their voice was a ratification of what had already become the mind of the church.”[[162]](#footnote-162)

Two final notes. The Roman Catholic Church issued a formal determination of the canon only in the 16th century at the Council of Trent, where they adopted the 27 books acknowledged at Hippo and Carthage.[[163]](#footnote-163) The Syrian Church often employed Titian’s Gospel harmony (*Diatessaron*), and did not recognize the following books until the sixth century: 2 Peter, 2-3 John, Jude and Revelation.[[164]](#footnote-164)

**e. The New Testament Canon in the Reformation Period**

After many years of stability regarding the New Testament canon, none other than Martin Luther decided to challenge it. In his translation of the New Testament into German, he enumerated only 23 books. At the end of his translation, he added the following books without enumeration: James, Hebrews, Jude, and Revelation.[[165]](#footnote-165) In time, though, he became more favorably inclined to the Book of Revelation.[[166]](#footnote-166) Yet, he felt these four books were not worthy of inclusion with the “proper and certain main books of the New Testament.”[[167]](#footnote-167) His justification for marginalizing them was their presentation of Christ (Christology).[[168]](#footnote-168) He felt so strongly about this that he stated,

Whatever does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching. Again, whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate and Herod were doing it.[[169]](#footnote-169)

In addition, Luther considered a main qualification for canonicity to be the book’s teaching on justification by faith. He held this position with tenacity, claiming to maintain it “even if you were to produce six hundred (passages of Scripture) in support of the righteousness of works and against the righteousness of faith.”[[170]](#footnote-170)

Along with devaluing the above mentioned books, Luther expressed a preference for certain others, thus creating a third and higher “level” of canonicity: Gospel of John, First Epistle of John, First Epistle of Peter, Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians. Luther felt that these works “show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salvatory for you to know.”[[171]](#footnote-171)

Other scholars of Luther’s time struggled with the question of canon as well. Contemporaries of Luther, Erasmus and Andreas Karlstadt, expressed doubts about the canonicity of Hebrews, James, 2-3 John, Jude, and 2 Peter.[[172]](#footnote-172) One of Luther’s primary antagonists, Thomas Cajetan, also challenged the authorship of these books, except for 2 Peter. The reformer Zwingli was hesitant about accepting Revelation, and John Calvin had doubts about the authorship of 2 Peter.[[173]](#footnote-173)

**5. Criteria for the Canonization of New Testament Books**

Having surveyed the historical process by which the Church adopted the New Testament canon, we now face the issue of whether it correctly determined its contents. Were Luther and the other Reformers correct in challenging the canon? By which criteria can we make this assessment? Do we have in our present New Testament the books that truly belong there?

Traditionally, four cardinal criteria determine the canonicity of New Testament writings: apostolicity, antiquity, orthodoxy and catholicity (universality). We must examine the legitimacy of these criteria and, in light of our conclusions, suggest a delineation of the New Testament canon.

**a. Apostolicity (Apostolic Authorship)**

The primary criterion by which to judge the canonicity for any potential New Testament book is authorship by an apostle or a close associate. This idea derives from the key role the apostles, appointed by the Lord Himself, played in the preservation and propagation of Christ’s life and teaching. We already highlighted their key role earlier in this Chapter. Who is more capable of passing on to us the truth of Christ than the apostles of Christ, authorized by Him, gifted and inspired by the Spirit of God?

Ridderbos objects that establishing the canon on the criterion of apostolic authorship would mean that the faith of the Church rests on historical research, which, in his opinion, weakens confidence in the canon.[[174]](#footnote-174) What Ridderbos overlooks, however, is that historicity is not a weak point in the defense of Christianity, but a strong, even essential one. The gospel itself, by which we are saved, is based on historical events – on the death of Jesus and His resurrection from the dead.

In Shedd’s words, “The canonicity of a book means its right to a place in the collection of inspired writings; and this depends upon the fact that it was composed by an inspired man or under his direction.”[[175]](#footnote-175) Here, it is important to note that the apostles’ *teaching* is considered authoritative. This means that if a work written in apostolic times by an associate of an apostolic under his direction and with his approval faithfully reflects the apostolic teaching, it could potentially find itself among the canonical books.[[176]](#footnote-176)

In connection with apostolic authorship, as was stated earlier, acceptance of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the Early Church depended on the assumption of its apostolic authorship. F. F. Bruce further comments,

The fortunes of the letter to the Hebrews provide a further example of the importance attached to apostolic authority (if not authorship). Those who (like the church at Alexandria) accepted this letter as the work of Paul recognized it without more ado as canonical.… Those who (like the well-informed members of the Roman church) knew that the work was not Paul’s, esteemed it highly as an edifying document… but did not accept it as apostolic.[[177]](#footnote-177)

The situation with the Book of Revelation parallels that of Hebrews, except that this time the Eastern Church doubted the book’s canonicity. In particular, Dionysius of Alexandria expressed doubts about its authorship by the apostle John.[[178]](#footnote-178) Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory Nazianzen excluded it from their canons. The Eastern Church (with the exception of Athanasius) did not recognize Revelation until the end of the first Christian millennium.[[179]](#footnote-179)

We already indicated other books, whose canonicity was originally doubted: James, 2 Peter, 2-3 John, and Jude. Again, one of the reasons for this hesitation was the questionable authorship of these works. For example, Eusebius relates the Early Church’s quandary about who wrote the Epistles of James and Jude:

These things are recorded in regard to James, who is said to be the author of the first of the so-called catholic epistles. But it is to be observed that it is disputed; at least, not many of the ancients have mentioned it, as is the case likewise with the epistle that bears the name of Jude, which is also one of the seven so-called catholic epistles. Nevertheless we know that these also, with the rest, have been read publicly in very many churches.[[180]](#footnote-180)

Guthrie comments on the possible reasons 2 Peter struggled for recognition. According to Guthrie, Jerome related that in his day some doubted Petrine authorship of the letter due to differences in style from Peter’s first epistle. Guthrie also feels that the Early Church may have wavered on works allegedly written by Peter, since some known forgeries were in already circulation, such the *Apocalypse of Peter*.[[181]](#footnote-181) The Second and Third Epistles of John encountered difficulty in that the author calls himself “the Elder.” In the second century, Papias mentioned the existence of an “Elder John” in distinction from the apostle John.[[182]](#footnote-182)

These observations compel us to look into the question of pseudonymity, i.e., authoring a work in the name of another, especially an apostle. Unfortunately, church history is marred by not a few examples of this practice. Some contemporary scholars feel that this practice was permissible in its time, as long as the book’s contents met the New Testament standard. Often, those who defend this position do so to justify the view of liberal theologians that some recognized New Testament books were indeed pseudonymic, namely the Pastoral Epistles, 2 Peter and others).

However, the Early Church did not share this view. Amphilochius, bishop of Iconium (4th c.), for example, spoke of pseudonymic books as “compositions of demons.”[[183]](#footnote-183) Cyril of Jerusalem insists, “There are the four Gospels only, for the rest have false titles and are mischievous (*Catechetical lectures*, 4.36). In Bruce’s opinion, “It is doubtful if any book would have found a place in the canon if it had been *known* to be pseudonymous.”[[184]](#footnote-184)

We can cite specific instances, where the Early Church rejected pseudonymic works. A certain presbyter from Asia wrote the *Acts of Paul*, claiming to be Paul himself, and was subsequently dismissed from his post (see Tertullian, *On baptism*, 17). Serapion, bishop of Antioch, (190-203), wrote concerning the Gospel of Peter, “For we, brethren, receive both Peter and the other apostles as Christ; but we reject intelligently the writings falsely ascribed to them, knowing that such were not handed down to us” (see Еusebius, *Church history*, 6.12.3). Еusebius relates that in his time, many wavered about the *Pastor of Hermas* due to doubts that the author was really the coworker of Paul by that name (See Rom 16:14; *Church history*, 3.3.6). Еusebius also wrote,

We have felt compelled to give this catalogue in order that we might be able to know both these works and those that are cited by the heretics under the name of the apostles, including, for instance, such books as the Gospels of Peter, of Thomas, of Matthias, or of any others besides them, and the Acts of Andrewand John and the other apostles (*Church history* 3.25.6).

Defenders of pseudonymity in the Early Church appeal to the presence of the practice in Jewish intertestamental books and in Greco-Roman literature. They question why Christian writers would not mimic this style? Schnabel responds, “The device of pseudonymous writings was not as generally accepted as is often assumed: both in the Greek and in the Roman world there was a marked concern for the authenticity of the classical traditions.”[[185]](#footnote-185)

Lea directs our attention to Paul’s warning not to receive letters falsely written in his name (2 Thes 2:2).[[186]](#footnote-186) In addition, at times Paul would personally sign his letters to distinguish them from forgeries (1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; 2 Thes 3:17; Col 4:18). Baker adds the thought that if a writing contains false information (pseudonymity), then it cannot be inspired by God.[[187]](#footnote-187)

In conclusion, we must make a necessary qualification to our conclusion of the primacy of apostolic authorship for canonization. The fact is that the Church could not always determine with confidence the apostolic authorship of some of the books we now accept as canonical. In addition, some books were in circulation that claimed to have close ties with apostolic figures, such as the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, and the *Pastor of Hermas*. Therefore, there were cases where secondary, supplemental criteria were brought into play.

**b. Antiquity**

The first of our “supplemental criteria” is antiquity (date of writing). To consider a writing for canonicity, it must have been written during the life of one of the Twelve Apostles (that is, in the first Christian century), who could verify its fidelity to the gospel. This criterion, then, derives from the criterion of apostolic authorship and is a natural consequence of it.

**c. Orthodoxy**

Our second supplemental criterion, “orthodoxy,” also derives from our primary criterion – apostolic authorship. If a given book was truly written by an apostle or close associate of one, its teaching would certainly agree with the teachings of other Spirit-led apostles. In the Early Church there existed a standard of apostolic teaching, expressed both by the “rule of faith,” and by already accepted apostolic writings. This enabled the Church to evaluate the quality of books aspiring to canonicity. The criterion of orthodoxy operates on the principle that neither the Early Fathers, nor contemporary conservative scholars allow the claim that the Bible contains contradictions.

In general, the criterion “orthodoxy” is a negative criterion in the sense that it is useful, not so much to approve acceptance of a book, as to justify its rejection. A book that contains true teaching, yet lacks apostolic roots, would nonetheless not qualify for canonicity. Nicole concurs, “Orthodoxy is a purely negative criterion. Nothing that violates it can be viewed as canonical: Orthodoxy is necessary, but it is far from sufficient. Thousands of books have been written that are orthodox but not canonical.”[[188]](#footnote-188)

We note an example of this criterion in use by Eusebius in the fourth century. In evaluating spurious works, he writes, “…the character of the style is at variance with apostolic usage, and both the thoughts and the purpose of the things that are related in them are so completely out of accord with true orthodoxy that they clearly show themselves to be the fictions of heretics” (*Church history*, 3.25.7).

**d. Catholicity (Usage in the Church)**

**1) In the Early Church**

Catholicity refers to the acceptance a given book by Christian congregations.[[189]](#footnote-189) In the Early Church, this criterion for canonicity grew in popularity over time. We see clear evidence of it in the third century, when Dionysius of Alexandria was ready to recognize the Book of Revelation because of its acceptance by the churches and true prophetic character, even though he doubted its apostolic authorship.[[190]](#footnote-190) Another native Alexandrian, Origen, also highly valued this criterion.[[191]](#footnote-191)

Tertullian supported the idea of catholicity by claiming that true apostolic teaching is best perceived by those congregations, where the apostles themselves served, “Now, what that was which they preached – in other words, what it was which Christ revealed to them – can, as I must here likewise prescribe, properly be proved in no other way than by those very churches which the apostles founded in person” (*Prescription against heretics*, 21).

We find support in the writings of Irenaeus as well: “Wherefore it is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the Church,—those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles; those who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received the certain gift of truth” (*Against heresies*, 4.26.2). Similarly, in the fourth century Eusebius spoke of “ecclesiastical tradition” as a criterion for acknowledging a canonical book (*Church history*, 3.25.6).

Moreover, in the fifty century, Augustine and Jerome ventured to consider a book canonical even without any confirmation of its apostolic origin.[[192]](#footnote-192) Augustine voices his support for the superiority of the criterion of catholicity in the following excerpt:

Now, in regard to the canonical Scriptures, he must follow the judgment of the greater number of catholic churches; and among these, of course, a high place must be given to such as have been thought worthy to be the seat of an apostle and to receive epistles (*On Christian doctrine,* 2.8.12).

McDonald theorizes that “catholicity” involved not only references to certain books in the works of early Christian writers, but also the use of these books in congregational worship.[[193]](#footnote-193) If churches regularly gave a certain writing a place in the worship service, then it was well on the way to acceptance as canonical.

**2) In Liberal Theology**

The criterion of catholicity dominates the views of liberal theologians, as well as those of Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox. A representative of liberal theology, James Barr, believes that in church history, the formation of the canon was a gradual process, and that the canon is “a product of the church.”[[194]](#footnote-194) Liberals, however, do not take seriously the evidence presented earlier, that from the very beginning, in its determination of canonicity, the Church valued most of all apostolic authorship. The Church did not rely on its own authority to establish the canon, but on the authority of the apostles.

Brevard Childs advanced another variation of liberal thought. He urged believers to accept the present biblical canon simply because they belong to the Church. The Church is the fellowship of believers, and so it is a natural expression of the believer’s identification with it to accept its canon.[[195]](#footnote-195) He writes, “The status of canonicity is not an objectively demonstrable claim but a statement of Christian belief.”[[196]](#footnote-196) His approach, however, undermines objectivity in determining the canon. If the canon is determined by people’s preference, then it loses it authority as the Word of God.

**3) In Roman Catholicism**

In Roman Catholicism, the biblical canon of Old and New Testaments was officially established in the 16th century at the Council of Trent. Catholic author K. McDonnell offers the following resume of the Church’s ability to recognize inspired Scripture (a view shared by Eastern Orthodoxy as well): “The church, as the body of Christ in history commissioned by Christ and empowered by the Spirit, recognizes the apostolic teaching in the documents that come out of her own history, and makes an authoritative determination of what belongs to the canon and what does not.”[[197]](#footnote-197)

Chapman, however, denies that the Catholic Church holds to a one-sided view on canonization, where the only factor is catholicity. He cites the following from the First Vatican Council:

These books the church holds to be sacred and canonical not because she subsequently approved them by her authority after they had been composed by unaided human skill, nor simply because they contain revelation without error, but because, being written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author, and were as such committed to the church.[[198]](#footnote-198)

Nonetheless, Catholic writer T. Hoffman emphasizes the irreplaceable role that the Church plays in defining canon: “It is the church's decision, and this alone, not some inherent component of inspiration or normativeness, that is the ultimate reason why a book is or is not canonical.”[[199]](#footnote-199)

So then, although Catholicism recognizes the inspired nature of Scripture, at the same time, it also holds that the Church, in particular, its clergy, possesses an intuitive and exclusive ability to recognize true canonical works and define their proper interpretation. This is a distinguishing mark between Catholic faith and Protestantism.

**4) In Eastern Orthodoxy**

Eastern Orthodoxy often appeals to Paul’s words that the Church is the “pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15b). Does this imply that the Church has the right to determine the biblical canon?

On closer examination, we note that Paul did not claim that the Church is the *source* of truth, but that it is truth’s *pillar and support*. The Greek scholar William Mounce notes that the terms “pillar” and “support” stand without the definite article, which indicates that the Church is not truth’s *exclusive* pillar and support, but one among others.[[200]](#footnote-200)

We also note that 1 Timothy 3:15b was written by an apostle. Just previous to this passage, Paul writes about his authority over the Church: “I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God” (1 Tim 3:14-15a). It follows that if an apostle has authority to determine the status of the Church in relation to God’s truth, then the apostle has greater authority than the Church in doctrinal matters. We, then, must listen to the apostles over the Church.

Finally, it is imperative to understand that the phrase “pillar and support” does not necessarily describe the present condition of the Church, but rather its calling and function. God’s intention is for the Church to faithfully preserve and propagate His truth, similar to His appointing the temple as a “house of prayer” in the Old Testament. Yet, God’s people of that time turned the temple into a “robbers’ den” (Matt 21:13). Therefore, fulfilling the function of being a “pillar and support of the truth” does not happen automatically, but depends on the Church’s response to God’s calling. This is why Paul found it necessary to instruct Timothy as to how he should “conduct himself in the household of God.”

**5) Evaluation and Conclusions**

Those who prioritize the criterion of apostolic authorship and the secondary criteria of antiquity and orthodoxy look on catholicity from a different perspective. Scaer expresses it well, “Canonicity may be defined as the church's recognition of the apostolic character of certain writings.”[[201]](#footnote-201) Catholicity, in fact, is not necessary in cases where apostolic origin is without doubt. It only has a place in the case of books with uncertain authorship.[[202]](#footnote-202)

We affirm that, in relation to more questionable books, the Church was able to discern the inspired and apostolic character of genuine New Testament works. One can assume that Spirit-filled believers are able, to some degree, to perceive the activity of that same Spirit in inspiring a true canonical book. Knox sees confirmation of this claim in how Paul attributed to prophets in Corinth this perceptive ability: “If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment” (1 Cor 14:37).[[203]](#footnote-203)

However, we refrain from supporting the Catholic-Orthodox position that the Church or its clergy possess the inherent ability to unerringly define the biblical canon and all its contents. As we have already asserted, the criterion of catholicity is required only when a book’s authorship is in doubt. It does not involve some special mystical ability, given by God to the Church, but is simply the result of the natural spiritual perceptiveness of the people of God in general in recognizing His truth.

So then, a book’s acceptance into the canon depends not on the endorsement of the Church, but on its apostolic connection. The Church’s endorsement only serves as a confirmation of apostolic authorship in cases where that was difficult to substantiate historically.

We may add that the canonical status of more doubtful books can be confirmed not only by the criterion of catholicity, but also by the historical research of competent scholars, who, on the basis of the book’s contents itself, can often unveil the books authorship without an appeal to the criterion of catholicity. A good example of such a resource is *New Testament Introduction* by Donald Guthrie.

**e. Conclusions**

In summary, we can safely conclude that the most essential and reliable criterion for recognizing the New Testament canon is apostolic authorship. This view derives from the key role that the apostles, authorized by the Lord Himself, played in the preservation and transmission of His life and teaching. As mentioned before, who is more capable of passing on to us the truth of Christ than the apostles of Christ, authorized by Him, gifted and inspired by the Spirit of God? The criteria of antiquity and orthodoxy stem from the criteria of apostolicity and depend upon it. The criterion of catholicity is a supplement criterion in those cases, when apostolic authorship is in question.

In conclusion, it is needful to say a word about the view of John Calvin, who felt that the primary criterion for New Testament canonization was the inner witness of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers.[[204]](#footnote-204) He describes his view thus:

Let it therefore be held as fixed, that those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture; that Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit (*Institutes*, 1.7.5).

Although we do not wish to undervalue the role of the Spirit in confirming truth in the hearts of believers, nonetheless, the weakness of this view is clear – subjectivity. Without objective criteria, people tend to lean towards personal opinions, which reflect not so much the work of the Spirit, as much as personal preference.

Although we acknowledge the role of the Spirit in the context of catholicity (see above), at the same time, we refrain from considering catholicity or the witness of the Spirit the *primary* criteria for canonicity. If, on the basis of convincing historical evidence, one is able to demonstrate the apostolic origin of a certain work, then it is worthy of acceptance independent of the subjective experience of an individual. So then, canonicity operates, whenever possible, on objective criteria. Yet the Spirit does indeed give subjective confirmation of a proper determination of a truly canonical work.

**6. Determination of the New Testament Canon**

Having established that apostolic authorship determines canonicity, we recognize as well that not all the New Testament books were written by the Twelve. Only three of their number penned inspired books: Matthew, Peter and John. How should we regard the other New Testament writers, especially Paul, who wrote about half of the New Testament? Paul claimed that he received his commission and his understanding of the gospel directly form the Lord through a vision (Gal 1:11-12). In the strength of his personal revelation and apostolic gifting, Paul considered himself “not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles” (2 Cor 11:5). As a recipient of divine revelation (Eph 3:3-6), he considered himself one of the foundational apostles of the Church (Eph 2:20).

Unlike the Twelve, though, Paul received his calling through a personal, subjective encounter with Jesus. Can we therefore accept his claims? We resolve this dilemma by appealing to Galatians chapter 2, where Paul records that he submitted his teaching to the apostles in Jerusalem, and they endorsed his teaching and ministry. In addition, Peter spoke of his teachings as Holy Scripture (see 2 Peter 3:15-16). Geisler and Nix add the thought that the miracles Paul performed also confirm his apostolic authority (see 2 Cor 12:12).[[205]](#footnote-205)

It appears that the authority to write Scripture can extend to those not belonging to the Twelve, in this case, to the apostle Paul. It is important to note that we base this conclusion not only on Paul’s claim to be a teacher of truth, but also on the confirmation that he received from other apostles, who were authorized by the Lord Himself.

In Galatians chapters 1 and 2, we notice another interesting fact: James, the brother of the Lord through Mary, is also called an apostle (Gal 1:19), even one of the “pillars of the Church” (Gal 2:9). Paul later relates that James received a special visitation from the Lord after His resurrection (1 Cor 15:7). In this context, Paul again indicates James’ apostolic status (1 Cor 15:5-7). Therefore, in the strength of his personal encounter with the Lord and acknowledgement by the apostles in Jerusalem and Paul, nothing prevents us from recognizing James, the brother of the Lord, as an inspired author of Holy Scripture.[[206]](#footnote-206)

What about the other Gospel writers, i.e., Mark and Luke? The Church Fathers repeatedly mention that Mark wrote his gospel under the direction of Peter (see Irenaeus, *Against heresies*, 3.1.1; Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 4.5, Clement of Alexandria in Eusebius’ *Church history*, 6.14.6-7; 2.15.1-2; and Origen in *Church history*, 6.25.5). Most remarkable is the testimony of Papias, bishop of Hierapolis (early 2nd c.):

This also the presbyter said: “Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not indeed in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord’s discourses, so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them. For he was careful of one thing, not to omit any of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely.” These things are related by Papias concerning Mark (Eusebius, *Church history*, 3.39.15-16).

We can justify Luke’s inclusion among inspired writers in the following way. Some Church Fathers stated that, like Peter’s supervision of Mark’s Gospel, Luke wrote under Paul’s direction. Irenaeus wrote, “Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him” (*Against heresies*, 3.1.1). Eusebius relates Origen’s understanding of the question: “And the third by Luke, the Gospel commended by Paul, and composed for Gentile converts” (*Church history*, 6.25.6). In the Muratonian Canon (180 AD) we read: “After the resurrection of Christ Luke, the physician, whom Paul had taken along with him as a legal expert, wrote (the record) down in his own name in accordance with (Paul’s) opinion.”[[207]](#footnote-207) Origen concurs in *Commentary on Matthew,* 6.25, as does Tertullian in *Against Marcion*, 4.5.[[208]](#footnote-208)

Concerning Jude, most likely he was the brother of James and half-brother of Jesus through Mary (see Mark 6:3). We assume that his close ties with the apostolic circle in Jerusalem confirms that his epistle faithfully represents the apostolic teaching.[[209]](#footnote-209) In fact, his epistle is almost a duplicate of the 2nd chapter of Peter’s second epistle, which he likely borrowed from. This gives further confirmation that his teaching reflects the apostolic standard of truth. When Jude addresses his audience in the epistle, he styles himself as “a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James,” thus indicating his connection with the apostolic circle.

Jowers feels that Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 9:5 make a close connection between the brothers of the Lord, including Jude, and the apostles: “Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?”[[210]](#footnote-210) Finally, both Origen (*de Principiis,* 3.2.1) and Tertullian (*On the Adornment of Women*, 2.1.3) call the epistle writer the “apostle Jude.”

In Tertullian’s work *Against Marcion*, we discover an interesting claim that the apostles’ associates had authority to produce Gospel material. He writes:

We lay it down as our first position, that the evangelical Testament has apostles for its authors, to whom was assigned by the Lord Himself this office of publishing the gospel. Since, however, there are apostolic men also, they are yet not alone, but appear with apostles and after apostles; because the preaching of disciples might be open to the suspicion of an affectation of glory, if there did not accompany it the authority of the masters, which means that of Christ, for it was that which made the apostles their masters. Of the apostles, therefore, John and Matthew first instill faith into us; whilst of apostolic men, Luke and Mark renew it afterwards (*Against Marcion*, 4.2).

It seems strange that only three of the Twelve Apostles wrote New Testament material, and that men outside of that number wrote the majority of the New Testament text. This may be due to the literary ability of the writers. In all likelihood, the earliest disciples of Jesus (with the exception of Matthew) were simple, uneducated men. The bulk of the New Testament was written by Luke and Paul, who were well educated and wrote well.

We may also assume that the First Epistle of Peter, written in excellent Greek, was penned by Silvanus at Peter’s dictation (see 1 Pet 5:12). Similarly, the Gospel of Matthew may have been translated into Greek from an Aramaic original.[[211]](#footnote-211) From these observations, we may conclude that God, in general, chose competent individuals, who could clearly express His truth in excellent Greek. It is not so important that the Twelve wrote the New Testament themselves, as it is that their testimony and teaching was faithfully preserved.

Thus, based on the criterion of apostolic authorship, we are able to confirm the New Testament canon of 27 books presently acknowledged by all Christian confessions. Their inclusion is also confirmed by the criterion of antiquity, since they were all composed in the first century, and by the criterion of orthodoxy, since their teachings do not introduce contradictions that cannot be resolved by careful exegetical work. For a detailed discussion of the more disputed books, both canonical and non-canonical, and to what degree they meet the criteria for canonization, see Appendix 1.

### D. The Canon’s Completeness

**1. Is the Canon Closed?**

For hundreds of years, the Scriptures stand unchanged and unchallenged, with the exception of debates that still continue about the status of the Apocrypha in the Old Testament. Yet, the question arises, “Can we still add books to the canonical list, or remove books already in that number?”

Some feel that in light of the concept of “progressive revelation,” we may yet allow an open canon. “Progressive revelation” means that in the course of biblical history, God progressively reveals His truth to His people. Some ask, “Why must this process end?” and, “Why can there be no new biblical revelation?” This view, however, undervalues the key role that apostles play in formation of the canon. The Bible speaks of them as the foundation of the Church (Eph 2:20; Rev 21:14). Biblical revelation is not given to all, but only to authorized to receive it – the apostles. In our day, we lack such individuals.

The famous German theologian, Karl Barth, favored an open canon for the following reason. In the past, God always gave His revelation to imperfect people. So, why can He not continue to do so today?[[212]](#footnote-212) On the other hand, those who embrace the doctrine of the full inspiration of Scripture do not share Barth’s opinion that the Scripture writers’ perception of God’s revelation was faulty.

Filson asserts, “It is the living Church… that in each generation must make the decision to keep or change the canon.”[[213]](#footnote-213) On the one hand, Filson correctly states that canonization rests on specific criteria, and therefore we cannot totally exclude the possibility that previous generations of believers may have errored in their determinations. This is why we include an evaluation of disputed books in Appendix 1. On the other hand, Brunner comments, “We cannot lightly ignore the canonical decisions of the Early Church,” and feels that we would likely come to the same conclusions.[[214]](#footnote-214) In support of the present canon, others appeal to the stability of the New Testament canon over time.[[215]](#footnote-215) Metzger adds the thought that those who wish to change the canon must examine their motives for doing so.[[216]](#footnote-216)

Smith claims that the contemporary Church has the right not so much to reexamine the canonicity of any particular book, as to reexamine the *criteria* of canonicity, which may lead, of course, to an alteration in its contents.[[217]](#footnote-217) One cannot object that the choice of canonical books should be based on the best, most reliable criteria. For that very reason, we gave detailed treatment to the accepted criteria for canonicity in this chapter and found them adequate.

A theoretical problem arises if we were to discover another genuine apostolic writing. Would we include it in the canon of Scripture? It is true that a previously undiscovered apostolic writing would indeed meet the criteria for canonicity discussed above. On the other hand, Ridderbos makes the fair point that the canon is the foundation of Christian faith. If follows that “…sooner or later the limits of this would be established and the canon would be closed.”[[218]](#footnote-218) It is unwise to unearth a foundation already laid. For the Church to be properly built, God would certainly have laid the foundation at the beginning of church history. Geisler and Nix add the thought, “It seems highly unlikely that God would have inspired a book He did not preserve.”[[219]](#footnote-219)

Finally, in regard to the closing of the canon, we must touch on Revelation 22:18-19: “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.” Although these verses are located in the last chapter of the last biblical book, and although God, in his foreknowledge, knew that these verses would be at the end, formally, they apply only to the Book of Revelation.

**2. Is There Unity in the Canon?**

Theologians and serious students of the Bible have long noted that within the biblical canon we encounter not only variations in genre, expressing God’s truth, but also various perspectives, from which the biblical authors write. In other words, the unified Judeo-Christian faith embraces variety in its expression, depending on the given author. Consequently, we often hear expressions like the “theology of John,” the “theology of Isaiah,” the “theology of Luke,” etc. In the words of Barr, “It is, I think, now agreed among most biblical theologians that there is a plurality of theologies within the Bible.”[[220]](#footnote-220)

How does this observation affect our understanding of the biblical canon? In the presence of such variety, can we still speak of unity? Brevard Childs presents us with an example of an extreme view. He feels that the canon “did not attempt a final formulation of its message” or establish “one doctrinal position.” Instead, “The canon provides for innumerable fresh combinations of its witness.”[[221]](#footnote-221) Käsemann even feels that the New Testament contains “irreconcilable theological contradictions.”[[222]](#footnote-222)

Those who hold to the full inspiration of Scripture, however, believe that behind the human writers of Scripture stands the Holy Spirit, who inspired them all. Therefore, there is an inherent unity in Scripture. In fact, the canon can only exist because of its inherent unity. Its existence implies that all the books it contains are in sufficient agreement to make up a whole. We also recall that one of the criteria for canonicity is orthodoxy, which means that all canonical books agree doctrinally.[[223]](#footnote-223)

If the Bible contains both unity and diversity, then how are we to understand the relationship between them? Although we must insist on the overall unity of canon, in the practical application of God’s truth, we may allow variety. Miles writes, “The diversity of Scripture not only affords us a richer and more nuanced picture of God, it also honors and addresses the complex reality of the people of God.”[[224]](#footnote-224)

Beeby comments that various voices in Scripture “can speak to all sorts and conditions of men and women in all sorts and conditions of human joy and anguish. At times we must hear one voice more than others.”[[225]](#footnote-225) Metzger concurs that at various times various sections of Scripture may be more relevant to some.[[226]](#footnote-226) Sanders adds that variety in the biblical text brings balance to the Christian life. Some biblical principles provide a balance for others.[[227]](#footnote-227) At the same time, Metzger reminds us that the canon limits that variety. It is not permissible to believe anything at all or do anything at all.[[228]](#footnote-228)

**3. Is There a Canon within the Canon?**

In the previous section, we discussed the relationship of unity and variety in the biblical canon. The search for a unifying factor, though, can lead to the formation of what has been called a “canon within the canon.” This means that some biblical books or Scriptural principles may take priority over others. The result, then, is that some biblical books are interpreted in the light of these key books or key principles.

Throughout the history of the Church, we witness many attempts to form this “canon within a canon.” Dunn even asserts, “*All Christians have operated with a canon within the canon.*”[[229]](#footnote-229) He continues, “All Christians operate on the principle of interpreting the unclear passages by means of the clear; but, of course, a passage which gives a clear meaning to one is precisely the unclear passage for another, and vice-versa.”[[230]](#footnote-230) Dunn gives the following examples.[[231]](#footnote-231) For Catholics, the central passage is Matthew 16:17-19. For Protestants – the early epistles of Paul. For Eastern Orthodox – the writings of John. For Pentecostals – the Book of Acts. For some liberals – either the historical Jesus, or the kerygma of the Church.

Some object to this practice. They fear that creating a canon within the canon will lead to its formation by personal preference.[[232]](#footnote-232) It creates a “one-sided gospel.”[[233]](#footnote-233) Miles summons us to preach “the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27).[[234]](#footnote-234) Kurt Aland calls us to include the whole Bible witness in our theology: “This road will be long and laborious and painful. But it must be trodden if the present situation is to be overcome.”[[235]](#footnote-235)

Taking this counsel into consideration, it nonetheless seems appropriate, in the search for a unifying principle, to respect the historical nature of the question. Earlier we addressed the issue of “progressive revelation,” which means that God progressively reveals His truth to His people in the context of canonical history. Without question, the New Testament presents a more advanced understanding of God’s plan than the Old Testament does. This does not nullify the importance and significance of the Old Covenant, but nonetheless, one must admit the historical development between them in resolving any apparent conflict between the Testaments.

Moreover, some are willing to admit theological development between the Gospels and the Epistles. We note that Jesus ministered in the context of the Old Testament. At that time, He had not yet accomplished His redemptive mission. He informed His disciples, “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear {them} now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth” (Jn 16:12-13), and only after His resurrection, “He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Lk 24:45). Again, we do not minimize the role of the Gospels in the unfolding of God’s plan; nevertheless, we also take into account the aspect of “progressive revelation.”

Kline comments on this point, “Although the New Testament canon is the currently normative canon for the church, it contains in the Gospels certain directives for the company of Jesus’ disciples which were applicable only within the old covenant order.”[[236]](#footnote-236)

An even more controversial topic is the suggestion that theological development occurs within the Epistles of the Apostles. Were some of the New Testament authors more “advanced” in their understanding of God’s plan than others were? Upon reading the New Testament text, one receives that impression.

In the Book of Acts and the Epistle to the Galatians, for example, we observe some tension between the apostles in Jerusalem and the apostle Paul. Although the apostles in Jerusalem fully endorsed Paul’s teaching and ministry, at the same time, they speak of his gospel as the “gospel to the uncircumcised,” and of their own gospel as the “gospel to the circumcised” (Gal 2:7-9). It seems that the “gospel to the circumcised” contained elements deemed unnecessary for the Gentiles. This becomes clear in the decree of the Jerusalem Council, which designates a special order for Gentile believers (see Acts 15:19-20).

It seems, though, that Paul was not comfortable with this distinction between believers, since he taught that Christ “made both {groups into} one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall” (Eph 2:14). Therefore, when Peter, Barnabas and other Jewish believers, at the “coming of certain men from James,” distanced themselves from Gentile believers in Antioch, “fearing the party of the circumcision,” Paul rebuked Peter publicly, because “they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel” (Gal 2:12-14).

In addition, when Paul came to Jerusalem, James and the elders feared the reaction of the believing Jews, since they were “zealous for the Law” (Acts 21:20). Therefore, it does not surprise us to see in James’ epistle an emphasis on good works and personal righteousness. Although we affirm that James’ theology is correct, nonetheless, Paul’s theology certainly presents us with a more thoroughgoing apprehension of God’s plan. Guthrie comments on James,

His outlook was correspondingly limited. The full freedom of the gospel had not yet reached him. He lived in an age of transition. It is not surprising, therefore, to find him the author of an epistle in which many of the cardinal Christian doctrines are not mentioned.[[237]](#footnote-237)

Nonetheless, as is often mentioned, the Epistle of James introduces a healthy balance in the relationship of faith and works when he writes, “I will show you my faith by my works” (Jam 2:18). With this qualification, Paul would heartily agree. He himself spoke of “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6).

Therefore, although we hesitate to suggest a “canon within the canon,” is seems advisable to assert that the most fruitful guiding principle in examining the canon as a whole and for resolving any apparent conflicts within it is the principle of “progressive revelation.” According to that principle, we look at the canon as a gradual assimilation of God’s revelation by the biblical writers over time, but without contradiction between them.

### E. Conclusions

In summarizing our investigation of the biblical canon, we recall the wise words of Harris, which contain the key to our solution of the canon debate: “The Lord Jesus did not, in prophecy, give us a list of the twenty-seven New Testament books. He did, however, give us a list of the inspired authors.”[[238]](#footnote-238)

Concerning the Old Testament, the Lord Jesus did indeed “give us a list” of Old Testament books – the 24 books of the Hebrew canon, which both He and His apostles considered God’s inspired Word. In the case of the New Testament, the Lord gave us “a list of the inspired authors.” All genuine canonical New Testament books must be connected with the ministry of the Twelve Apostles or their close associates. Geisler and Nix echo this thought:

In a real sense, Christ is the key to the inspiration and canonization of the Scriptures. It was He who confirmed the inspiration of the Hebrew canon of the Old Testament; and it was He who promised that the Holy Spirit would direct the apostles into all truth.[[239]](#footnote-239)

Unfortunately, in regard to the Old Testament, certain Church Fathers did not take Jesus’ example seriously, but freely used apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works, some of which eventually found their way into the canon endorsed by the Church. Only through the Reformation did the Church succeed in restoring the true Old Testament canon.

Concerning the New Testament, by means of the primary criterion of apostolic authorship and the secondary criteria of antiquity, orthodoxy and catholicity, the Church successfully discovered and confirmed the New Testament canon. Yet even here, some early Christian writers deviated from the norm. In the fifth century, Jerome and Augustine substituted catholicity for apostolic authorship as the primary criterion for canonicity.

The existence of the canon is very valuable for the Church. From it, the Church draws its doctrine and even its self-definition. It enables the Church to recognize false teachings and practices and, thereby, prevent the distortion of Christian faith.[[240]](#footnote-240) Without the canon, the Church could not fulfill its mission. Believers must know exactly what to preach to the world and teach in the congregations. God’s people know these things by appealing to the biblical canon. The canon gives the Church guidance not only for its missions, but also for proper behavior and church order.

If God’s people are directed by a written standard, i.e., the canon, no individual can dominate them, since every member, leaders included, must submit to the “constitution” of the Church – the canon of Holy Scripture.[[241]](#footnote-241)

## Appendix 1: Disputed Canonical and Non-Canonical Books

### А. Old Testament

### **1. Books Accepted as Canonical**

### Song of Solomon (Song of Songs)

Discussion arose about the contents of this book. Many felt that it resembled a romantic novel more than inspired Scripture.[[242]](#footnote-242) Even today, its contents disconcert some readers, leading to allegorical treatment of the book. It is usually taken as a symbol of the love between Christ and the Church, or of Yahweh’s love for Israel.[[243]](#footnote-243)

The Mishnah records the debates that took place over this work (see *m. Yadayim,* 3.5). The Mishnah itself originated in the third century AD, but the rabbis mentioned in *Yadayim,* 3.5 lived in the first century AD (Akiva, Eleazar ben Azariah) or the second century AD (Jose ben Halafta, Simeon ben Azzai).

Jose ben Halafta reported that there was disagreement about the status of Song of Solomon. Simeon ben Azzai, however, claimed that 72 elders, headed by Eleazar ben Azariah, believed that the book does “impart uncleanness to hands,” which refers to its canonical status. Rabbi Akiva insisted on its canonicity: “All the scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs is holiest of all” (ibid). He also claimed, “No Israelite man ever disputed concerning Song of Songs that it imparts uncleanness to hands” (ibid). On the other hand, the fact that Akiva reacted so strongly to the attack on its canonicity may indicate that a heated debate over Song of Solomon was indeed raging.[[244]](#footnote-244)

Discussions about Song of Solomon appear in other passages as well. In the Tosefta (another variant of the Mishna) we read, “He who, at a banquet, renders the Song of Songs in a sing-song way, turning it into a common ditty, has no share in the world to come” (*t. Sanhedrin*, 10.12). The Babylonian Talmud echoes this thought: “Our Rabbis taught: He who recites a verse of the Song of Songs and treats it as a [secular] air, and one who recites a verse at the banqueting table unseasonably, brings evil upon the world” (*b.* *Sanhedrin*, 101а).[[245]](#footnote-245)

Some feel these excepts demonstrate a low view of the book among God’s people. Miller, however, correctly responds that the thrust of these passages is that people should show respect for Holy Scripture, the Song of Solomon included.[[246]](#footnote-246) These passages, then, serve to confirm the book’s inspired status.

We may offer other support for the Song’s inclusion in the canon.[[247]](#footnote-247) By tradition, the book is attributed to Solomon, to whom God gave supernatural wisdom. Moreover, Aquila of Sinope (1st-2nd c. AD), the author of a respected Greek translation of the Old Testament, included the book in his collection. It is also listed in the “Hebrew” canons cited by Melito and Origen. The Mishna also views Song of Solomon as Scripture (*m.* *Taanit*, 4.8; *m. Abodah Zarah*, 2.5). In addition, one may assume that it entered the canon of Josephus as well.

Furthermore, the fact that many rabbis treated the book allegorically also hints at its canonical status. Allegorization is used to defend a books sacred status against objections to its contents taken literally. Finally, even taken in a literal sense, the book is not necessarily questionable, since romantic love is part of God’s creation plan.

In conclusion, although in the New Testament writings Jesus and the apostles never cited the book, evidence suffices that it was part of Hebrew canon at the time of Jesus and so should be regarded as Holy Scripture.

### Ecclesiastes

The book of Ecclesiastes faced numerous obstacles to its canonicity.[[248]](#footnote-248) Ecclesiastes seems to champion a more skeptical view of life (1:2-3). In general, it looks at life from a secular point of view. Seemingly, it denies the teaching of a future resurrection of the dead (3:19-21). Some rabbis saw internal contradictions in it as well:

* I said of laughter, "It is madness," and of pleasure, "What does it accomplish?" (2:2)
* So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry (8:15)
* So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living (4:2)
* For whoever is joined with all the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion. (9:4)

What else did the rabbis say about Ecclesiastes? Simeon ben Menasia claimed, “Koheleth (i.e., Ecclesiastes) does not render the hands unclean because it contains only the wisdom of Solomon” (*b. Megillah,* 7а).[[249]](#footnote-249) In a minor tractate of the Talmud, the *Avot of Rabbi Natan*, we read that Ecclesiastes must be excluded from the canon because it “merely contained aphorisms and were not part of the [holy] writings.”[[250]](#footnote-250) We observe hesitations in the Mishna as well. Jose ben Halafta felt that the book “does not impart uncleanness to hands” (*m. Yadayim,* 3.5). Also expressing doubts was the rabbinic school of Shammai (ibid).

On the other hand, other rabbis defended Ecclesiastes. Simeon ben Azzai claimed that 72 elders, headed by Eleazar ben Azariah, believed that the book does “impart uncleanness to hands” (ibid). The rabbinic school of Hillel also supported it (ibid). The following passages in the Mishna regard Ecclesiastes as Scripture: *m. Sukkah*, 2.6; *m. Hagigah*, 1.6; *m. Qiddushin*, 1.10. In addition, Aquila included it in his Greek Old Testament,[[251]](#footnote-251) and, most likely, Josephus included it in his canon as well. We also note that the life history of the author corresponds to that of Solomon (see 1:12, 16; 2:9).

In spite of the objections voiced against Ecclesiastes, the Jews of the first century did acknowledge Ecclesiastes to be the Word of God, which means that the Scriptures Jesus and the apostles endorsed contained it. Even in the rabbinic passages expressing doubt about its canonicity, along with the objections we often see attempts by the rabbis to resolve these apparent conflicts. The main argument employed by the rabbis in its defense was that, at the end of it all, the author comes to a correct conclusion:

The conclusion, when all has been heard, {is:} fear God and keep His commandments, because this {applies to} every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil (12:13-14).

### Esther

Surprising at it may seem, the main objection the rabbis had to Esther was that it introduced a new feast day into the religious calendar, one not sanctioned by the Torah, namely Purim. Another commonly encountered objection is the absence of God’s name throughout the book. Also interesting – an enumeration of Old Testament heroes, done by the author of the Book of Sirach (2nd c.), omits Esther and Mordecia (see chapters 44-50).[[252]](#footnote-252)

Also notable is that several early Christian writers fail to include Esther in their Old Testament canon, namely Melito, Gregory Nazianzen, and Athanasius. Athanasius included it in the non-canonical classification “ecclesiastical books.” On the other hand, other early Christian canons include it.

Among Jewish commentators, Shimon ben Lakish (3rd c.) spoke out in defense of Esther.[[253]](#footnote-253) Likewise, Josephus makes the following comment: “But as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books” (*Against Apion*, 1.40). This would include the time of Esther.[[254]](#footnote-254) Finally, Beckwith informs us that in rabbinic (tanniatic) literature (1st-2nd c. AD), we encounter references to Esther as Scripture.[[255]](#footnote-255)

Even though the evidence examined above for Esther’s inclusion in the Hebrew canon at the time of Jesus in inconclusive, the arguments for its exclusion also do not force its rejection. Yet, our discussion earlier indicated that at the time of Jesus, the Old Testament canon was already complete. This allows us to assume that it included Esther among the inspired books. A “closed” canon would not allow alterations between the time of Jesus and the publishing of the Hebrew canon in *Baba Bathra,* 14b, which included Esther.

As far as the absence of God’s name, Geisler and Nix convincingly respond, “In any event, the absence of God’s name is more than compensated for by the presence of His power and grace in the deliverance of His people, a fact which gives canonical worth to the book.”[[256]](#footnote-256)

### **2. Books Not Accepted as Canonical**

### 1 Esdras (Esdras A, 2 Ezra, 3 Ezra)

This work has several designations. In the West, it is best known as *1 Esdras*. The Septuagint calls it *Esdras A*. The Vulgate – *3 Ezra*. The Orthodox Church assigns the name *2 Ezra*.[[257]](#footnote-257) It was written between the second century BC and the first century AD, originally in Hebrew.[[258]](#footnote-258)

The contents of *1 Esdras* are as follows. In general, it repeats material from 2 Chronicles 35:1-36:21, the canonical Book of Ezra (except for 4:6), and the Book of Nehemiah 7:73-8:13a (but Nehemiah is called “Attharates”). The material is arranged, though, in a way that introduces chronological inconsistencies.[[259]](#footnote-259)

The main feature of the book is the addition of new material in 3.1-5.6, where the story is told of a competition between three bodyguards of King Darius. They were to answer the question, “What is the strongest thing in the world?” The first answered “wine,” and the second – “the king,” but the third, Zorobabel, responded “women and truth.” The king liked Zorobabel’s answer so much that he granted him permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild it.

It is interesting to note that in the historical work *Jewish Antiquities* (11:3), none other than the famous Jewish historian Josephus related this story. Augustine refers to it as well (*City of God*, 18.36), as does Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata*, 1.21), and Origen. Jerome, however, rejected its historicity (*Preface to Ezra and Nehemiah*), as did Luther and the Council of Trent.[[260]](#footnote-260)

Catholics and Protestants assign *1 Esdras* to apocryphal literature, while Eastern Orthodox term it “non-canonical.” Since it does not comprise a part of the Hebrew canon, it lacks Jesus’ endorsement and, consequently, is to be excluded from the Old Testament canon.

### 4 Ezra (2 Ezra, 3 Ezra)

The book *4 Ezra* also has several designations. It is so named in the Latin Vulgate, but is also known as *3 Ezra* in the Orthodox faith, and by some others as *2 Ezra*. It is an apocalyptic book. It is not found in the Septuagint or the Dead Sea Scrolls, and is not numbered among the Apocrypha, but with pseudepigraphic books. It was composed in the last half of the first century AD, most likely in the Hebrew language. It has been preserved only in translations of a lost Greek version. Scholars feel that chapters 1-2 and 15-16 are later interpolations by Christian authors (they exist only in the Latin translation). Therefore, the “genuine” *4 Ezra* consists of chapters 3-14.[[261]](#footnote-261)

In main theme of the book can be summarized as follows.[[262]](#footnote-262) “Ezra” grieves over the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon and voices his complaint before God (yet, many feel that the author actually lived in the first century AD, and grieves for Jerusalem’s destruction by Rome). Ezra begins to doubt both God’s faithfulness to His covenant with Israel and His justice, since He used an ungodly race, the Babylonians, to chastise Israel. Ezra also complains that people have an “evil impulse,” i.e., a tendency toward evil, and for that reason cannot keep God’s law.

The angel Uriel visits Ezra and counsels him to trust God. In the end – Uriel reassures – all will be right, and God with His true people will triumph. The day of Jerusalem’s glory in coming. Messiah will reign for 400 years before the eternal age commences. Uriel also advises that people ought to strive, with God’s help, to overcome sin, yet few will be saved in the end. Still, he offers this hope: “If ye, then, will rule over your own understanding and will discipline your heart, ye shall be preserved alive and after death obtain mercy” (14.34).

The following episode is especially interesting, where Ezra, under inspiration from God, dictates to five scribes a group of books, 24 of which will supposedly become the Hebrew canon:

So in forty days were written ninety-four books. And it came to pass when the forty days were fulfilled, that the Most High spake unto me saying: “The twenty-four books that thou hast written publish, that the worthy and unworthy may read (therein): but the seventy last thou shalt keep, to deliver them to the wise among thy people” (*4 Ezra* 14.44-46).

A number of early Christian writers cite *4 Ezra*: Clement of Alexandria, the *Epistle* *of* *Barnabas*, Cyprian, Tertullian and Ambrose. The Orthodox classify it as “non-canonical,” with the exception of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which canonized it.[[263]](#footnote-263) Its absence in the Hebrew canon of Jesus’ time disqualifies it for inclusion in our Old Testament canon.

### Psalm 151

In cave 11 of the Qumran collection, researchers discovered manuscript 11QPss, which, among other things, contains two non-canonical psalms that also appear together in the Septuagint under the title Psalm 151.[[264]](#footnote-264) For a long time, it was thought that the variant in the Septuagint was originally written in Greek, but now it is clear that it goes back to a Hebrew original. The Septuagint version reads as follows:

1 I was small among my brothers, and the youngest in my father’s house; I tended my father’s sheep. 2 My hands made a harp; my fingers fashioned a lyre. 3 And who will tell my Lord? The Lord himself; it is he who hears. 4 It was he who sent his messenger and took me from my father’s sheep, and anointed me with his anointing oil. 5 My brothers were handsome and tall, but the Lord was not pleased with them. 6 I went out to meet the Philistine, and he cursed me by his idols. 7 But I drew his own sword; I beheaded him, and took away disgrace from the people of Israel.[[265]](#footnote-265)

Mroczek comes to this conclusion: “At this time, there was no such thing as a biblical book of Psalms. There were, instead, different collections of inspired prayers, of various lengths, orders, and contents, compiled for different purposes.”[[266]](#footnote-266) Others suggest an alternate explanation. The Qumran community utilized various hymnbooks in their liturgy, some of which did not necessarily contain only canonical psalms. We must note that other manuscripts were discovered at Qumran that do contain the full set of canonical psalms.[[267]](#footnote-267)

We must also consider Psalm 151’s contents. Canonical psalms characteristically lack historical data. The goal of a psalmist is to allow the reader to express his/her personal emotions to God, using the psalm as a model. Therefore, the literary style of this psalm markedly differs from the others. We lack, then, substantial reason to include 151 among the inspired psalms.

### Sirach

Among the non-canonical books, one of the most popular and influential among the Church Fathers was the *Wisdom of ben-Sirach*, or simply *Sirach*. It is also known by the title “Ecclesiasticus.” In *Sirach* 50.27, the author is identified as Jeshua, son of Eleazar, son of Sirach.[[268]](#footnote-268) The book originated in the early second century BC. At the end of that century, the grandson of Jeshua added a preface.

The *Book of Sirach* reminds us in many ways of the Proverbs of Solomon. It distinguishes itself, however, in that the author draws not only from Old Testament truth, but also from the wisdom of Egypt and Greece. The work contains practical advice for nearly all sectors of human experience. Surprisingly, though, nothing is said about life after death. The work emphasizes leading a moral life, observing the Law, and doing good works. These things secure for the individual forgiveness of sins: “A flaming fire doth water quench, so doth almsgiving atone for sin.” At times, *Sirach* seems to degrade women and slaves. It also contains prayers to God and praises to Him.[[269]](#footnote-269)

We give special attention to chapters 44-50, which lists “heroes of the faith,” from Enoch to Simeon the high priest (3rd c. BC). The list, though, is not exhaustive. It omits such figures as Ezra, Daniel, Ruth and Esther.[[270]](#footnote-270) Beckwith notes that, although at times the author of *Sirach* seems to consider his work inspired (see 33:16-18), nonetheless, he does not include himself among the “heroes of the faith.”[[271]](#footnote-271) Some assert that New Testament writers drew on *Sirach*.[[272]](#footnote-272)

Copies of *Sirach* were discovered at Qumran, and the Mishna, the Talmud, and other Jewish writings often mention it as well. Even once, it is called Scripture.[[273]](#footnote-273) On the other hand, the Tosefta reminds us that the work was written after the cessation of authorized prophets. According to Jewish tradition, this disqualifies it for inclusion among the inspired writings (see *t. Yadayim*, 2.13).[[274]](#footnote-274)

Even though the Jews refused to receive as canonical any book written after Malachi, the Early Church did not share that hesitation.[[275]](#footnote-275) We find citations on *Sirach* as early as the beginning the second century in the *Didache* and the *Epistle of Barnabas*. Clement of Alexandria frequently refers to it as an authoritative document. His pupil, Origen, even spoke of it as Scripture (*Against Celcus*, 6.7; 7.12). We also encounter such a view in the works of Tertullian, Cyprian, Methodius of Olympus, and the *Apostolic Constitutions* (6.14-15). Athanasius assigned it to the category of “ecclesiastical books,” which were not canonical, but considered useful for reading. Augustine thought it to be canonical, and the Councils of Hippo and Carthage followed his lead. Even Jerome, who rejected *Sirach’s* canonicity, once did cite it as Scripture (see *Commentary on Isaiah*, 2.3).

Nonetheless, although many found in the Book of Sirach material for edification and inspiration, its exclusion from the Hebrew canon disqualifies it for inclusion in the Christian Old Testament canon. We must also consider that its teaching on salvation by works contradicts New Testament teaching.[[276]](#footnote-276)

### Tobit

The Book of Tobit, written in the late third or early second century BC, has a romantic thematic, allegedly relating the story of Tobit and his son Tobias.[[277]](#footnote-277) Tobit and his family had settled in Nineveh after the deportation of Israel by Assyria. Tobit, now blind, sends his son to retrieve money he had left in Media. Media is also the residence of a woman named Sarah, who had lost several husbands by the hand of the evil spirit Asmodaeus before the marriages were consummated (3.17).

Tobias is accompanied to Media by the angel Raphael, who pretends to be a relative of Tobias. During the journey, Raphael directs Tobias to acquire the heart, liver and gallbladder of a certain fish, and instructs, “As regards the heart and the liver of the fish, make thou a smoke before a man or a woman who hath an attack of a demon or an evil spirit; and every attack will flee from him, and they shall nevermore find an abode with him. And as for the gall – anoint a man’s eyes, upon which white films have come up, or blow into them on the white films, and they become well” (6.8-9).

In Media, Tobias meets Sarah, marries her, and burns up the heart and liver of the fish, thereby protecting himself from the evil spirit Asmodaeus. Upon his return to Nineveh, Tobias anoints his father’s eyes with salve from the gallbladder, and Tobit recovers his sight.

The *Book of Tobit* not only tells the story of Tobit, but contains many ethical exhortations as well. Especially emphasized are keeping the Law and giving alms.[[278]](#footnote-278) Almsgiving can actually lead to salvation: “Because alms delivereth from death, and suffereth not to come into darkness” (4.10), and “Almsgiving doth deliver from death, and it purges away all sin” (12.8).

Although the book was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Jews did not include it in their canon.[[279]](#footnote-279) In contrast, the Early Church welcomed it. For example, Polycarp (*Philippians* 10.2; cf. *Tobit* 4.10) and Origen (*Letter to Africanus*, 14; cf. *Tobit* 1.12-14) cite it authoritatively. Clement of Alexandria calls it Scripture (*Stromata,* 2.23; cf. *Tobit* 4.16). Athanasius assigned it to the category of “ecclesiastical books,” which were not canonical, but considered useful for reading.

The Roman Catholic Church considers Tobit “deuterocanonical,” and Eastern Orthodox – “non-canonical.” Protestants rejects its canonicity outright, although Luther stated, “Is it history? Then is it a holy history. Is it fiction? Then is it a truly beautiful, wholesome, and profitable fiction, the performance of a gifted poet.”[[280]](#footnote-280)

In spite of Luther’s positive assessment, the book encounters several serious drawbacks.[[281]](#footnote-281) First, as noted earlier, the book advances the teaching of salvation by works. Second, Raphael employs deception in order to fulfill his mission. Third, the biblical narrative lacks a parallel account, where an angel accompanies someone for an extended period of time and befriends him/her. Fourth, the method for healing the sick resembles shamanism. In addition, the book contains several geographical and historical errors.

All these factors, together with *Tobit’s* exclusion from the Hebrew canon, prevent us from welcoming it into the Christian canon.

### Judith

The *Book of Judith* was composed in the second century BC, assumedly in Hebrew. At the present time, it exists only in the Septuagint Greek.[[282]](#footnote-282) The book tells a fictional story about Nebuchadnezzar, who “reigned over the Assyrians in Nineveh, the great city;in the days of Arphaxad, who reigned over the Medes in Ecbatana” (1.1). Nebuchadnezzar wages war against Media, summoning Egypt and Syria to support him, yet they declined. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar sends his armies under the command of Holofernes to punish them. However, the inhabitants of Bethulia, in Israel, resist Holofernes, who, in response, puts the city under siege and cuts off its water supply.

In Bethulia lived a young widow named Judith, who promises the elders of the city to deliver it from Holofernes. She adorns herself in fine clothes, approaches Holofernes, and informs him that, because of the sin of Bethulia, the God of Israel will hand it over to him. She then promises to help him ascertain the best time for the attack. Holofernes is taken by Judith’s beauty, and repeatedly invites her to dine with him, to which she eventually agrees. After dinner, all those present depart the hall, leaving Holofernes and Judith alone. While the intoxicated Holofernes was reclining on a bed, Judith seizes a sword and slays him. Inspired by her heroism, the inhabitants of Bethulia take courage and drive the Assyrians from their territory.

Even though the early Church Fathers failed to ascribe to *Judith* canonical status, they nonetheless viewed it as a good source of edifying reading. Numerous early Christian writers give it a positive review: Clement of Rome (*1 Clem*, 55:4-5), Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata*, 2.7; cf. *Judith* 8.27), Origen (*Against Rufinus*, 3.1.474), Tertullian, Methodius of Olympus, Ambrose, and Jerome.[[283]](#footnote-283) Athanasius assigned it to the category of “ecclesiastical books,” which were not canonical, but considered useful for reading. Augustine included *Judith* in his canon, a decision endorsed by the Council of Trent.

In evaluating the quality of this book, one cannont help to notice the obvious geographical and historical errors.[[284]](#footnote-284) First, Nebuchadnezzar ruled over Babylon, not Assyria. Second, there is no historical confirmation of the reign of Arphaxad over Media. Third, we also lack historical confirmation of an attack by Nebuchadnezzar on Media, or of the existence of the city Bethulia. Furthermore, according to this account, Holofernes led his troops over 300 miles from Nineveh to Bectileth in the course of only three days. Finally, in this narrative the Judeans have already returned from their captivity and rebuilt the temple (5.17-19).

On the positive side, some have noted the inspirational value of the work. Luther called it “a fine, good, holy, useful book, well worth reading by us Christians” (*Preface to the Apocrypha*).[[285]](#footnote-285) DeSilva claims the book shows: (1) how God can use a woman, (2) that God is greater than all gods, (3) a demonstration of courage before danger, and (4) that God answers prayer.[[286]](#footnote-286) DeSilva’s assessment, though, suffers from the weakness that this is not actual history.

On the negative side, as Charles points out, Judith not only keeps God’s Law, but exceeds its requirements (8.5-6), which reminds one of the attitude of the Pharisees of Jesus’ time. Charles summarizes, “She is thus a perfect type of Pharisaic righteousness.”[[287]](#footnote-287) It is also important to note that Judith deceived Holofernes in promising a victory over Israel, and used her beauty to seduce him.

In summary, a work of such low quality, both historical and ethical, which also was excluded from the Hebrew canon, is not worthy of acceptance in the Christian community.

### Additions to Esther

At the end of the second century BC, some passages were added to the Book of Esther that, in general, expand the narrative, especially with the goal of showing God’s intervention in this story. Much is said about God and His nature. The following additions are noted:[[288]](#footnote-288)

1. A dream of Mordecia about impending trouble for Israel (preface)
2. Expansion of the order of King Artaxerxes concerning the annihilation of the Jews (3.13)
3. Prayers of Mordecia and Esther (4.17)
4. Expansion of the episode when Esther first appeared before King Artaxerxes (5.1)
5. Expansion of the order of King Artaxerxes, allowing the Jews to defend themselves (8.12)
6. The interpretation of Mordecia’s dream mentioned above (10.3)
7. The expanded version of Esther concludes as follows: “In the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, Dositheus, who said he was a priest and a Levite, and Ptolemaeus his son brought in *to Egypt* the Epistle of Phrurai *here* set forth, which they said was *true*, and that Lysimachus the son of Ptolemaeus, of the dwellers in Jerusalem, had interpreted it.”

It is curious to note that, in his historical work, Josephus assumes the truth of these additions (*Jewish Antiquities*, 11.184-296).[[289]](#footnote-289) Moreover, Clement of Rome (*1 Clem*. 55.6) and Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata*, 4.19) cite the prayer of Esther. Although Origen admitted that the Jews did not accept these additions, he nonetheless defended their acceptance by the Church (see *Letter to Africanus,* 3).[[290]](#footnote-290)

In evaluation of this work, one can clearly see that the goal of these additions was to answer the objection about God’s absence in this narrative. Consequently, these additions were not part of the original composition and therefore do not share the inspired nature of the book.

### Wisdom of Solomon

Scholars disagree about when *Wisdom of Solomon* was written. The date is somewhere in the interval between the second century BC and the first century AD, yet most commentators place it before Christ. The author was most likely an Alexandrian Jew, who composed the original in Greek. Its literary style resembles the Proverbs of Solomon, and the author even identifies himself as Solomon (see chp. 9). Yet the general opinion is that the work is pseudonymic.[[291]](#footnote-291)

*Wisdom of Solomon* consist of the following parts.[[292]](#footnote-292) The first part (1.1-6-8) deals with eschatology and describes the afterlife for both the righteous and the wicked. The second part (6.9-11.1) lauds the excellence of wisdom. The final part (11.2 to the end) retells Israel’s exodus from Egypt and journey through the wilderness. Much is said about the evils of idolatry.

In the Early Church, Clement of Rome quotes verbatim 2.24 (see *1 Clem.* 3.4) and 12.12 (ibid, 27.5). Irenaeus does likewise (cf. 6.19 with *Against heresies*, 4.38.3). The *Epistle of Barnabas* refers to 2.12 as Scripture. In his epic *City of God*, Augustine quotes 2.12-20 as an authoritative source, and several times refers *Wisdom of Solomon* in his treatise *On the Trinity*.[[293]](#footnote-293) Ignatius and Origen also cite this work.[[294]](#footnote-294)

Even though he rejected its canonicity, John of Damascus described *Wisdom of Solomon* as “virtuous and noble” (*An Exact exposition of the Orthodox faith*, 4.17). In like manner, Athanasius includes it with the non-canonical “ecclesiastical” books. Surprisingly, the Muratonian Canon places it in the New Testament canon! Even Luther praised the book: “It pleases me beyond measure that the author here extols the Word of God so highly and ascribes to the Word all the wonders God has performed, both on enemies and in his saints.”[[295]](#footnote-295)

Concerning the possible use of *Wisdom* by New Testament writers, some see an echo of it in Matthew 27:43.[[296]](#footnote-296) The later reads, “He trusts in God; let God rescue {Him} now, if He delights in him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God,’” which is compared to *Wisdom* 2.18: “For if the righteous man is God’s son, he will uphold him, and he will deliver him out of the hand of his adversaries.” Yet, we must also consider that Matthew here quotes the words of Christ’s enemies.

The Epistle to the Hebrews presents us with other possible parallels.

* And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature (Heb 1:3)
* For she is a breath of the power of God, and a clear effluence of the glory of the Almighty... she is an effulgence from everlasting light and an unspotted mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness (*Wisdom of Solomon*, 7.25-26).

Some assume that the author of Hebrews drew material about Enoch from *Wisdom*: “Being found well-pleasing unto God he was beloved of him, and while living among sinners he was translated” (*Wisdom of Solomon*, 4.10; cf. Hebrews 11:5). Yet, one must also note that *Wisdom* is not referring to Enoch specifically, but a “righteous man.”

Commentators give special attention to the similarities between *Wisdom* and the writings of Paul. Maybe most striking is the comparison of the behavior of the unrighteous Gentiles in Romans 1:19-24 and *Wisdom* 13.5-10 and 14.22-27. Other passages are compared:

* Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? (Rom 9:21).
* For a potter, kneading soft earth, laboriously mouldeth each vessel for our service. Nay, out of the same clay doth he fashion both the vessels that minister to clean uses, and those of a contrary sort, all in like manner. But what shall be the use of either sort, the craftsman himself is the judge (*Wisdom of Solomon,* 15.7).

Another parallel is seen in Paul’s teaching on predestination:

* You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? (Rom 9:19-20)
* For who shall say, What hast thou done? Or who shall withstand thy judgement? And who shall accuse thee for the destruction of nations which thou didst make? Or who shall come and stand before thee as an avenger for the unrighteous? (*Wisdom of Solomon,* 12.12).

Again:[[297]](#footnote-297)

* Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil {one.} And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph 6:13-17).
* He shall take his jealousy as complete armour, and shall make the *whole* creation his weapons for vengeance on *his* enemies. He shall put on righteousness as a breastplate, and shall take judgement unfeigned as a helmet. He shall take holiness as an invincible shield, and shall sharpen stern wrath for a sword (*Wisdom of Solomon,* 5.17-20а).

Charles argues that one can explain one or two parallels by appealing to a common thought or a common source, but a large number of parallels is best explained by borrowing of material. Since *Wisdom* was written before Paul’s epistles, it logically follows that Paul borrowed from the author of *Wisdom.* On the other hand, Paul often indicates the sources of his citations, but not in regard to *Wisdom.*[[298]](#footnote-298)

The most likely explanation is that Paul was familiar with *Wisdom* and borrowed some terms and illustrations from it in order to express his own thoughts. This does not mean, however, that Paul endorsed the entire contents of the book or considered it canonical. It is most important to note that Paul never cited passages from *Wisdom* with the formula “Scripture says,” or “it is written,” but only, at best, indirectly referred to it.

In evaluating *Wisdom*, we would advise caution. First, the work is pseudonymic, which means that the author was purposely deceptive. Even Augustine, who including the work among the inspired New Testament books, acknowledged, “It has been customary to ascribe to Solomon other two, of which one is called Wisdom, the other Ecclesiasticus… but the more learned have no doubt that they are not his” (*City of God*, 17.20). Second, not a few passages in *Wisdom* depart from biblical revelation and lean toward Greek philosophy.[[299]](#footnote-299) We may offer the following examples.[[300]](#footnote-300)

Wisdom is presented as an omnipresent force that penetrates all things, which resembles the Stoic concept of the “World Soul”: “For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; yea, she pervadeth and penetrateth all things by reason of her pureness (7.24); “She reacheth from one end of the world to the other with full strength, and ordereth all things well” (8.1). Wisdom is almighty, all-knowing, and glorified with God: “She, though but one, hath power to do all things; and remaining in herself, reneweth all things” (7.27); “With thee is wisdom, which knoweth thy works… she knoweth all things” (9.9, 11); “Give me wisdom, her that sitteth by thee on thy throne” (9.4). Wisdom in even nearly identified with God (see 7.25-26 above).

This book also advances a false cosmology. For example, God created the world from “formless matter” (11.17). A person’s soul exists before his/her birth: “Now I was a child good by nature and a good soul fell to my lot. Nay rather, being good, I came into a body undefiled” (8.19-20). Sometimes the body is degraded: “A corruptible body weigheth down the soul, and the earthy frame lieth heavy on the mind that is full of cares” (9.15). Charles summarizes, “The influence of Platonism in the book is… undeniable.”[[301]](#footnote-301)

Finally, *Wisdom* teaches salvation by personal righteousness: “They knew not the mysteries of God, neither hoped they for wages of holiness, nor did they judge that there is a prize for blameless souls” (2.22); and “Having borne a little chastening, they shall receive great good, because God tested them, and found them worthy of himself” (3.5).

The above-mentioned objections, along with the fact that *Wisdom of Solomon* was excluded from the Hebrew canon, require us to exclude it from the Christian canon as well.

### The Epistle of Jeremiah

The *Epistle of Jeremiah*, supposedly written by Jeremiah, is addressed to the Judean captives in Babylon. “Jeremiah” warns them that they will be in captivity for seven generations, and that they should refrain from idolatry, which he mocks in this letter. The work, though, it thought to have been written at the end of the fourth century BC in Greek.[[302]](#footnote-302)

Often this writing was included with *1 Baruch* and Lamentations in the book of the prophet Jeremiah as one volume (see Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*, 8.6.1-3; Origen in Eusebius, *Church history*, 6.25.2 [without mention of *1 Baruch*]; Athanasius, *Festal letter*, 39.4; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical lectures,* 4.35; Council of Laodicea). Sometimes the *Epistle of Jeremiah* functions as the sixth chapter of *1 Baruch,* and is so found in the Catholic Bible. The Orthodox preserve it as a separate work.[[303]](#footnote-303)

Origen and Epiphanius of Salamis claim that the combination of the *Epistle of Jeremiah* with the Book of Jeremiah reflects the true Hebrew canon.[[304]](#footnote-304) The *Epistle of Jeremiah* was found at Qumran as well. Jerome, however, who fervently defended the Hebrew canon, insisted that this epistle “was not read” among the Jews (see Preface to the *Commentary on Jeremiah*).[[305]](#footnote-305)

Did Jeremiah really compose this epistle? Although some early Christian writers appear to think so, Jewish sources do not confirm this claim. We must also take seriously the testimony of Jerome, who was more familiar with the Jewish faith than any of his contemporaries. Also important is that the prediction of a seven-generation exile was not fulfilled and contradicts Jeremiah’s known prophecy about a seventy-year captivity (Jer 25:11-12; 29:10). Therefore, we do not accept the claim that Jeremiah authored this work.

### 1 Baruch

The work *1 Baruch* is attributed to the associate of Jeremiah by that name, and is dated in the second century BC. It is thought to have originally been written in Hebrew.[[306]](#footnote-306) There are three divisions.[[307]](#footnote-307) The first part relates how, in the fifth year of the Judean captivity, Baruch read this book before Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim and king of Judah, together with other captives. The words touched their hearers, and they sent money to the high priest in Jerusalem, so that he would make sacrifices and offer prayers for them and for Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

The second division recounts the confession of Judah’s sin and recognition of God’s justice in punishing them. The people plead for mercy from God and are reminded of God’s promise through Moses of restoration after repentance. The third division contains praises to God for His wisdom and exhortations to seek Him. In addition, the people grieve about the calamities they have encountered and receive a word of comfort along with a promise of future restoration and victory over their enemies.

The Church Fathers held *1 Baruch* in high esteem. A number of Fathers cite it as an authoritative source: Athanasius (*Against Arius*, 12), Irenaeus (*Against heresies*, 5.35.1), Clement of Alexandria (*Pædagogus*, 1.10.91-92), Origen (*Homily on Jeremiah*, 7.3), Augustine (*City of God*, 18.33.1), John Chrysostom, *Apostolic Constitutions*, Tertullian, Cyprian, and others. Sometimes early commentators assign the contents to Jeremiah himself.[[308]](#footnote-308)

As we already mentioned, *1 Baruch* was sometimes included in the Book of Jeremiah along with Lamentations and the *Epistle of Jeremiah* in one volume. We observe this in Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*, 8.6.1-3, Athanasius, *Festal letter*, 39.4, Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical lectures,* 4.35, and the Council of Laodicea.[[309]](#footnote-309)

In evaluating this work, we find it difficult to believe that in the fifth year of their exile, the Jews had already returned the utensils to the temple in Jerusalem (1.8). Furthermore, we know that Baruch did not end up in Babylon, but in Egypt (Jer 43:6-7).[[310]](#footnote-310) Finally, Jerome, who was more familiar with the Jewish faith than any of his contemporaries, insisted that this epistle “was not read” among the Jews.[[311]](#footnote-311) Considering his testimony and the historical errors mentioned above, we join Jerome in rejecting the canonicity of *1 Baruch*.

### 2 Baruch

We will attempt a brief summary of *2 Baruch*.[[312]](#footnote-312) It is written in apocalyptic style and speaks of Jerusalem’s destruction and its future restoration under Messiah. Since the book was authored in the first or second century AD, some feel the author is in reality writing not so much about Babylon’s destruction of Jerusalem, as its demolition by Rome.

Most likely, *2 Baruch* comes from a Hebrew original, was translated into Greek, but now is only available in its Syrian version.[[313]](#footnote-313) Other features of this work: (1) *2 Baruch* 1.1 mistakenly assigns Jehoiakim a 25-year reign, and (2) salvation is attained by good works:

But those who have been saved by their works,

And to whom the law has been now a hope,

And understanding an expectation,

And wisdom a confidence,

Shall wonders appear in their time.

For they shall behold the world which is now invisible to them,

And they shall behold the time which is now hidden from them:

And time shall no longer age them (*2 Baruch*, 51.7-9).

The second book of Baruch is absent in the Septuagint, the Hebrew canon and all Christian canons of Scripture.

### Susanna

The story of *Susanna* is usually an addition to the Book of Daniel, enumerated as its thirteenth chapter. It was composed, however, much later – in the first century BC.[[314]](#footnote-314) The story is about a woman named Susanna, whom two elders in Israel, infatuated by her beauty, plan to rape. When their plan fails, they accuse her of adultery, of which she is subsequently declared guilty. Before her execution, Daniel discovers the truth about the matter, exonerates her, and her two accusers are executed instead.[[315]](#footnote-315)

Was this story part of the original Book of Daniel? Some in the Early Church thought so.[[316]](#footnote-316) Irenaeus quotes it as such (*Against heresies*, 4.26.3). Tertullian (*de Corona*, 4), and Athanasius (*Against Arius*, 12) accept it as real history. John Chrysostom preached a sermon in praise of Susanna. Even Jerome gave it a place in his Vulgate translation.

We find especially intriguing a now famous correspondence between Origen and Africanus concerning the question of whether the book was genuine. Africanus objected (and Origen admitted) that the Jews did not accept this account. He also noted the difference in literary style between Daniel and *Susanna*, as well as a discrepancy in Daniel’s prophetic activity – only in *Susanna* does he prophecy. In the Book of Daniel, he sees and interprets visions and dreams. Africanus also questioned whether Jews were allowed to execute anyone in Babylon. He also noted a play on words in the Greek, which shows that the original was in Greek, not Hebrew.[[317]](#footnote-317) In his reply, Origen attempted, unsuccessfully, to answer these objections.

Examining the existing documents of *Susanna* is also revealing.[[318]](#footnote-318) One can find it in the Septuagint and the Greek translation by Theodotian, yet in the translation of Aquila, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus’ history, and the Hebrew Masoretic Text, it is absent.

Andrews concludes with this judgment: “The stories are full of anachronisms and extravagances, and evidently are merely folklore adapted as a vehicle of religious instruction.”[[319]](#footnote-319)

### The Prayer of Azariah

Another “addition” to the Book of Daniel is the *Prayer of Azariah*, one of the three companions of Daniel, who was thrown into the furnace by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. The date of composition is thought to be the first century BC.[[320]](#footnote-320) In the Book of Daniel, it is located after Daniel 3:23. It has four parts: (1) an introduction, (2) the prayer of Azariah for deliverance, (3) the heating of the furnace and the descent of the Angel of the Lord, (4) the deliverance of the three Jews and praises to God.[[321]](#footnote-321)

Like the story of Susanna, the Church Fathers favored this account. It can be found in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of Theodotion, and the Vulgate, but it is absent from the Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus’ history, and the Hebrew Masoretic Text.[[322]](#footnote-322) Because of this rejection by Jewish sources, we refrain from its acceptance as well.

### Bel and the Dragon

The final “addition” to Daniel is a combination of two stories: *Bel* and *The Dragon*. They are placed at the end of Daniel (chapter 14) and were composed in the second century BC.[[323]](#footnote-323) In *Bel*, Daniel refuses to worship the idol Bel at the command of King Cyrus. In an attempt to convince Daniel to do homage to Bel, Cyrus shows the prophet how Bel consumes the food brought to him each night (yet, the priests actually eat it). Daniel obtains permission to test this claim. In the evening, he covers the floor with ashes, and it the morning the ashes reveal the footprints of the priests and their families. As a result, the king executes the priests and destroys the idol.[[324]](#footnote-324)

The second story is about a dragon in Babylon, whom the people cater to and worship. Again, Daniel refuses to worship the dragon and receives permission to slay it, which he does. The people are infuriated with Daniel and demand he be punished. The king, then, casts him into a lion’s den. In the course of seven days, however, the lions do not touch him. In addition, God commands the prophet Habakkuk, who was in Palestine at the time, to feed Daniel. An angel seizes Habakkuk by the hair and transports him to Babylon, suspending him above the lion’s den. Later, when the king discovers that Daniel is unharmed, he releases him and punishes his accusers.[[325]](#footnote-325)

Several Church Fathers cite these stories,[[326]](#footnote-326) and they are found in the Septuagint and the Greek translation of Theodotion. Yet they are lacking in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hebrew Masoretic Text.[[327]](#footnote-327)

Some problems, though, exist. DeSilva informs us that the temple of Bel was destroyed after the reign of Xerxes I (5th c. BC), but Daniel lived in the sixth century. Regarding *The Dragon*, one must question whether such a creature actually existed. Moreover, this story clearly borrows material from other passages: the history of Daniel and the lion’s den from Daniel chapter 6, and the account of Ezekiel’s translation in a vision. In Ezekiel 8:3, we read, “He stretched out the form of a hand and caught me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem.”

Due to their absence in the Hebrew text and the presence of dubious elements in these stories, we concur with deSilva: “Bel and the Dragon is no longer regarded as a historical narrative… This narrative is another manifestation of Judaism’s polemic against idolatry.”[[328]](#footnote-328)

### 1 Maccabees

The book of *1 Maccabees* enjoys great popularity as a quality historical narrative of the Jewish rebellion against Greek rule in the second century BC, headed by the Maccabees family. Charles gives the book the following assessment:

The book is a sober and, on the whole, trustworthy account of the Jewish struggle for religious liberty and political independence during the years 175–135 b.c., i.e., from the accession of Antiochus Epiphanes to the death of Simon the Maccabee.[[329]](#footnote-329)

It is believed that the book was originally written in Aramaic or Hebrew, but it exists now only in translation.[[330]](#footnote-330) It originated in the second century BC.[[331]](#footnote-331) Flavius employed it in his composition of Jewish history. Although there is no mention of God’s name, His intervention on behalf of His people is clearly evident.[[332]](#footnote-332)

Unlike Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox, Protestants do not recognize *1 Maccabees* as canonical. This is due to its absence from the Hebrew canon, endorsed by the Lord Jesus. The Jews assert that any book written after Malachi lacks prophetic authorship and is therefore excluded from the canon.

Even though this book provides us with invaluable historical insight into the intertestamental period and with inspiration from the heroism of the Maccabees, these qualities still do not qualify it as God-inspired Scripture.

### 2 Maccabees

*2 Maccabees* was written, most likely, in the second or first centuries BC by an anonymous author.[[333]](#footnote-333) The author claims that he is compiling a summary of a five-volume work by a certain Jason of Cyrene on the history of the Maccabees (2.24). Therefore, *2 Maccabees* claims to provide another account of the Jewish rebellion against the Greeks, headed by the Maccabees, yet in a condensed format. It summarizes the first seven chapters of *1 Maccabees*. Yet, it lacks the quality of historical narrative seen in the first book. In addition, *2 Maccabees*, introduces supernatural elements into the story (see 2.22; 3.24-30; 5.2-4; 10.29-31).[[334]](#footnote-334)

Besides the emphasis on God’s intervention, *2 Maccabees* distinguishes itself in still other ways. Israel supposedly found itself in this predicament due to its sins. Quite often, the resurrection of the dead is mentioned (7.9-29; 12.43-45; 14.46), which is rarely mentioned in the Old Testament itself. Some feel the author of Hebrews drew on material from *2 Maccabees* (see Heb 11:35).

Especially significant is that *2 Maccabees* advances some doctrines totally foreign to the biblical witness. For example, prayer for the dead is advised (12.43-45). The author also claims that the dead pray for God’s people and can appear to the living (15.11-16). In addition, the death of a martyr can provide God’s people with redemption (7.37-38). In the light of these obvious doctrinal errors and the exclusion of *2 Maccabees*from the Hebrew canon, we deny it that status as well.

### 3 Maccabees

The *Third Book of Maccabees* tells the legendary story of how King Ptolemy IV (Philopator), after his victory at the battle of Raphia, attempted to enter the temple in Jerusalem. In answer to the prayers of His people, God struck the king, which forced him to depart from Israel.

Philopator, however, upset by his humiliation, began to oppress the Jews in Alexandria. He gathered them in the arena, planning to release elephants to stampede them. Two angels, though, descended from heaven, causing terror among the spectators, and the elephants turned on their attendants and stampeded them instead. When the king witnessed these events, he repented of his hostility to the Jews and became their benefactor in Alexandria.[[335]](#footnote-335)

Some features of the story appear to have roots in history and were recorded by Josephus. Yet, Josephus identifies the king as Ptolemy VIII, who arranged a pogrom against the Jews supporting Cleopatra. Josephus also records that elephants turned on the accompanying soldiers and stampeded them, after which Ptolemy VIII became a support to the Jews (*Jewish Antiquities*, 2.50-55). In addition, Ptolemy IV did win a military victory over the Seleucids at Raphia, after which he visited Jerusalem. Yet, Josephus does not relate an attempt to enter the temple.

Charles gives the following evaluation of the book: “The story as it stands is full of impossibilities and bombastic exaggerations, but each one of the incidents taken singly may well rest on some basis of fact, though they certainly did not all take place in the same reign.”[[336]](#footnote-336)

DeSilva concurs: “The author was seeking to write not history, but an edifying tale loosely anchored in history.”[[337]](#footnote-337) It appears that the goal of this work was to prevent the spread of Hellenism among the Jews of that time. The story was written in the second or first century BC, when the threat of Hellenization was very real.[[338]](#footnote-338)

So then, because of the Jewish rejection of this book’s canonicity and its historical inaccuracies, we do not include it in our collection of inspired books.

### 4 Maccabees

We will only briefly treat the fourth book of Maccabees (1st c. AD), which no group, Jewish or Christian, accepts as inspired, yet the present Septuagint contains it.[[339]](#footnote-339)

The work combines the streams of conservative Judaism and Greek philosophy. On the one hand, the author is a Jew, who defends the observation of the Torah. On the other hand, he embraces many of the fundamental concepts of Stoicism. For him, the key to victory in spiritual life is ὁ εὐσεβὴς λογισμός, i.e., “inspired reason,” obtained through study of the Torah. One’s “inspired reason” must harness one’s feeling and desires. The author points to the seven martyred brothers of *2 Maccabees* as examples.

Andrews provides the following summary: “The influence of Greek thought is patent on every page,” yet “He is a loyal Jew, devoted to the Law.”[[340]](#footnote-340) For the Church, though, this work provides no edification or instruction for Christian faith.

### Psalms of Solomon

The *Psalms of Solomon* were composed by an unknown author in the first century BC. They were, most likely, written in Hebrew, but now exist only in their Greek and Syrian translations. The *Psalms of Solomon* are found in the present Septuagint, but the Hebrew canon and all Christian confessions exclude them. The Church Fathers rarely appeal to them.[[341]](#footnote-341)

The collection consist of 18 psalms, and their style resembles the biblical Psalter. They emphasize keeping the Torah. Psalm 17.27-51 speaks of Messiah, but only in general terms as a human liberator and ruler.[[342]](#footnote-342) The exclusion of the *Psalms of Solomon* from the Hebrew canon allows us to exclude them from the Christian Old Testament canon as well.

### Prayer of Manasseh

The *Prayer of Manasseh* allegedly informs us of what King Manasseh prayed when he repented before the Lord. It is interesting to note that in 2 Chronicles, chapter 33, we read that the contents of his prayer are recorded in “the records of the kings of Israel” (v. 18) and in “the records of the Hozai” (v. 19). DeSilva postulates that these two verses “issued an open invitation for some pious Jew to compose a fine penitential psalm in order to fill this gap in the tradition.”[[343]](#footnote-343) One has to agree with deSilva’s assessment, knowing that the book was written about the time of Christ.[[344]](#footnote-344) Andrews concurs: “There is no justification for regarding the prayer as genuine. Everything points to the fact that it was an imaginative composition.”[[345]](#footnote-345)

Among the Orthodox, the *Prayer of Manasseh* finds itself among the “non-canonical” books, yet is absent from the Hebrew canon and the present Septuagint.

### Jubilees

The *Book of* *Jubilees* contains a paraphrase of Genesis 1 to Exodus 12.[[346]](#footnote-346) It was written in the second century BC, in the Hebrew tongue.[[347]](#footnote-347) *Jubilees* was found at Qumran, but is not in the present Septuagint. According to this narrative, when Moses was on Sinai, God directed the “Angel of the face” to relate to Moses the events of biblical history prior to that time.

Some fascinating, but puzzling features are worth noting. From time to time, the “Angel of the face” reveals to Moses how the angels were involved in the events of history. Moreover, God did not test Abraham, but an evil spirit did. The failures of the patriarchs of Israel are sometimes omitted. People in antiquity already observed certain Jewish feasts: Noah – the Feast of Weeks (6.17), and Abraham – the Feast of Tabernacles (16.21). Angels observe the Feast of Weeks as well (6.18), as well as the Sabbath and the rite of circumcision. In addition, sin began not in the Garden of Eden, but in Genesis 6, when the “sons of God” went into the “daughters of men.”

This book advances its own unique view of eschatology. The kingdom of Messiah will progressively exert a greater and greater influence on the earth, until all humanity and nature itself will be transformed. Then a new heavens and a new earth will appear, where there will be no sin or pain. People will live for 1000 years and, after death, will enter an incorporeal state of bliss in the spiritual world.

All things considered, we affirm the position of Andrews that the author of *Jubilees* “wrote over again the story of the patriarchal age, and brought it into harmony with his own conceptions of what ought to have happened during that period.”[[348]](#footnote-348)

### 1 Enoch

The *Book of 1 Enoch* claims to narrate the experience of Enoch: how an angel visited him and how he saw a vision of the spiritual world and future events. The book was, in fact, written by various authors over the period from the second to the first centuries BC. It contains five books joined into a whole. The original appeared in Aramaic or Hebrew, but the work is preserved only in Greek, Latin and Ethiopic translations, the later being the most complete.[[349]](#footnote-349)

The first book (chps. 1-36) recounts the supposed sexual union between fallen angels (the “Watchers”) and the “daughters of men” (see Gen 6), which led to humanity’s fall into sin, the Great Deluge, and God’s judgement on fallen angels. The second book (chps. 37-71) contains three proverbs that touch on various topics, especially God’s judgement, eschatology and cosmology. The third book (chps. 72-82) discusses the movement of heavenly bodies and the establishment of the solar calendar. The fourth book (chps. 83-90) covers biblical history, which concludes with the appearance of the glorious messianic kingdom. This section also further details the fall of angels and humans. The final book (chps. 91-108) covers world history with emphasis on future events, especially the fate of the righteous and unrighteous. More is also said about the history of Noah.[[350]](#footnote-350)

Although *1 Enoch* was found at Qumran and quoted in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and *Judith*, the rabbis deemed it unworthy for inclusion in the Hebrew canon of Scripture.[[351]](#footnote-351) Origen (*Commentary on Numbers*, 28.2) and Tertullian (*On the adornment of women*, 1.3), who employed the work as an authoritative source, also acknowledged that the Jews did not accept it.[[352]](#footnote-352)

Unlike the hesitancy by the Jews, the Church Fathers freely employed *1 Enoch* until the fourth century. Such notables as Irenaeus (*Against heresies*, 4.16.2), Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian (*On idolatry*, 15), and others cited it authoritatively.[[353]](#footnote-353) Origen reveals, however, that not all Christian congregations accepted the book (*Against Celsus*, 3.54; *Commentary on John*, 6.25). Sometimes he cites it as an authoritative source, while at other times he distinguishes it from Holy Scripture (*de Principiis*, 1.3.3).[[354]](#footnote-354) Nonetheless, from the fourth century on, due to a negative assessment of the book by Augustine, Jerome and Hilary, its popularity waned and it lost its prestigious status among the churches.[[355]](#footnote-355)

Certain features of the book deserve notice. In *1 Enoch* we encounter the title for Messiah “Son of Man,” which Jesus often applied to Himself. He is also called the “Righteous One” and the “Chosen One” (cf. Acts 3:14; Lk 23:35). In addition, according to *1 Enoch*, the Son of Man has a heavenly origin (62.7) and will sit on a glorious throne (62.5).[[356]](#footnote-356)

*1 Enoch* has several significant shortcomings. Charles, for example, sees a number of inconsistencies in its teaching on Messiah, His kingdom, the origin of sin, and eschatology. Some object that Enoch could not have survived the flood of Noah. In defense, Tertullian claims that he passed on this information through Methuselah (*On the adornment of women*, 1.3), yet this is only an assumption by Tertullian. Another minus – the exclusion of *1 Enoch* from the Hebrew canon.

The most intriguing feature is that in verses 14-15 of his epistle, Jude quotes *1 Enoch*: “And behold! He cometh with ten thousands of ‹His› holy ones to execute judgement upon all, and to destroy ‹all› the ungodly, and to convict all flesh of all the works ‹of their ungodliness› which they have ungodly committed, ‹and of all the hard things which› ungodly sinners ‹have spoken› against Him” (*1 Enoch,* 1.9). In acknowledgement of the true prophetic character of these words, Jude introduces the quotation with the words, “{It was} also about these men {that} Enoch, {in} the seventh {generation} from Adam, prophesied…”. The significance of this citation is discussed in our analysis of Jude’s epistle below.

### Testament-Ascension of Moses

There once existed two pseudonymic books attributed to Moses, which some feel were joined together into one volume – the *Testament of Moses*, and the *Ascension of Moses.* The later was mentioned at the Council of Nicaea, but in other ancient sources, both titles are encountered.[[357]](#footnote-357)

Both books appeared in the first Christian century and were likely written in Hebrew. The *Testament of Moses* is only partially preserved in its Latin translation, while the *Ascension of Moses* has disappeared completely except for isolated citations in the works of the Fathers.[[358]](#footnote-358) Clement of Alexandria, for example, gleaned the following from the *Ascension of Moses*: “Rightly, therefore, Jesus the son of Nave saw Moses, when taken up [to heaven], double, – one Moses with the angels, and one on the mountains, honoured with burial in their ravines” (*Stromata*, 6.15).

The *Testament of Moses* relates a supposed conversation between Moses and Joshua, during which Moses predicts Israel’s future from the time of the conquest of Canaan to the time of the Maccabees. In addition, he prophecies about the end times and the ultimate victory of God’s people. Israel will triumph, however, not by violence, but by God’s supernatural intervention.[[359]](#footnote-359) Most interesting is the prediction that from the time of Moses’ death to the inauguration of the messianic kingdom with be “250 weeks” (10.12), which means 1750 years.

Moreover, in the *Testament of Moses*, Moses encourages his understudy Joshua and assures him of God’s future aid and support.[[360]](#footnote-360) Unlike the *Ascension of Moses*, in the *Testament of Moses*, Moses dies a natural death (see 1.15; 3.13; 10.14). The word “ascension,” found in *Testament of Moses* 10.12 after the word “death,” is likely a later insertion.[[361]](#footnote-361)

The final part of the *Testament of Moses* is lost. Some consider that it contained an account of Michael the archangel disputing with the Devil about the body of Moses, of which Jude speaks (Jude 9).[[362]](#footnote-362) Charlesworth, along with others, challenges that assumption, insisting that Jude is citing a different, unknown source.[[363]](#footnote-363) Yet, other parallels can be drawn: (1) similarities of the description of the ungodly in Jude 4 and the *Testament of Moses* 7.3-9, and (2) discussion of the end times (Jude 18; *Testament of Moses*, 7.1).

As was the case in our discussion of *1 Enoch*, we find here a book which by rights should be excluded from the Old Testament canon because of its exclusion from the Hebrew canon. On the other hand, how are we to understand the possible reference to it in the Epistle of Jude? We will table that discussion until we resume it in our study of Jude’s epistle a little later.

### Ascension of Isaiah

The work consists of three parts: the *Martyrdom of Isaiah*, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, and the *Testament of Hezekiah*. It is thought that the first part was written by a Jewish author, but the other two – by a Christian. The first part tells about Hezekiah advising his son Manasseh before the former’s death, Manasseh’s rebellion, and the martyrdom of Isaiah, whom Manasseh sawed in two. Most likely, the author of Hebrews drew on this history in writing Hebrews 11:37 (see *Ascension of Isaiah,* 5.11-14). *Ascension of Isaiah*, in fact, had been written not long before that. We can find citations to *Ascension of Isaiah* in the works of Ambrose, Jerome, Origen, Tertullian and Justin Martyr.[[364]](#footnote-364)

The second part relates how Isaiah, having ascended to heaven, testifies of the descent of God’s Son to the earth, who died, rose, and ascended to heaven. We also encounter there hints of the doctrine of the Trinity.[[365]](#footnote-365)

Clearly, the parts of *Ascension of Isaiah* written by Christians cannot qualify for admission to the Old Testament canon. Nonetheless, the reference in Hebrews 11:37 indicates that that book may well have historical value. At the same time, as we noted in *1 Maccabees*, historicity of a work does not necessarily qualify it for canonicity.

Finally, we note Jerome’s claim that in the copy of *Ascension of Isaiah* that he possessed, he found the verse quoted by Paul in 1 Cor 2:9 (see *Commentary on Isaiah*, 64.4).[[366]](#footnote-366) This presents us with a dilemma in that Paul introduces this quotation with the words “it is written.” Nonetheless, it is now impossible to confirm Jerome’s claim.

### Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs

In this work, the twelve sons of Jacob tell of events in their lives and give advice to their descendants. The main part of the work was written at the end of the second century BC, yet many think that it contains interpolations by Christian writers.[[367]](#footnote-367) For example:

Now, therefore, observe whatsoever I command you, children; for whatsoever things I have heard from my fathers I have declared unto you. And behold I am clear from your ungodliness and transgression, which ye shall commit in the end of the ages [against the Saviour of the world, Christ, acting godlessly], deceiving Israel, and stirring up against it great evils from the Lord (*Testament of Levi*, 10.1-2).

For our father Israel is pure from the transgressions of the chief priests [who shall lay their hands upon the Saviour of the world (*Testament of Levi*, 14.2).

And the veil of the temple shall be rent, and the Spirit of God shall pass on to the Gentiles as fire poured forth (*Testament of Benjamin*, 9.4).

We also note parallels between the following passages and New Testament texts:[[368]](#footnote-368)

* And if any one seeketh to do evil unto you, do well unto him, and pray for him, and ye shall be redeemed of the Lord from all evil (*Testament of Joseph*, 18.2).
* But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matt 5:44).
* Love ye one another from the heart; and if a man sin against thee, speak peaceably to him, and in thy soul hold not guile; and if he repent and confess, forgive him (*Testament of Gad*, 6.3).
* If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother (Matt 18:15).
* Love the Lord through all your life, and one another with a true heart (*Testament of Dan*, 5.3).
* He said to him, “You shall love the lord your god with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:37-39).
* I was alone, and God comforted me. I was sick, and the Lord visited me. I was in prison, and my God showed favour unto me; in bonds, and He released me; slandered, and He pleaded my cause; bitterly spoken against by the Egyptians, and He delivered me; envied by my fellow-slaves, and He exalted me (*Testament of Joseph*, 1.6-7).
* For I was hungry, and you gave Me {something} to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me {something} to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me. (Matt 25:35-36)
* Then shall all the spirits of deceit be given to be trodden under foot, and men shall rule over wicked spirits (*Testament of Simeon*, 6.6).
* Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you (Lk 10:19)
* What will all the Gentiles do, if ye be darkened through transgressions? Yea, ye shall bring a curse upon our race, because the light of the law which was given to lighten every man… (*Testament of Levi*, 14.4).
* There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man (Jn 1:9).
* The good inclination receiveth not glory nor dishonour from men (*Testament of Benjamin*, 6.4).
* I do not receive glory from men (Jn 5:41)
* But his God and the God of his fathers sent forth His angel, and delivered him out of my hands (*Testament of Simeon*, 2.8).
* When Peter came to himself, he said, “Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting” (Acts 12:11).
* For they that are double-faced are guilty of a twofold sin; for they both do the evil thing and they have pleasure in them that do it, following the example of the spirits of deceit, and striving against mankind (*Testament of Asher*, 6.2).
* Although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them (Rom 1:32).
* And though they devise with evil intent concerning him, by doing good he overcometh evil, being shielded by God; and he loveth the righteous as his own soul (*Testament of Benjamin*, 4.3).
* Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom 12:21).
* For there is a season for a man to embrace his wife, and a season to abstain therefrom for his prayer (*Testament of Naphtali*, 8.8).
* Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control (1 Cor 7:5).
* For true repentance after a godly sort [destroyeth ignorance, and] driveth away the darkness, and enlighteneth the eyes, and giveth knowledge to the soul, and leadeth the mind to salvation (*Testament of Gad*, 5.7).
* For the sorrow that is according to {the will} {of} God produces a repentance without regret, {leading} to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death (2 Cor 7:10).

However, since Christian interpolations are clearly present in this book, one cannot determine with confidence who borrowed material from whom. It is possible that Jesus and the New Testament writers were familiar with these writings and borrowed phraseology from them to express their own thoughts. Yet, that does not mean that they endorsed all the contents of this book, or considered in canonical. It is vital to note that New Testament authors never quote passages from the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* with formulas like “Scripture says,” or “it is written.” At best, they only indirectly refer to them.

### Sibylline Oracles

The final disputed book we will examine is the *Sibylline Oracles*. Although no New Testament author cites it, the Church Fathers do so in abundance.[[369]](#footnote-369)

The *Sibylline Oracles* are a collection of various sayings, allegedly made by prophetesses (Sibyls), who advance various ideas, some consistent with paganism, others with Judaism, and still others with Christianity. It is thought that this variety of views resulted from editorial changes made over time by different hands. In its more original form, the *Sibylline Oracles* was highly esteemed in the pagan world, especially in the Roman Empire.

Collins comments, “It was doubtless because of the high esteem in which these prophecies were held that Jewish and Christian writers used the form so extensively to present their own messages,” and, “Christian writers adapted the Sibyls for their apologetic purposes.”[[370]](#footnote-370)

This book contains much ethical instruction, but especially stresses eschatology: rewards for the righteous and punishments for the unrighteous. It also places stress on God’s sovereignty and the refutation of idolatry.[[371]](#footnote-371) Nevertheless, the pagan roots of these writings place them outside of the range of acceptability for acceptance in the Old Testament canon.

### **3. Conclusions**

Our survey of apocryphal and pseudepigraphic books reveals their inferior quality compared to genuine inspired works. Not infrequently, they contain elements of Hellenistic thought, pagan ritualism, improper behavior by the “heroes-heroines” of the story, false teaching, or historical inconsistencies. Some of them read more like romantic novels than conveyors of God’s truth. The Jews correctly excluded them from the canon. Yet, we are amazed that they held such sway over the Early Church Fathers.

### B. New Testament

### 1. Books Accepted as Canonical

### 2 Peter

The debate about 2 Peter involves several issues. First, we will look at the contents of the epistle itself.[[372]](#footnote-372) The careful reader will quickly recognize the stylistic differences between this letter and 1 Peter. Moreover, it seems strange that Peter, being an apostle himself, would speak of the “commandment of the Lord and Savior {spoken} by your apostles” (3:2).

In addition, according to 2 Peter 3:4, believers have already been waiting a long time for Christ’s return. Also, 2 Peter contains less Old Testament citations than 1 Peter does. The second epistle has several expressions that stand in contrast with typical New Testament phraseology: “partakers of {the} divine nature” (1:4), and the divine title – the “Majestic Glory” (1:17).

We must also examine the epistle from a historical perspective.[[373]](#footnote-373) The Church Fathers rarely cited this work. Those who did often expressed doubts about its genuineness. The earliest copy of 2 Peter still in circulation dates only from the third century (papyrus 72). They may be, however, indirect allusions to it in the works of Clement of Alexandria (2nd c.) and Cyprian (3rd c.). Hippolytus of Rome (2nd-3rd c.) definitely cites it. Curiously, the Muratonian Canon (2nd c.) omits 2 Peter, but one must consider that other books are also missing in it, like 1 Peter.

Origen and Eusebius definitely refer to this epistle, yet hesitate to attribute it to the apostle. Jerome accepted it, but also related that this opinion was not universal. The Syrian church canonized it only in the sixth century. The Reformers Luther and Calvin also wavered about its authorship.

On the other hand, the following factors favor its inclusion among the inspired books.[[374]](#footnote-374) The author identifies himself as the great apostle (1:1, 14-18). We note, however, that several other pseudonymic works appeared in the post-apostolic period, supposedly written by Peter (*Gospel of Peter*, *Apocalypse of Peter*). Some feel that the Early Church hesitated to receive 2 Peter out of fear that it was also pseudonymic. Nevertheless, the fact that, in spite of that fear, the Church eventually did canonize the book, lends support to the claim of its authenticity. By the fourth century, with the exception of the Syrian Church, all Christian congregations accepted it.

We might explain, along with Jerome, the difference in literary style by the use of an amanuensis. It is also significant that Jude quotes 2 Peter 3:3 as the words of an apostle: “…that they were saying to you, ‘In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts’” (Jude 18). In addition, the contents of Jude closely follow that of 2 Peter, which shows that Jude was familiar with the work and considered it authoritative. Finally, the emphasis on eschatology better coincides with the New Testament period than the post-apostolic era.

In conclusion, since the contents of 2 Peter is not unworthy of the apostle and does not contradict other New Testament teaching, we may accept its claim to apostolic authorship. Although some Fathers expressed doubts about 2 Peter, no one rejected it outright.[[375]](#footnote-375)

### James

Along with several other of the Catholic Epistles, the Book of James had a rocky road to canonical recognition. We will investigate the contents of the epistle as well as the opinions of early Christian writers.[[376]](#footnote-376) Before this, though, we must tackle the question, “Which James is this?” Without doubt, the author is not James, the son of Zebedee. He was martyred early in the history of the apostolic church. There was another James among the Twelve, James the son of Alpheus, but little is known about him.

This epistle is characteristic of James, the half-brother of Jesus.[[377]](#footnote-377) The author is definitely a Jew. His stress on morals corresponds to his allegiance to the Law of Moses, as depicted in the Book of Acts. This James certainly held a prominent position in the Early Church, as also indicated in the Book of Acts. Finally, some note similarities between James’ speech in Acts 15:13-21 and the contents of this epistle.

As far as the content of this epistle, we immediately notice the apparent conflict with Paul’s insistence on justification by faith alone (cf. Jam 2:24 and Eph 2:8-9). Not only Martin Luther noted this tension, but some of the Church Fathers as well. Also significant is the absence of reference to the redemptive work of Christ, which is the heart of the gospel. Finally, some feel the quality of the author’s Greek is too good for a simple Jew.

The Early Church seemed divided on the question. Origen and Jerome inform us that some doubted its canonicity, and Eusebius includes it among the doubtful books. Nonetheless, in their theological discussions, they use as an authoritative resource. The Eastern Church was the first to recognize James as canonical, in particular, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen, and Athanasius. The first in the West was Hilary.

James is also absent from the Muratonian Canon and the canon of the Syrian Church (until the 4th century). However, as was mentioned before, many books, accepted by the Church, are missing from the Muratonian Canon likely because of damage to the document. In addition, the Syrian Church hesitated to accept all the Catholic epistles, not just James.

In defense of James’ inclusion among the inspired New Testament books, we may say the following. The good Greek employed by the author can be explained by use of an amanuensis. In addition, we have noted that the epistle’s contents correspond to the character of James, the Lord’s brother. The book’s teaching closely corresponds with the Lord’s teaching, which one might expect from one closely related to Him. In addition, we would expect a pseudonymic author to take advantage of James’ reputation in the Early Church and personal connection with Jesus to make his forgery more convincing. Yet, these ties are not mentioned in the epistle.

The evidence seems adequate to attribute this work to James, the Lord’s half-brother, who was a “pillar” of the Early Church (Gal 2:9; 1 Cor 15:7). Since he was part of the “apostolic circle,” his epistle is worthy of inclusion in the canon of the Church. As far as his “conflict” with Paul’s teaching, we will return to this issue at the end of this Appendix.

### Hebrews

For a long time now, the identity of the author of Hebrews has puzzled scholars and students of the Bible. For this very reason, the Western Fathers were hesitant about accepting its canonicity. Eusebius comments, “Some have rejected the Epistle to the Hebrews, saying that it is disputed by the church of Rome, on the ground that it was not written by Paul” (*Church history*, 3.3.5). From the beginning, however, the Eastern Church has ascribed Hebrews to Paul and therefore has recognized its inspired status.

One Eastern Father, Clement of Alexandria held the following view. He felt that Paul wrote the epistle in Hebrew, and that Luke translated it into Greek, which explains the stylistic differences between Hebrews and Paul’s other epistles. Furthermore, Clement explains that Paul wrote Hebrews anonymously out of fear that Jews would immediately reject his message.[[378]](#footnote-378) Origen felt likewise, that the epistle contains Paul’s thoughts, which were written down by one of his disciples.

In the West, Christian thinkers not only doubted Paul’s authorship, but also objected to the teaching that the apostate could not be restored (Heb 6:4-6)[[379]](#footnote-379). The first Western Father to acknowledge Hebrews was Hilary.[[380]](#footnote-380) The Western Church as a whole accepted it only due to the positive assessment of Augustine and Jerome (and possibly Athanasius).[[381]](#footnote-381)

Certain factors, however, weigh against Pauline authorship.[[382]](#footnote-382) It is unlike Paul to write an anonymous work – he customarily emphasizes his apostolic authority. In addition, in his epistles, Paul usually makes some personal comments, which are absent in Hebrews. Many typical Pauline themes are also absent: the resurrection of Christ, the believer’s position “in Christ,” the contrast of spirit and flesh, and others. Furthermore, such notables as Luther, Calvin and Erasmus questioned Pauline authorship of the epistle.[[383]](#footnote-383)

Nonetheless, even if we doubt Paul’s authorship, convincing arguments exist for attributing Hebrews to one of his coworkers. Along with Clement’s proposal that Luke translated Paul, others suggest the following possible authors: Luke, Clement of Rome, Barnabas, Silas, or Apollos.[[384]](#footnote-384)

In defense of Barnabas’ authorship, we may note that Tertullian so taught. Additionally, Barnabas was a Levite, and so likely had a special interest in the temple order, a feature strongly stressed in this book. He was also called the “son of encouragement” (παρακλήσεως) (Acts 4:36), which corresponds to the author’s parting words, “Bear with this word of exhortation (παρακλήσεως)” (Heb 13:22). In defense of Luke’s authorship, we observe common stylistic features between Hebrews and the known writings of Luke. Silas was a coworker with Paul and also a Jew.[[385]](#footnote-385)

Another variant to consider is Apollos. He was well acquainted with Paul and was “mighty in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24). He was also “an eloquent man” (ibid), which fits the style of this writing. His place of origin is also significant – Alexandria, where the Septuagint originated. All the quotations in Hebrews are from this Greek translation. Luther preferred this variant, yet the Church Fathers apparently did not.[[386]](#footnote-386)

Summing up the question, we may fairly assume that Hebrews was composed either by Paul or by one of his close associates. Therefore, in the strength of: (1) authorship by an apostle of close associate, (2) orthodox teaching of the epistle, and (3) acknowledgement by the Church, immediately in the East, and eventually in the West, the epistle to the Hebrews satisfies the criteria for canonicity. We recall the words of Origen: “The thoughts of the epistle are admirable, and not inferior to the acknowledged apostolic writings, anyone who carefully examines the apostolic text will admit” (from Eusebius, *Church history,* 6.25.12).

### 2-3 John

Concerning the canonization of the Second and Third Epistles of John, we encounter two problems.[[387]](#footnote-387) First, these letters are brief and read more like personal communications. Second, the author calls himself the “Elder,” which is atypical for an apostle. We are also aware that in the second century, Papias mentioned a certain “Elder John” in distinction from the apostle John: “…what Andrew or what Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the disciples of the Lord, and what things Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, say” (*Church history*, 3.39.4).

Some early Christian writers challenged it as well. Both Eusebius (*Church history*, 3.25.3) and Origen included it among the “disputed books.” Origen wrote, “(John) has left also an epistle of very few lines; perhaps also a second and third; but not all consider them genuine” (from *Church history*, 6.25.10). The Muratonian Canon acknowledges only two epistles of John, but does not indicate which two. Finally, Jerome ascribed 1 John to the apostle, but 2-3 John to the “Elder John.”[[388]](#footnote-388)

On the other hand, other Fathers defended Johannine authorship. Irenaeus, for example, attributed 2 John 7-8 to the apostle (*Against heresies*, 3.16.8). Dionysius of Alexandria considered 2-3 John apostolic (see *Church history*, 7.25.11). Eventually the entire Church embraced it, but the Syrian Church did so only in the sixth century.

Other arguments can be advanced. Papias once used the term “elder” in reference to an apostle (see *Church history*, 3.39.4). In addition, the literary style of theses “lesser” epistles in identical to that of 1 John. Thus, in the strength of probable apostolic authorship and edifying instructional material, we are ready to accept 2-3 John as Scripture.

### Jude

The Epistle of Jude is also numbered among the disputed New Testament books for two main reasons. First, doubt exists concerning the epistle’s authorship and the author’s apostolic status. Second, to support his teaching, the author appeals to non-canonical, pseudepigraphical writings.[[389]](#footnote-389)

As far as the book’s origins, the author identifies himself as “Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James” (Jude 1). Therefore, he is not only a “bond-servant” of Jesus Christ, but also his half-brother (see Mark 6:3). According to verse 17, Jude did not consider himself an apostle, yet his association with the apostolic circle in Jerusalem entitles him to a special status. Tertullian called him an “apostle” (*On the adornment of women*, 1.3).

Attempts to prove pseudonymity for this epistle fail. As Zahn relates, who would have taken Jude as his pseudonym? Among those in the apostolic circle, he was among the least well-known and the least influential.[[390]](#footnote-390)

Along with Tertullian, other early Christian writers cite this epistle, but usually with reservations about its authorship. We observe this in the Muratonian Canon, and in the works of Clement of Alexandria (see *Church history*, 6.14.1), Eusebius (ibid, 3.25.3; 2.23.25), and Jerome (*Lives of illustrious men,* 4). The Syrian Church accepted it only in the sixth century. Luther challenged Jude’s authorship as well. On the other hand, in papyrus 72 (3rd-4th c.) Jude is found together with other canonical epistles.[[391]](#footnote-391)

The second objection to Jude’s canonicity is the author’s use of non-canonical books. The first such instance is in verse 9: “But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’” Although no one knows for certain where this citation comes from, some assume that it came from a lost portion of the pseudepigraphic book *Testament of Moses*.[[392]](#footnote-392) The second instance is in verses 14-15:

{It was} also about these men {that} Enoch, {in} the seventh {generation} from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.

The passage in *1 Enoch* reads as follows:

“And behold! He cometh with ten thousands of ‹His› holy ones to execute judgement upon all, and to destroy ‹all› the ungodly, and to convict all flesh of all the works ‹of their ungodliness› which they have ungodly committed, ‹and of all the hard things which› ungodly sinners ‹have spoken› against Him” (*1 Enoch,* 1.9).

The Epistle of Jude and *1 Enoch* share other commonalities.[[393]](#footnote-393) Jude’s mention of angels “who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode” (v. 6) reminds one of *1 Enoch’s* claim that some angels left heaven and had sexual relations with women (*1 Enoch,* 12.4). We also note the following parallels: “judgment of the great day” (cf. Jude 6, *1 Enoch,* 10.6); “in eternal bonds under darkness” (cf. Jude 6, *1 Enoch,* 10.4-6); “…clouds without water… autumn trees without fruit… wandering stars” (cf. Jude 12-13, *1 Enoch,* 80.2-6); “the seventh from Adam” (cf. Jude 14, *1 Enoch,* 60.8; 93.3).

Due to Jude’s apparent dependence on *1 Enoch*, Jerome relates the Church’s reluctance to endorse it: “Jude the brother of James, left a short epistle which is reckoned among the seven catholic epistles, and because in it he quotes from the apocryphal book of Enoch it is rejected by many” (*Lives of illustrious men,* 4). Moore makes the interesting observation that early Christian writers began objecting to Jude’s usage of *1 Enoch* not immediately, but only later, in the 4th century. Before that time, as we noted above, *1 Enoch* enjoyed great popularity in the Church.[[394]](#footnote-394)

Several explanations are offered for Jude’s employment of pseudepigraphical sources. Most conservative commentators feel that Jude found accurate information in these documents, which he then included in his epistle.[[395]](#footnote-395) Yet, his endorsement of these portions does not imply that he considered the *Testament of Moses* or *I Enoch* canonical in their entirety. In the words of Zahn, Jude considered these passages “reliable witnesses of genuine tradition and true prophecy.”[[396]](#footnote-396)

Augustine, having carefully considered the question, comes to this conclusion:

For though there is some truth in these apocryphal writings, yet they contain so many false statements, that they have no canonical authority. We cannot deny that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, left some divine writings, for this is asserted by the Apostle Jude in his canonical epistle. But it is not without reason that these writings have no place in that canon of Scripture which was preserved in the temple of the Hebrew people by the diligence of successive priests (*City of God*, 15.23.4).

Other biblical examples exist where non-canonical works are cited, yet there is no indication that the entire non-canonical work is inspired (see Num 21:14-15, 27-30; Ezra 6:1-5; Acts 17:28; 1 Cor 15:33; 2 Tim 3:8; Tit 1:12)[[397]](#footnote-397).

On the other hand, deSilva points out an important detail. Jude appeals to the words of “Enoch” as a genuine prophecy and attributes this prediction to Enoch himself, the “seventh from Adam.”[[398]](#footnote-398) Since the *1 Enoch* is the only source of the “prophetic ministry” of Enoch, on what basis could Jude distinguish genuine material in the book from legendary? Beckwith answers that Jude himself believed the entire book to be legendary, but nonetheless found it useful, since his readers valued it.[[399]](#footnote-399) Yet, judging from the text, it seems clear that Jude himself accepted “Enoch’s” prophecy as true.

Finally, one must consider the relationship between Jude and 2 Peter, since their contents are nearly identical. Scholars usually believe that Peter borrowed material from Jude. Yet, such thinkers ignore some important facts. First, Jude quotes 2 Peter 3:3, ascribing the passage to an apostle: “But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, ‘In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts’” (Jude 17-18). Second, in 2 Peter the appearance of false teachers is a future event, while in Jude it is a present threat.[[400]](#footnote-400) Third, it is more probable that Jude would appeal to a more authoritative source, than that Peter would appeal to a less authoritative one.

Regarding the canonicity of Jude, we do not see any insurmountable obstacles to its acceptance. Jude served in the context of the apostolic circle. His teaching is in full agreement with the teaching of the apostle Peter, and is therefore orthodox. Eventually, the entire Church embraced this epistle.

Regarding Jude’s use of pseudepigraphical writings, this observation does not violate any criterion for canonicity, assuming the fact that Jude accepted those borrowed passages as genuine history. His employment of those passages does not affect the canonicity of his epistle as much as it does the canonicity of these quoted works. Yet, we have already ruled out their canonicity based on their failure to meet the required criteria. The question of why Jude employed *1 Enoch*, and possibly the *Testament of Moses*, remains an enigma.

### Revelation

The matter of Revelation’s canonicity resonates with the experience of several other disputed books, in that questions arose concerning both the book’s authorship, and its contents.

As far as the origin of the Apocalypse, on the one hand, many early commentators supported the view of Johannine authorship.[[401]](#footnote-401) We can list the following: Justin Martyr (*Dialogue*, 82), Irenaeus (*Against heresies*, 4.30.4), Tertullian (*Against Marcion*, 3.14), Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata*, 6.13), Origen (see Eusebius, *Church history*, 6.25.9), Melito (ibid, 4.26.2), and Theophilus of Antioch (ibid, 4.24.1). The Muratonian Canon lists it as well. Eusebius writes about persecuted believers in Gaul in the second century who call Revelation 22:11 “Scripture” (ibid, 5.1.58).

Donald Guthrie joins in the defense of Johannine authorship as well.[[402]](#footnote-402) The author writes with authority, expecting his words to be heeded. He speaks of Jesus as the “Logos,” i.e., the “Word” (cf. Jn 1:1 and Rev 19:13), a “Shepherd” (cf. John 10:1 and Rev 7:17), and the “Lamb of God” (cf. Jn 1:29 and Rev 5:6).

On the other hand, Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, rejects this claim (see Eusebius, *Church history*, 7.25.7ff). Because of stylistic differences, he declined to attribute the book to the “disciple that Jesus loved.” He also noted that in John’s Gospel and Epistles, the author does not identify himself, whereas in Revelation, he does. Additionally, we lack in Revelation themes characteristic of John, like “light,” “life,” “love,” and others. The Greek of Revelation is much different as well. Therefore, Dionysius thought that another individual named John wrote the book.

Following the lead of Dionysius, for some time the Eastern Church refrained from acknowledging the Apocalypse as Scripture. It is absent from the canonical lists of the Council of Laodicea, Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catechetical lectures,* 4.36), and Gregory Nazianzen (*Theological verses*, 12). Eusebius also expressed doubts (*Church history*, 3.25.2-4; 3.3.2). Eventually, Athanasius recognized it (*Festal letter*, 39), as well as John of Damascus (*Exact exposition of the Orthodox faith*, 4.17), and then the entire Eastern Church (except for the Syrian branch – only in the sixth century).

As far as doctrinal questions, some in the Early Church (especially in the East) objected to the teaching of a material, thousand-year messianic reign, thinking that participation in an earthly kingdom was unbefitting for saints. Eastern theologians also feared that such a teaching would lend support to the Montanist movement, which was threatening the Church at that time.[[403]](#footnote-403)

However, for those who do not reject the possibility of an earthly reign of Christ, such an objection is unconvincing. Concerning the difference in literary style, one could postulate that John wrote in an apocalyptic style in conformity with similar works, or, possibly, an amanuensis was involved in the composition of John’s other writings.[[404]](#footnote-404) It seems that there are no convincing reasons to exclude Revelation from the New Testament canon.

### 2. Books Not Accepted as Canonical

### Didache

The *Didache*, which means “Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,” claims to contain the actual teaching of the original disciples of Jesus. Two themes are highlighted – proper behavior and proper church order. It was penned in the mid-second century.

The Early Church valued this book to the point that Clement of Alexandria and Origen considered it Scripture.[[405]](#footnote-405) On the other hand, Eusebius placed it in the category of “rejected writings” (*Church history,* 3.25.4). In the opinion of Harnack, “It never could give the same impression of unassailable authenticity as did works Apostolic in form and title.”[[406]](#footnote-406)

Also important – the *Didache* is anonymous, which also arouses suspicion, since we cannot confirm that the book actually contains the teachings of the Twelve. We must know who wrote the book and where he gathered his information in order to be convinced of its apostolic origin. We cannot accept a claim to apostolic authorship without substantiation. Additionally, a study of the book will reveal that its teaching departs from the New Testament norm. Nonetheless, the *Didache* is valuable as a historical record of the condition of the Church in the second century.

### Epistle of Barnabas

The *Epistle of “Barnabas”* resembles the Epistle to the Hebrews in that it discusses the relationship of the Old Testament to Christianity. Unlike Hebrews, though, it abounds in allegorical treatment of the Old Testament. Guthrie, commenting on the quality of the work, claims that in comparison with Hebrews “*The Epistle of Barnabas* is greatly inferior in spiritual grasp, in historical appreciation and in breadth of understanding of the problems with which it deals.”[[407]](#footnote-407)

In the Early Church, Clement of Alexandria and Origen considered it Scripture, and Codex Sinaiticus (4th c.) places it after the Book of Revelation.[[408]](#footnote-408) Eusebius, however, delegated it to the category of “rejected writings” (*Church history,* 3.25.4).

Andrews comments on the authorship of *Barnabas*, “The traditional view which ascribes the book to the Apostle Barnabas is very improbable, and has now been almost universally rejected.”[[409]](#footnote-409) Andrews backs up his view by observing that the author, supposedly being a Levite, nonetheless makes mistakes in his description of Jewish rituals. In addition, the book coveys a certain anti-Semitic tone. Noted expert in textual criticism, Brooke Foss Westcott, also expresses concern: “While the antiquity of the Epistle is firmly established, its Apostolicity is more than questionable.”[[410]](#footnote-410)

In light of the inferior quality and doubtful apostolic authorship of this work, we refrain from including it in the canon of Holy Scripture.

### Pastor (Shepherd) of Hermas

The *Pastor of Hermas* was composed in the mid-second century. The author claims to be Hermas, whom Paul greeted in Romans 16:14. Origen and Jerome were ready to attribute the book to Hermas, but the author reveals that he lived during the time of Clement (*Visions*, 2.4). In addition, according to the Muratonian Canon, the author’s brother was Pius, bishop of Rome, who lived in the second century.[[411]](#footnote-411)

The book has three parts. The first, “Visions,” relates the visions of Hermas when he saw the Church in the guise of an old woman, who revealed certain mysteries to him. At the end of this section, the “Pastor” (i.e., “Shepherd”) appears to Hermas, gives him “Commandments,” and relates to him certain “Parables,” which are the designations for the last two sections of the book.[[412]](#footnote-412) Rife describes his overall impression of the book with the words, “The Shepherd is the work of a naive mind, slow style is rambling, confused and often tiresome.”[[413]](#footnote-413)

*Pastor of Hermas* stresses repentance and moral perfection. It warns against sinning after water baptism:

If any one is tempted by the devil, and sins after that great and holy calling, in which the Lord has called His people to everlasting life, he has opportunity to repent but once. But if he should sin frequently after this, and then repent, to such a man his repentance will be of no avail; for with difficulty will he live (*Commandments*, 4.3).

The Early Church held this book in high regard. Some regarded it as Scripture: Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Irenaeus.[[414]](#footnote-414) For example, Irenaeus quoted Commandment 3.1 with the formula “the Scripture declared” (*Against heresies*, 4.20.2). Codex Sinaiticus placed it after the Book of Revelation, along with several other works.[[415]](#footnote-415)

Eusebius acknowledged that congregations read *Pastor of Hermas*, but nonetheless he categorized it with the “rejected writings” (*Church history*, 3.25.4).[[416]](#footnote-416) Jerome felt it was useful for reading, but the Muratonian Canon advised not employing it in public worship.[[417]](#footnote-417)

In light of the late date of the book, its pseudonymic authorship, and its inferior instructional quality, *Pastor of Hermas* is unqualified for acceptance into the New Testament canon.

### 1 Clement

Clement served as bishop of the church at Rome at the conclusion of the first century. All agree as to the epistle’s genuine authorship. Here, Clement reproves the church at Corinth for their disrespect of leaders and summons the congregation to unity. To substantiate his teaching, Clement frequently cites Paul’s letter to the same Corinthian congregation.

Quite a few early Fathers speak well of Clement and his epistle. Origen calls him a “disciple of the apostles” (*de Principiis*, 2.3.6), while Clement of Alexandria acknowledges him as an “apostle” (*Stromata*, 4.17). Irenaeus wrote of him that “he had seen the blessed apostles, and had been conversant with them, might be said to have the preaching of the apostles still echoing [in his ears], and their traditions before his eyes” (*Against heresies*, 3.3.3). The Alexandrian Codex of the New Testament (4th c.) locates *1 Clement* among the New Testament books.[[418]](#footnote-418) Finally, Eusebius weighs in:

There is extant an epistle of this Clement which is acknowledged to be genuine… We know that this epistle also has been publicly used in a great many churches both in former times and in our own (*Church history,* 3.16).

However, although Clement was familiar with the apostles and their teaching, his epistle was not written under their supervision or with their endorsement. Therefore, *1 Clement* lacks the main criterion for canonicity – apostolic authorship. Moreover, in this work we encounter a most strange phenomenon – recognition of the existence of the phoenix (*1 Clement*, 25). Finally, Andrews provides this assessment of the epistle’s overall quality:

It cannot be said that the Epistle of Clement possesses a very great intrinsic value of its own. The style is diffuse and tedious, and the writer’s ideas rarely rise above the commonplace. The theology is conventional, and shows but little appreciation of the great truths which constitute the essence of the teaching of St. Paul.[[419]](#footnote-419)

### Gospel of Thomas

The *Gospel of Thomas*, written no later than the second century, contains 114 sayings attributed to the Lord Jesus. In all, 80 of these resemble sayings in the canonical Gospels, yet with some variation, for example: “…the kingdom is inside of you” (v. 3), and, “Jesus said, ‘Let him who seeks continue seeking until he finds. When he finds, he will become troubled. When he becomes troubled, he will be astonished, and he will rule over the All’” (v. 2).[[420]](#footnote-420)

Besides these 80, the remainder of the sayings are absent from the New Testament. Some commentators hold the view, however, that some of these remaining sayings may be the genuine words of the Savoir as well.[[421]](#footnote-421) Koester defends this view: “At least four apocryphal gospels belong to a very early stage in the development of gospel literature – a stage that is comparable to the sources which were used by the gospels of the NT.”[[422]](#footnote-422)

With rare exception, though, the Church Fathers were united in the stance against these spurious gospels. Origen called the *Gospel of Thomas* heretical (see *Homily on Luke 1*).[[423]](#footnote-423) Cyril of Jerusalem stated, “The Manichæans also wrote a Gospel according to Thomas, which being tinctured with the fragrance of the evangelic title corrupts the souls of the simple sort” (*Catechetical lectures*, 4.36). We hear this from Eusebius:

…such books as the Gospels of Peter, of Thomas, of Matthias, or of any others besides them… the character of the style is at variance with apostolic usage, and both the thoughts and the purpose of the things that are related in them are so completely out of accord with true orthodoxy that they clearly show themselves to be the fictions of heretics (*Church history*, 3.25.6-7).

We observe many instances, where sayings of Jesus parallel no New Testament passage and contain strange, even idiotic ideas, which in no way can be attributed to the Son of God. Consider the following examples:

Jesus said, “Blessed is the lion which becomes man when consumed by man; and cursed is the man whom the lion consumes, and the lion becomes man” (7).

Simon Peter said to him, “Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.” Jesus said, “I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven” (114).

The disciples said to Jesus, “We know that you will depart from us. Who is to be our leader?” Jesus said to them, “Wherever you are, you are to go to James the righteous, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being” (12).

Jesus said, “The kingdom of the father is like a certain man who wanted to kill a powerful man. In his own house he drew his sword and stuck it into the wall in order to find out whether his hand could carry through. Then he slew the powerful man” (98).

The fact is that the *Gospel of Thomas* has strong leanings toward Gnosticism.[[424]](#footnote-424) It teaches that people existed as spirits before their physical birth and that the goal of the spiritual life is to return to that condition. The characteristic feature of God’s kingdom is the restoration of unity in the universe. One obtains salvation through knowing divine mysteries, revealed by Jesus through the Word, and by knowing one’s true position before God: “When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living father” (3).

Furthermore, the *Gospel of Thomas* promotes disregard of the body: “Jesus said, ‘If the flesh came into being because of spirit, it is a wonder. But if spirit came into being because of the body, it is a wonder of wonders. Indeed, I am amazed at how this great wealth has made its home in this poverty’” (29). This “Gospel” errors not only in what it teaches, but also in what it fails to teach. There is no mention of repentance, sin, the God of Israel, salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ, or the earthly reign of Messiah.

Ehrman summarizes the teaching of the *Gospel of Thomas*:

And so, salvation for this Gospel of Thomas, which presupposes a unification of all things so that there is no up and down, in and out, male and female, requires that all divine spirits return to their place of origin… This gospel assumes that some humans contain the divine spark that has been separated from the realm of God and entrapped in this impoverished world of matter, and that it needs to be delivered by learning the secret teachings from above, which Jesus himself brings.[[425]](#footnote-425)

In light of all that has been said, it presents us no difficulty to join the Early Church in rejecting the *Gospel of Thomas*. It is actually amazing that some modern commentators should attribute some of these sayings to the Lord Himself. It is perfectly clear that this publication is an attempt by Gnostics to promote their teaching through false sayings of Christ. The book records some actual sayings of Christ in order to deceive the reader into thinking that the remainder of the citations are legitimate as well.

### Gospel of Truth

Along with the *Gospel of Thomas*, the so-called *Gospel of Truth* was found in the ancient library of Nag Hammadi in Egypt among other Gnostic publications. Its contents fully correspond to that heretical teaching.[[426]](#footnote-426) The Gnostic coloring of the following excerpt is clear:

In this way the Word of the Father goes forth in the totality, as the fruit [of] his heart and an impression of his will. But it supports the totality; it chooses there and also receives the impression of the totality, purifying them, bringing them back into the Father, into the Mother, Jesus of the infinite sweetness. The Father reveals his bosom. – Now his bosom is the Holy Spirit (23-24).[[427]](#footnote-427)

According to this “Gospel,” humanity’s problem is ignorance of its true relationship with God and position before Him. People fear God’s wrath for no reason. This “Gospel” proclaims, “Ignorance of the Father brought about anguish and terror; and the anguish grew solid like a fog, so that no one was able to see. For this reason error became powerful” (17).[[428]](#footnote-428) Jesus, then, appeared to reveal humanity’s true spiritual conditions – one can find God within oneself.

We may well understand why Irenaeus responded to this writing so caustically: “Indeed, they have arrived at such a pitch of audacity, as to entitle their comparatively recent writing ‘the Gospel of Truth,’ though it agrees in nothing with the Gospels of the Apostles, so that they have really no Gospel which is not full of blasphemy” (*Against heresies*, 3.11.9).

### Gospel of Peter

The *Gospel of Peter* presently exists only in fragments. Yet, even in the limited material still available, we see several significant deviations from the Four Gospels.[[429]](#footnote-429) First, Herod alone was responsible for Jesus’ crucifixion – Pilate is totally vindicated. Second, the Gospel advances an anti-Semitic polemic. Third, Jesus is presented in a docetic form, i.e., His humanity is rejected. For example, Jesus experienced no pain on the cross. Fourth, the brothers and sisters of Jesus were from Joseph’s first wife. Finally, we read this fantastic version of Jesus’ resurrection:

And in the night in which the Lord’s day was drawing on, as the soldiers kept guard two by two in a watch, there was a great voice in the heaven; and they saw the heavens opened, and two men descend from thence with great light and approach the tomb. And that stone which was put at the door rolled of itself… they see three men come forth from the tomb, and two of them supporting one, and a cross following them: and of the two the head reached unto the heaven, but the head of him that was led by them overpassed the heavens. And they heard a voice from the heavens, saying, Thou hast preached to them that sleep. And a response was heard from the cross, Yea (9-10).

Eusebius makes a proper evaluation of such “Gospels” by saying,

…we might be able to know both these works and those that are cited by the heretics under the name of the apostles, including, for instance, such books as the Gospels of Peter, of Thomas, of Matthias, or of any others besides them… which no one belonging to the succession of ecclesiastical writers has deemed worthy of mention in his writings (*Church history*, 3.25.6).

### Gospel of the Hebrews

The *Gospel of the Hebrews* is a missing document, excerpts of which we find only in the works of the Church Fathers, namely: Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Eusebius, and Jerome. Irenaeus informs us that the Ebionites used this “Gospel” in order to glorify the Law and undermine the teachings of Paul. Jerome claims that some in the Church felt that this was the original copy of the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew before its translation into Greek (yet, its contents differ).[[430]](#footnote-430) Eusebius gave this assessment: “Among these some have placed also the Gospel according to the Hebrews, with which those of the Hebrews that have accepted Christ are especially delighted. And all these may be reckoned among the disputed books” (*Church history*, 3.25.5).

Certain features of this book are worth noting.[[431]](#footnote-431) After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to James, who had made a vow not to eat from the time of the Last Supper (at which he was supposedly present) until he saw the risen Christ. Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as His mother. He objected to being baptized by John the Baptist, since He had no sin to be cleansed from. The message of the Voice from heaven during Jesus’ baptism differs markedly from the true Gospel accounts.

It is clear that the narrative and teaching of this work deviates from the Gospel norm. In addition, it is difficult to consider a book canonical that is no longer in circulation.

### Other Apocryphal Gospels

The***Gospel of Phillip***was discovered in the ancient library of Nag Hammadi in Egypt among other Gnostic publications. Ehrman characterizes its contents as “Gnostic mystical accounts,”[[432]](#footnote-432) and as “a seemingly random series of reflections and dialogues of Jesus and the disciples about the secrets of the universe, the meaning of the world, and our place in it.”[[433]](#footnote-433)

This apocryphal work rejects the teaching of Christ’s virgin birth and physical resurrection: “Some said, ‘Mary conceived by the holy spirit.’ They are in error. They do not know what they are saying” (55); and, “Those who say that the lord died first and (then) rose up are in error, for he rose up first and (then) died” (56). There may be an allusion to a romance between Jesus and Mary Magdalene: “And the companion of the […] Mary Magdalene. [… loved] her more than [all] the disciples [and used to] kiss her [often] on her […]” (63).[[434]](#footnote-434)

The ***Gospel of Nicodemus*** consists of two parts. The first part, the *Acts of Pilate*, tells of Jesus’ trial before Pilate prior to His crucifixion. The second part gives a detailed account of Jesus’ alleged sojourn to Hades. Here is a brief excerpt from this imaginative narrative:

Hades, answering, said to Prince Satan: Who is he that is so powerful, when he is a man in fear of death? For all the powerful of the earth are kept in subjection by my power, whom thou hast brought into subjection by thy power. If then, thou art powerful, what is that man Jesus like, who, though fearing death, withstands thy power? If he is so powerful in humanity, verily I say unto thee, he is all-powerful in divinity, and his power can no one resist. And when he says that he fears death, he wishes to lay hold on thee, and woe will be to thee to the ages of eternity (4).

The ***Protoevangelium of James*** is a fabricated story about the childhood and later life of Mary. The obvious goal of this work was to glorify Mary and advance unbiblical doctrines about her. According to this narrative, Mary remained a virgin her entire life. The brothers and sisters of Jesus are Joseph’s children by his first wife. Moreover, Jesus’ birth was supernatural – He passed through the birth canal without leaving any marks of the birth process. Finally, at the moment of Jesus’ birth, time stood still for several seconds, and everyone froze in place.[[435]](#footnote-435)

This book borrows freely from other, biblical books. For example, like Elkanah and Hannah, Joachim and Anna, Mary’s parents, attempted for years to conceive a child without success. In addition, like Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, Joachim fasted 40 days in the wilderness to receive this miracle. Like Sampson, an angel announced the future birth of Mary first to the wife, and then to the husband. When Mary was three years old, Joachim and Anna brought her to the temple to live there in imitation of the story of Samuel. Finally, as in the story of Elijah, an angel fed Mary.

The ***Infancy Gospel of Thomas*** allegedly relates an expanded history of Jesus’ childhood. As a youth, Jesus supposedly did many miracles, some of which, however, do not fit the biblical picture of Jesus Christ. For example, in violation of the Sabbath and in spite of Joseph’s warning, He formed birds out of clay, and then made them fly. He rebuked people who offended him, with the result that they died.[[436]](#footnote-436) The matter came to the point that Joseph told Mary, “From this time we shall not let him go out of the house, since everyone who opposes him is struck dead” (49). On the other hand, Jesus does many “good” miracles, like healing the sick and raising the dead.

Andrews critiques this book as follows: “The miracles are generally puerile displays of magical power, and lack the ethical motive which is so prominent in the Gospels of the NT.”[[437]](#footnote-437) Commenting on a passage from this work, Irenaeus wrote, “Besides the above [misrepresentations], they adduce an unspeakable number of apocryphal and spurious writings, which they themselves have forged, to bewilder the minds of foolish men, and of such as are ignorant of the Scriptures of truth” (*Against heresies*, 1.20.1).

The ***Gospel of the Egyptians*** exists today only in fragments. It promotes asceticism and a demeaning attitude toward the human body and the birth of children. We also observe in it a distorted understanding of the Trinity: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are only one Person.[[438]](#footnote-438) Origen considered the book heretical (see *Homily on Luke 1*).[[439]](#footnote-439)

The ***Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew***provides a fabricated description of the birth and early history of both Mary and Jesus. Its distinctive feature, according to Andrews, is that it “contains more mythical stories, probably, than any other Gospel.”[[440]](#footnote-440) We will cite just a few of many examples:[[441]](#footnote-441)

The light from God so shone in the cave, that neither by day nor night was light wanting as long as the blessed Mary was there. And there she brought forth a son… And as soon as He was born, He stood upon His feet (13).

And on the third day after the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the most blessed Mary went forth out of the cave, and entering a stable, placed the child in the stall, and the ox and the ass adored Him (14).

Then the child Jesus, with a joyful countenance, reposing in the bosom of His mother, said to the palm: O tree, bend thy branches, and refresh my mother with thy fruit. And immediately at these words the palm bent its top down to the very feet of the blessed Mary; and they gathered from it fruit (20).

The contents of the ***Gospel of the Nazarites*** overlap in many cases with the Synoptic Gospels except that some details are exaggerated, sometimes grossly. For example, the story of the man Jesus healed of the withered hand is expanded. When Jesus prayed on the cross, “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do,” thousands of people repented on the spot. The book also offers an explanation as to how the apostle John became acquainted with the high priest. The conversation between Jesus and the “rich young ruler” (Lk 18) is also expanded.[[442]](#footnote-442)

The ***Gospel of the Ebionites*** supports the heretical teaching of the Ebionites, Jews who acknowledged Jesus as Messiah, but rejected His Deity. The Ebionites keep the Law of Moses, refrain from eating meat, and deny that John the Baptist ate locusts.[[443]](#footnote-443)

The ***Correspondence of Jesus and Abgar*** supposedly relates how King Abgar of Edessa appealed to Jesus for healing, and Jesus subsequently promised to send Abgar one of His disciples. After Jesus’ ascension, Thomas sent Thaddeus, “one of the seventy,” who healed Abgar and preached the gospel to the people of Edessa. None other than the noted historian Eusebius retold this story (*Church history,* 1.13.1-20).

However, Andrews offers the following rebuttal: “There seems to be no possibility of doubt that the correspondence is fictitious. The first trace of Christianity in Edessa is not found till about A.D. 200. The letters were probably written in the third century by an Edessan Christian who was anxious to bring the origin of his Church into relation with Christ.”[[444]](#footnote-444)

Our final example will be the ***Gospel of Mary (Magdalene)***.[[445]](#footnote-445) According to this narrative, Jesus revealed certain “truths” to His disciples during the time between His resurrection and ascension. After that period, the disciples appealed to Mary Magdalene to learn what Jesus had revealed to her. The “truths” that the disciples thus learned correspond more to a Gnostic worldview, than to a Christian one.

For example, Jesus’ teaching on sin is as follows: “There is no sin, but it is you who make sin when you do the things that are like the nature of adultery, which is called ‘sin.’” (7), and, “[Matter gave birth to] a passion that has no equal, which proceeded from (something) contrary to nature. Then there arise a disturbance in the whole body” (8).[[446]](#footnote-446) Salvation comes when the soul overcomes the evil powers that seek to prevent its elevation.

In summary, we can confidently say that not one of these Apocryphal Gospels can demonstrate its apostolic origin, antiquity, orthodoxy or endorsement by the Church. Their spiritual quality is far below the New Testament standard. We reject, therefore, their inclusion in the canon of Scripture.

### Acts of Paul

The***Acts of Paul***contains four sections, which are sometimes found in separate volumes: *Acts of Paul and Thecla, Letter of the Corinthians to Paul, Third Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians,* and *Martyrdom of the Holy Apostle Paul.*

The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* claims to narrate the ministry of Paul in Iconium, where a certain young woman named Thecla heard his teaching. When she heard Paul instruct about the necessity of celibacy to qualify for the resurrection, she broke off her engagement with her future husband. This caused an uproar, and, as a result, Paul was arrested and expelled from the city. The authorities attempted several times to execute Thecla, but God delivered her each time. Subsequently, Thecla became a disciple of Paul and preacher of the gospel, remaining a virgin her entire life.

In the second section, the Corinthian church notifies Paul that two elders had come to them, teaching that: God is not almighty, there is no resurrection of the dead, humans are not God’s creation, Jesus was not human and was not born of Mary, and angels created the world. In Paul’s supposed *Third Epistle to the Corinthians* (which he mentions in 2 Cor 2:3-4), he refutes these errors. In the *Martyrdom of the Holy Apostle Paul*, when Nero beheaded Paul, milk flowed from his neck instead of blood.[[447]](#footnote-447)

In assessing the *Acts of Paul,* one must consider several factors. First, the work promotes the false teaching that celibacy is required for obtaining the resurrection. Second, in one episode in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Paul tells a lie in saying that he does not know Thecla. Third, Eusebius places this work among the “rejected writings” (*Church history.* 3.25.4). Finally, Tertullian writes that a certain elder in Asia Minor, out of admiration for Paul, wrote the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, and was subsequently removed from the church office (*On baptism*, 17). We join Tertullian in his rejection of not only *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, but this work in its entirety.

### Other Apocryphal Acts

The ***Acts of Andrew*** tells of Andrew’s martyrdom under Ægeates, the Roman proconsul in Asia. The proconsul was infuriated with Andrew, because he refused to worship idols and turned others away from the practice. After brutally torturing him, Ægeates crucified the apostle. During his crucifixion, which lasted three days, Andrew was able to smile and to preach to the people assembled there, in number about twenty thousand. The book describes his condition on the cross as follows:

And when also on the fourth day they beheld his nobleness, and the unweariedness of his intellect, and the multitude of his words, and the serviceableness of his exhortations, and the stedfastness of his soul, and the sobriety of his spirit, and the fixedness of his mind, and the perfection of his reason, they were enraged against Ægeates.

On the fourth day, the people insisted that Ægeates release Andrew, but the latter refused release, prayed to God, and departed magnificently:

…he became in the sight of all glad and exulting; for an exceeding splendour like lightning coming forth out of heaven shone down upon him, and so encircled him, that in consequence of such brightness mortal eyes could not look upon him at all. And the dazzling light remained about the space of half an hour. And when he had thus spoken and glorified the Lord still more, the light withdrew itself, and he gave up the ghost.

This incredible tale is undoubtedly legendary. Eusebius correctly assigned it to the group of “rejected writings” (*Church history*, 3.25.6-7).

Another writing classified as an Apocryphal Acts is the ***Acts of the Holy Apostle Thomas***.[[448]](#footnote-448) According to this legend, Thomas and Jesus are twins. After the latter’s ascension to heaven, the apostles gathered in Jerusalem to determine the future ministry of each by casting lots. Thomas was appointed for India. Although he initially refused the mission, he received a vision of Christ confirming his calling. It turned out that Thomas was sold into slavery to India, and so ended up in that land after all. There he had many adventures, successfully evangelizing the people and performing many miracles. Due to the conversion of the king’s wife, though, he was martyred.

Historians are, for the most part, willing to accept the historicity of Thomas’ mission to India. At the same time, the theology of the *Acts of Thomas* deviates from the biblical norm. There is a definite leaning toward asceticism. For example, in one episode, Jesus appears to a new bride and advises her not to consummate her marriage. Some commentators warn of this trend as well:

(The book) is designed to show that a source for supernatural power, and in fact for all right relationship with God, comes from living the life of renunciation, free from sexual activity of any kind, even within the context of marriage.[[449]](#footnote-449)

The other stories in the book are all written to support the view that marriage is sinful, and celibacy is the only right mode of life.[[450]](#footnote-450)

In spite of the possible historical accuracy of Thomas’ mission to India, due to its theological irregularities, the Acts of Thomas is nonetheless an unacceptable addition to the New Testament Scriptures.

The publication ***The* *Acts of Holy Apostle and Evangelist, John the Theologian***[[451]](#footnote-451) contains several episodes allegedly taken from the life of the apostle, which are sometimes found in separate volumes. There exists still a fifth episode, which was not part of this set – *The Acts of John in Rome* – where his trial before Diocletian and exile to Patmos are described.

The first episode relates several miracles supposedly performed by John: the destruction of a pagan temple with a word, during which the priests perished, the “exorcism” of an infestation of bed bugs, and the resurrection of several individuals from the dead. In one bizarre instance, a woman, who refrained from sexual intercourse with her husband for the Lord’s sake, died prematurely, and another man attempted to have sex with her corpse. God struck down the offender, and he died, but John resurrected both parties from the dead, and the offender repented.

In the second episode, “John” recalls some special moments in his experience of following Jesus. Yet, his description of these events shows traces of docetic theology, i.e., the rejection of Jesus’ true humanity. When Jesus walked, for example, He left no footprints. Chapter 101 hints that Jesus did not suffer on the cross. In chapter 93, John reveals, “Sometimes when I meant to touch him, I met a material and solid body; at other times again I felt him, the substance was immaterial and bodiless and as if it were not existing at all.”[[452]](#footnote-452)

The third episode relates the death of the apostle John.

We must note that, in one form or another, the *Acts of John* was condemned as heretical by the Second Council of Nicaea. Eusebius also rejected it (*Church history*, 3.25.6). This assessment by the Early Church and the historical and theological irregularities of the book requires us to reject it as well*.*

The ***Acts of the Phillip*** reportedly tells of the ministry of Phillip in Athens and his debate with 300 philosophers there. When the philosophers could not silence Phillip, they summoned to their aid the Jewish high priest, Ananias, who arrived with 500 assistants. In the course of time: (1) Ananias and his assistants were struck with blindness, (2) Jesus made a glorious appearance to them and the entire city, (3) Phillip raised a person from the dead, and (4) the 500 men of Ananias repented. Ananias himself, though, refused to repent, and at the command of Phillip, the earth opened up and swallowed him.

The *Acts of Phillip* also tells of his missionary journey with his sister and Bartholomew to Hierapolis in Asia Minor. Because of the conversion of the ruler’s wife, the three were subjected to torture, and Phillip was hung upside down. Against the advice of his sister, Bartholomew, and the apostle John (who somehow happened on the scene), Phillip cursed the people, and the earth opened up and swallowed the ruler and 7000 inhabitants of the town, their families, and the town’s idols. Jesus immediately appeared to Phillip, rebuked him for this deed, and announced that after death Phillip would suffer in a place of punishment for 40 days before being allowed into heaven. Jesus then released the “engulfed” inhabitants of Hierapolis from the pit, except for the ruler and the idols.

The presence of clearly grandiose elements in this narrative makes its contents very questionable, to say the least. It seems that the author was dealing more with legend, than with fact.

The apocryphal ***Acts of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul*** narratives the meeting of these two saints in Rome, where they assure the church that they hold to the same Faith. The magician, Simon Magnus, opposes them before the Caesar Nero. They debate one another before the Emperor, demonstrating supernatural powers in confirmation of their views. Peter speaks for the apostolic team, while Paul supports him in prayer. At one point, Simon demonstrates his ability to fly. Yet, Peter rebukes the demon supporting Simon in the air, and the latter falls to the ground and expires. Nero then executes the apostles for this deed.

As in similar “Acts,” this work is full of legendary elements. Andrews concludes, “There can be no doubt that the contents of the books are mainly fiction. They may contain some germs of fact, but it is almost impossible to disconnect the fact from the fiction.”[[453]](#footnote-453)

Finally, we will examine the ***Acts of Peter***.[[454]](#footnote-454) The main feature of this work is the competition between Peter and Simon Magnus, similar in content to the *Acts of Peter and Paul*. The work also includes an account where Peter attempts to flee persecution in Rome, but meets Jesus on the way, who directs him to return for execution. Peter is sentenced to crucifixion and requests crucifixion upside down. Some Church Fathers echo this account, namely Origen and Jerome. This book, again, tends toward asceticism and Docetism.

Again, we heed the warning of Eusebius:

We have felt compelled to give this catalogue in order that we might be able to know both these works and those that are cited by the heretics under the name of the apostles, including, for instance, such books as the Gospels of Peter, of Thomas,of Matthias, or of any others besides them, and the Acts of Andrew and John and the other apostles, which no one belonging to the succession of ecclesiastical writers has deemed worthy of mention in his writings. And further, the character of the style is at variance with apostolic usage, and both the thoughts and the purpose of the things that are related in them are so completely out of accord with true orthodoxy that they clearly show themselves to be the fictions of heretics (*Church history*, 3.25.6-7).

### Apocryphal epistles

Next, we continue with the examination of epistles supposedly written by apostles. The ***Epistle to the Laodiceans*** enjoyed popularity in the Western Church from the sixth to the fifteenth centuries and was included in many Latin Bibles.[[455]](#footnote-455) Some assumed that this was the letter Paul mentioned in Colossians 4:16: “Read my letter {that is coming} from Laodicea.”

The Muratonian Canon negatively assess this work, yet some feel the author of the Canon had in mind a different work.[[456]](#footnote-456) Nevertheless, Jerome and the Second Council of Nicaea rejected the *Epistle to the Laodiceans.*[[457]](#footnote-457)

As far as the letter’s composition, J. B. Lightfoot writes, “The Epistle is a centro of Pauline phrases strung together without any definite connection or any clear object.”[[458]](#footnote-458) Geisler and Nix continue, “Unlike most forgeries it had no ulterior aim.… It has no doctrinal peculiarities. Thus it is quite harmless, so far as falsity and stupidity combined can ever be regarded as harmless.”[[459]](#footnote-459) It is certainly possible that in Colossians 4:16, Paul had in mind his Epistle to the Ephesians, which most likely was circulated around Asia Minor.[[460]](#footnote-460)

The ***Correspondence between Paul and Lucius Annaeus Seneca*** attracted the attention of early Christian apologists, since they found it potentially valuable in defending the Faith.[[461]](#footnote-461) Jerome, together with others, considered it genuine (see *Lives of illustrious men*, 12). The *Correspondence* consists of 14 letters, eight from Seneca and six from Paul.

Modern scholars, however, ascribe the *Correspondence* to a pseudonymic author. They characterize the work in the following words:

Bruce Metzger: “The commonplace manner and the colourless style of the epistles show that they cannont be the work either of the moralist or of the apostle Paul.”[[462]](#footnote-462)

J. B. Lightfoot: “The poverty of thought and style, the errors in chronology and history, and the whole conception of the relative positions of the Stoic philosopher and the Christian Apostle… betray clearly the hand of a forger.”[[463]](#footnote-463)

Phillip Schaff: “They are very poor in thought and style, full of errors of chronology and history, and undoubtedly a forgery.”[[464]](#footnote-464)

Herbert Andrews: “The contents of these letters are very flimsy and uninteresting. They consist mainly of an interchange of compliments between the Apostle and the philosopher.”[[465]](#footnote-465)

In conclusion, it is important to mention various other writings, which allegedly trace back to the apostles: the ***Didache***, i.e., “Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,” the ***Epistles of the Apostles***, and the ***Apostolic Constitutions***, which include the 85 ***Apostolic Canons***. None of them were written in the first century, that is, during the apostolic age. The *Didache* and the *Epistles of the Apostles* were composed in the second century, and the *Apostolic Constitutions* with the *Apostolic Canons* – between one and two hundred years later.[[466]](#footnote-466)

Furthermore, the *Apostolic Constitutions* (and, consequently, the *Apostolic Canons* as well), begin with the words, “The apostles and elders to all those who from among the Gentiles have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; grace and peace from Almighty God, through our Lord Jesus Christ…” This means that these writings are pseudonymic and therefore a forgery, which automatically excludes them from the canon. The *Didache* is anonymous, which also arouses suspicion, since we cannot confirm that the book actually contains the teachings of the Twelve. We must know who wrote the book and where he gathered his information in order to be convinced of its apostolic origin. We cannot accept a claim to apostolic authorship without substantiation.

### Apocalypse of Peter

In brief, we will touch on one of the apocryphal apocalypses. The *Apocalypse of Peter* relates a vision of Jesus that Peter allegedly saw, where the latter is shown the bliss of heaven and the torment of hell. In the Early Church, Clement of Alexandria cited this work, and Codex Bezae (5th c.) lists it with canonical New Testament books.

The author of the Muratonian Canon expressed doubts about its instructional value, and Jerome and Eusebius outright reject it: “Among the rejected writings… the Apocalypse of Peter” (*Church history,* 3.25.4).[[467]](#footnote-467)

### 3. Conclusions

When we examined books now accepted into the New Testament canon, we were able to confirm their canonicity based on accepted canonical criteria. Based on those same criteria, we exclude the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works discussed above.

## Appendix 2: Supposed Borrowing from Non-Canonical Books

### А. Old Testament

***Similarities***

Old Testament history

Creation of the world (Gen 1)

Woman made from the rib of man (Gen 2)

Tree of Life (Gen 2)

Worldwide flood (Gen 6-8)

Tower of Babel (Gen 11)

Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19)

Babylonian legends[[468]](#footnote-468)

Creation of the world (similar in general scheme, differences in detail)

Woman made from the rib of man

Tree of Life

Worldwide flood

Tower of Babel

Destruction of a city by raining fire

Comments:

1. Overlap of Old Testament history and Babylonian legends explained by preservation in Babylon of the original tradition recounting these events.

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***Similarities***

Law of Moses

Laws about miscarriage after trauma (Ex 21:22-25).

Laws about unruly ox (Ex 21:35)

Laws for slaves

Forbid murder, adultery, incest

Structure of Deuteronomy

Seventh day – day of rest, work forbidden

Ancient Near Eastern Laws[[469]](#footnote-469)

Laws about miscarriage after trauma (HL §§17, SL §§1–2, LH §§209–214, MAL §§A 21, 50–52)

Laws about unruly ox (LE §53 identical to Ex 21:35, overlap with other similar laws)

Laws for slaves (similar to biblical laws)

Forbid murder, adultery, incest (LH §1, 129, 157)

Structure of the suzerain-vassal treaties of the Hittites

Seventh day – day of rest, work forbidden (Akkadian practice)[[470]](#footnote-470)

***Differences***

Law of Moses

Laws concern all spheres of life (ethical, religious, national)

Religious motive base

Laws from God

Laws have both instructional and regulatory functions

Laws for God’s glory

The authority of ruler limited (Deut 17:14-20)

Restitution up to five times, no death penalty for thief (Ex 22:1-4)

Punishment of unruly ox goring a slave more than for goring another ox.

Ancient Near Eastern Laws [[471]](#footnote-471)

Laws concern secular life only

No religious motive base

Laws from the ruler

Laws have regulatory function alone

Laws for the glory of the ruler

Authority of the ruler unlimited

Restitution up to 30 times, death penalty for thief (LH §§8, 265; HL §§57–59, 63, 67, 69)

Punishment of unruly ox goring a slave the same as for goring another ox.

Comments:

1. Concerning the overlap in laws, Sprinke comments, “The parallels are insufficient to suppose biblical laws were simply borrowed from ancient Near Eastern ones. On the other hand, the parallels seem too close for chance. It is best to say that the Bible shows awareness of extrabiblical laws… Where an existing law is just, the Bible can happily adopt it.”[[472]](#footnote-472)
2. The partial overlap between biblical and secular laws may be explained by the effect of general revelation (through conscience and observation of creation) on the pagan world.
3. The observance of the Sabbath in the Akkadian Empire could be a remnant of the original tradition based on creation.

### B. New Testament[[473]](#footnote-473)

Matt 6:7 – “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.”

*Sirach,* 7.14 – “Prate not in the assembly of elders, and repeat not (thy) words in (thy) prayer.”

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Matt 26:64 – “Jesus said to him, ‘You have said it {yourself;} nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.’”

*1 Enoch,* chps. 46ff tells of the heavenly Son of Man

Comments: Most likely, in Matthew 26:67 Jesus cites Daniel chp. 7, not *1 Enoch*.

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Matt 27; Mk 15; Lk 23; Jn 19 – Crucifixion of Jesus

*Wisdom of Solomon*, 2.12-20 – But let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is of disservice to us, and is contrary to our works, and upbraideth us with sins against the law, and layeth to our charge sins against our discipline. He professeth to have knowledge of God, and nameth himself servant of the Lord. He became to us a reproof of our thoughts. He is grievous unto us even to behold, because his life is unlike other men’s, and his paths are of strange fashion. We were accounted of him as base metal, and he abstaineth from our ways as from uncleannesses. The latter end of the righteous he calleth happy; and he vaunteth that God is his father. Let us see if his words be true, and let us try what shall befall in the ending of his life. For if the righteous man is God’s son, he will uphold him, and he will deliver him out of the hand of his adversaries. With outrage and torture let us put him to the test, that we may learn his gentleness, and may prove his patience under wrong. Let us condemn him to a shameful death; for according to his words he will be visited.[[474]](#footnote-474)

Comments: We must keep in mind that the crucifixion f Jesus was not a legend, based on the Wisdom of Solomon, but a real event of history.

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Acts 7:22 – “Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.”

Philo, *On the life of Moses*, 1.20f – “He himself exhibited a modest and dignified deportment in all his words and gestures, attending diligently to every lesson of every kind which could tend to the improvement of his mind. And immediately he had all kinds of masters… in a short time he surpassed all their knowledge…”[[475]](#footnote-475)

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Rom 1:21-27 – “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened… Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.”

*Wisdom of Solomon*, 14.22-27 – Afterward it was not enough for them to go astray in the knowledge of God; but also, while they live in sore conflict through ignorance of him, that multitude of evils they call peace. For either slaughtering children in solemn rites, or celebrating secret mysteries, or holding frantic revels of strange ordinances, no longer do they guard either life or purity of marriage, but one slays another treacherously, or grieves him by adultery. And all things confusedly are filled with blood and murder, theft and deceit, corruption, faithlessness, tumult, perjury, disquieting of the good, ingratitude for benefits received, defiling of souls, confusion of sex, disorder in marriage, adultery, and wantonness. For the worship of those unnameable idols is the beginning and cause and end of every evil.[[476]](#footnote-476)

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Rom 9:20-21 – “On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?”

*Sirach,* 33.12-13 – “Some He blessed and exalted, and others He hallowed and brought nigh to Himself. Some He cursed and abased, and overthrew them from their places. As the clay is in the power of the potter, to fashion it according to his good pleasure; so is man in the power of his creator, to make him according to His ordinance.”

*Wisdom of Solomon*, 12.12 – “For who shall say, What hast thou done? Or who shall withstand thy judgement? And who shall accuse thee for the destruction of nations which thou didst make? Or who shall come and stand before thee as an avenger for the unrighteous?”

*Wisdom of Solomon*, 15.7 – “For a potter, kneading soft earth, laboriously mouldeth each vessel for our service. Nay, out of the same clay doth he fashion both the vessels that minister to clean uses, and those of a contrary sort, all in like manner. But what shall be the use of either sort, the craftsman himself is the judge.”

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Rom 10:6-7 – “But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down), or “Who will descend into the abyss?” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).’”[[477]](#footnote-477)

*1 Baruch*, 3.28-30 – “So they perished, because they had no wisdom, they perished through their own foolishness. Who hath gone up into heaven, and taken her, and brought her down from the clouds? Who hath gone over the sea, and found her, and will bring her for choice gold?”

Comment: Baruch, however, does not apply Deut 30:12 to Messiah, as Paul does.

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Jam 1:19 – “{This} you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak {and} slow to anger.”

*Sirach*, 5.11 (13) – “Be swift to hear, but with patience make reply.”

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1 Cor 10:4 – “And all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.”

Rabbinic tradition of a rock, which followed Israel and provided them with water (*Targum Onkelos*, Num 19:25-26; *Midrash Sifre*, Num 21:17; *b. Shabbath*, 35a, *b. Aboth,* 5:6; *Midrash Rabbah*, Num 19:25-26; *t. Sukkah,* 3.11).[[478]](#footnote-478)

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Gal 3:19 – “Why the Law then? … ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.”

Heb 2:2 – “For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty.”

Moses received from an angel a revelation of the events that became the narrative of Genesis and Exodus, along with the laws for Passover, the Sabbath, and the jubilees (*Book of Jubilees,* 1.27ff).[[479]](#footnote-479)

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Eph 6:13-17 – “Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil {one.} And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

*Wisdom of Solomon*, 5.17-20а – “He shall take his jealousy as complete armour, and shall make the whole creation his weapons for vengeance on his enemies. He shall put on righteousness as a breastplate, and shall take judgement unfeigned as a helmet. He shall take holiness as an invincible shield, and shall sharpen stern wrath for a sword.”

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2 Tim 3:8 – “Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these {men} also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith.”

Jannes and Jambres are mentioned in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, 1.3; 7.2; 40.6; *Damascus Document*, 5.18; *Rabbah Exodus*; *b. Menahoth*, 85a.[[480]](#footnote-480)

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Heb 11:35-38 – “Women received {back} their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated ({men} of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.”

Martyrdom of seven brothers, hope in the resurrection (*2 Maccabees*, chp. 7).

Eleazar tortured (*2 Maccabees,* 6.18ff).

Isaiah sawn in two (*Martyrdom of Isaiah*, chp. 5).

According to tradition, Jeremiah was stoned.[[481]](#footnote-481)

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Jam 5:11 – “You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and {is} merciful.”

Description of Job’s patience in the *Testament of Job*.[[482]](#footnote-482)

Comments: Yet, the patience of Job is evident in the Book of Job as well.

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Jude 6-7 – “And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh...”

*1 Enoch*, chps. 6-11 – Angels (sons of God) went into the daughters of men.

*Book of Jubilees*, 5‬.1, 6 – “… daughters were born unto them, that the angels of God saw them on a certain year of this jubilee, that they were beautiful to look upon; and they took themselves wives… And against the angels whom He had sent upon the earth, He was exceedingly wroth, and He gave commandment to root them out of all their dominion, and He bade us to bind them in the depths of the earth, and behold they are bound in the midst of them, and are (kept) separate.”[[483]](#footnote-483)

Comments: Some feel that Jude is referring to the story as related in *Jubilees*. Yet, this contradicts the teaching of Jesus that angels (who have not physical bodies) do not marry (Matt 22:30). Therefore, it is unlikely that Jude is referring to *Jubilees*.

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Jude 9 – “But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’”

According to the traditions of the Church Fathers, this story in found in the last part of the book *The Testament of Moses*, but that section is now missing.[[484]](#footnote-484)

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Jude 14-15 – “{It was} also about these men {that} Enoch, {in} the seventh {generation} from Adam, prophesied, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.’”

*1* *Enoch,* 1.9 – “And behold! He cometh with ten thousands of ‹His› holy ones to execute judgement upon all, and to destroy ‹all› the ungodly, and to convict all flesh of all the works ‹of their ungodliness› which they have ungodly committed, and of all the hard things which› ungodly sinners ‹have spoken› against Him.”

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**Comments**: In the following examples, it is important to keep in mind that the book *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* contains some Christian interpolations, but their exact number and location are unknown.

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Matt 5:7 – “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

*Testament of Zebulun,* 8.1 – “Have, therefore, yourselves also, my children, compassion towards every man with mercy, that the Lord also may have Compassion and mercy upon you.”

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Matt 5:14-16 – “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does {anyone} light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

*Testament of Levi,* 14.4 – “But if ye be darkened through transgressions, what, therefore, will all the Gentiles do living in blindness? Yea, ye shall bring a curse upon our race, because the light of the law which was given for to lighten every man this ye desire to destroy by teaching commandments contrary to the ordinances of God.”

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Matt 5:44 – “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

*Testament of Joseph,* 18.2 – “And if any one seeketh to do evil unto you, do well unto him, and pray for him, and ye shall be redeemed of the Lord from all evil.”

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Matt 18:15 – “"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.”

*Testament of Gad,* 6.3 – “Love ye one another from the heart; and if a man sin against thee, speak peaceably to him, and in thy soul hold not guile; and if he repent and confess, forgive him.”

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Matt 22:37-39 –“And He said to him, ‘you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

*Testament of Dan,* 5.3 – “Love the Lord through all your life, and one another with a true heart.”

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Matt 25:35-36 – “For I was hungry, and you gave Me {something} to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me {something} to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.”

*Testament of Joseph,* 1.5-6 – “I was sold into slavery, and the Lord of all made me free. I was taken into captivity, and His strong hand succoured me. I was beset with hunger, and the Lord Himself nourished me. I was alone, and God comforted me. I was sick, and the Lord visited me. I was in prison, and my God showed favour unto me. In bonds, and He released me.”

Comments: Yet, unlike Matthew, in the *Testament of Joseph*, the Lord does not receive support, but gives it.

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Luke 10:19 – “Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you.”

*Testament of Simeon,* 6.6 – “Then shall all the spirits of deceit be given to be trodden under foot, and men shall rule over wicked spirits.”

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Luke 17:3 – “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.”

*Testament of Gad,* 6.3 – “Love ye one another from the heart; and if a man sin against thee, speak peaceably to him, and in thy soul hold not guile; and if he repent and confess, forgive him.”

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John 1:9 – “There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.”

*Testament of Levi,* 14.4 – “But if ye be darkened through transgressions, what, therefore, will all the Gentiles do living in blindness? Yea, ye shall bring a curse upon our race, because the light of the law which was given for to lighten every man.”

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John 5:41 – “"I do not receive glory from men.”

*Testament of Benjamin,* 6.4 – “The good inclination receiveth not glory nor dishonour from men.”

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Acts 12:11 – “When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

*Testament of Simeon,* 2.8 – “But his God and the God of his fathers sent forth His angel, and delivered him out of my hands.”

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Rom 1:32 – “Although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”

*Testament of Ashur,* 6.2 – “For they that are double-faced are guilty of a twofold sin; for they both do the evil thing and they have pleasure in them that do it, following the example of the spirits of deceit, and striving against mankind.”

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Rom 12:21 – “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

*Testament of Benjamin,* 4.3 – “And though they devise with evil intent concerning him, by doing good he overcometh evil, being shielded by God; and he loveth the righteous as his own soul.”

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1 Cor 7:5 – “Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”

*Testament of Naphtali,* 8.8 – “For there is a season for a man to embrace his wife, and a season to abstain therefrom for his prayer.”

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2 Cor 6:15 – “Or what harmony has Christ with Belial?”

*Testament of Benjamin,* 3.3 – “Fear ye the Lord, and love your neighbour; and even though the spirits of Beliar claim you to afflict you with every evil, yet shall they not have dominion over you, even as they had not over Joseph my brother.”

*Testament of Naphtali,* 2.6 – “For as a man’s strength, so also is his work; as his eye, so also is his sleep; as his soul, so also is his word either in the law of the Lord or in the law of Beliar. ”

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Gal 6:8 – “For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

*Testament of Levi,* 13.6 – “And sow good things in your souls, that ye may find them in your life. But if ye sow evil things, ye shall reap every trouble and affliction.”

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1 Thes 2:16 – “…hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.”

*Testament of Levi*, 6.11 – “But the wrath of the Lord came upon them to the uttermost.”

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2 Tim 2:22 – “Now flee from youthful lusts.”

*Testament of Reuben*, 5.5 – “Flee, therefore, fornication, my children.”

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Jam 4:7 – “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

*Testament of Dan*, 6.1 – “And now, fear the Lord, my children, and beware of Satan and his spirits.”

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Conclusions:

1. The status of the Lord Jesus as the Son of God and His apostles as receivers of divine revelation makes the claim of their dependence on material from the intertestamental period improbable.
2. At the same time, one cannot exclude that they may have included certain thoughts or expressions, found in the intertestamental literature, in their teaching, if those ideas accurately expressed God’s truth.

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6. Sundberg A. C. Bible canon and the Christian doctrine of inspiration // Interpretation. 1975. 29(4). P. 356. C. Allert also holds this position (see Allert C. D. A high view of Scripture. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007. – P. 38-42). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ulrich E. The notion and definition of canon // McDonald L. M., Sanders J. A. The canon debate. – Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002. – P. 30; Allert, p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Kruger M. J. The definition of the term 'canon': exclusive or multi-dimensional? // Tyndale Bulletin. 2012. 63 (1). P. 3-8; Chapman S. B. The canon debate: what it is and why it matters // Journal of Theological Interpretation. 2010. 4(2). P. 280-284; Dunbar D. G. The Biblical canon // Carson D. A., Woodbridge J. D. Hermeneutics, authority and canon. – Grand Rapids, MI: Academic Books, 1986. – P. 348. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Kruger, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Chapman, The canon debate, p. 286, 291; Chapman S. B. What are we reading? Canonicity and the Old Testament // Word & World. 2009. 29(4). P. 341-342. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ryle H. E. The canon of the Old Testament. – 2nd ed. – London: MacMillian & Co., 1895. – P. 136. A similar view in Selby D. J., West J. К. Introduction to the Bible. – New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971. – P. 2. Taken from Duffield G. P., Van Cleave N. M. Foundations of Pentecostal theology. – Los Angeles, CA: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983. – P. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. McDonald L. M. Identifying Scripture and canon in the Early Church: The criteria question // McDonald L. M., Sanders J. A. The canon debate. – Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002. – P. 416. Similar view in Charlesworth J. H. Writings ostensibly outside the canon // Evans C. A., Tov E. Exploring the origins of the Bible. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008. – P. 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Sanders J. А. From sacred story to sacred text. – Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987. – P. 18-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Sanders J. A. Canon and community: A guide to canonical criticism // Tucker G. M. Guides to biblical scholarship. – Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1984. – P. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Sanders, From sacred story, p. 30; Sanders J. A. The issue of closure in the canonical process // McDonald L. M., Sanders J. A. The canon debate. – Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002. – P. 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Geisler, Nix, p. 211. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Smith J. K. A. The closing of the Book: Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and the Sacred Writings // Journal of Pentecostal Theology. 1997. 5(11). P. 49-71. McDonald affirms the same (see Chapman, What are we reading?, p. 340.) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Markschies С. Neue Forschungen zur Kanonisierung des Neuen Testaments // Apocrypha 2001. 12. P. 242. Taken from Landmesser C. Interpretative unity of the New Testament // Helmer C., Landmesser C. One Scripture or many? Canon from biblical, theological, and philosophical perspectives. – Oxford: Oxford Press, 2004. – P. 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Carlston C. E. The canon – problems and benefits // Andover Newton Review. 1991. 2(1). P. 33-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Also, see Bruce F. F. The canon of Scripture. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1988. – P. 287. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Also, see Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 4.304. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Geisler, Nix, p. 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Josh 1:8; 8:31-34; 22:2, 5; 23:6; Judg 3:4; 1 Kin 2:3; 8:53, 56; 2 Kin 14:6; 18:6; 22:8-11; 23:3; 2 Chr 17:9; Neh 8:1-3, 18; 9:3; 10:29; 13:1-3; Ps 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Deut 17:18-20; 31:9-13; Josh 1:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Deut 4:2; 12:32. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. 2 Kings 17:37; Hos 8:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Geisler, Nix, p. 226. Harris agrees and affirms that miracles and fulfilled prophecy served as confirmation of a prophet’s ministry (Harris R. L. What books belong in the canon of scripture? // Presbyterion 1981. 7.1. P. 135-137). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Also supporting this view: Robinson G. L., Harrison R. K. Canon of the OT // G. W. Bromiley. The international standard Bible encyclopedia. – Revised ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 1. – P. 592. Also, see Filson, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The definite article standing before the term *safer* (book) in the Hebrew text indicates a specific book (likely, the very book of the law). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Bergen R. D. 1, 2 Samuel // Logos Library System; The New American commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001. – P. 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Beckwith, p. 65-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Harris R. L., What books, p. 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Josephus also speaks of the prophets’ writings (see *Antiquities of the Jews*, 10.35). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See 1 Chr 29:29; 2 Chr 9:29; 12:15; 13:22; 20:34; 32:32; 33:19 (Harris R. L. Inspiration and canonicity of the Bible. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1957, 1969. – P. 166). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Harris R. L., What books, p. 135-138. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Harris R. L. Was the Law and the Prophets two-thirds of the Old Testament canon? // Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 1966. 9(4). P. 168; Geisler, Nix, p. 251-252. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Bruce, p. 37-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Nicole R. The сanon of the New Testament // Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 1997. 40(2). P. 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Noted in Eusebius, *Church history*, 6.25.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ryle, p. 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Beckwith, p. 26-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid, p. 367-368. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Text from halakhah.com. See similar idea in: *1 Macc.* 4:46; 14:41, *Seder Olam Rabbah*, 30, *t. Sotah*, 13:2, *b. Yoma*, 9b, 21b; *b*. *Sanhedrin*, 11a, *b. Baba Bathra*, 12, *y. Ta’anith,* 2.1; *y. Makkoth*, 2.4–7 (from McDonald L. M., The formation of the Christian Biblical canon, p. 51, and Geisler, Nix, p. 206). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. McDonald L. M., The formation of the Christian Biblical canon, p. 40, Harris R. L., Inspiration and canonicity, p. 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Beckwith, p. 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Balge R. D. The Bible through the ages // Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. Jan. 1991. P. 282. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Ryle, p. 250-251. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid, p. 280. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Harris writes of an abundance of quotation in Qumran (second century BC) from the Psalms and Proverbs (Harris R. L. Inspiration and Canonicity, p. 140), yet, according to the liberal view, the section “Writings,” which contained them, was not closed until 100 AD. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Chapman, The canon debate, p. 275-276. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. See Josh 1:8; 8:31-34; 22:2, 5; 23:6; Judg 3:4; 1 Kin 2:3; 8:53, 56; 2 Kin 14:6; 18:6; 22:8-11; 23:3; 2 Chr 17:9; Neh 8:1-3; 10:29; 13:1-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. See Josh 23:16; Judg 2:1; 1 Kin 19:10, 14; 2 Kin 17:15, 35, 38; 18:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. See Matt 8:4; Mark 7:10; 12:26; Luke 24:27, 44; John 1:17; 5:45-47; Acts 3:22; Rom 10:5; 2 Cor 3:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Bruce, p. 35; McDonald L. M., The formation of the Christian Biblical canon. – Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995. – P. 49; Lewis J. P. Jamnia revisited // McDonald L. M., Sanders J. A. The canon debate. – Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002. – P. 146-147. The Mishna describes a dispute concerning the canonicity of Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs (*Yadayim,* 3.5). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Lewis, p. 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Harris R. L., Inspiration and сanonicity, p. 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Tov E. The text of the Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek Bible used in the ancient synagogues // Hebrew Bible, Greek Bible, and Qumran: Collected essays. –TSAJ 121. – Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008. – P. 177; noted in Gallagher E. L. The Jerusalem temple library and its implications for the canon of scripture // Restoration Quarterly 2015. 57:1. P. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Beckwith, p. 92. Also see Jowers D. W. The sufficiency of Scripture and the biblical canon // Trinity Journal. – 2009. 30ns. C. 51; Bruce, p. 28-29; Robinson, Harrison, v. 1, p. 597. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Also voicing this opinion: Newman R. C. The Council of Jamnia and the Old Testament canon // Westminster Theological Journal. 1975. 38(3). P. 346; Robinson, Harrison, v. 1, p. 597; Duffield, Van Cleave, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Bruce, p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Dempster S. G. Torah, Torah, Torah // Evans C. A., Tov E. Exploring the origins of the Bible. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008. – P. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Robinson, Harrison, v. 1, p. 597. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. See Bruce, p. 51-52; Mounce W. D. Pastoral Epistles. – Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2000. – P. 550; Elliott J. K. Manuscripts, the codex and the canon // Journal for the study of the New Testament. 1997. 19(63). P. 117; Harrington D. J. The Old Testament Apocrypha in the Early Church and today // McDonald L. M., Sanders J. A. The canon debate. – Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002. – P. 200-201; deSilva D. A. Introducing the Apocrypha. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. – P. 22-25; Sundberg A. C. The Old Testament of the Early Church. – Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964. – P. 26-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Charlesworth reveals the sources of these quotations: Acts 17:28 from Aratus (*Phenomena*, 5) and Cleanthes; Tit 1:12 from Epimenides (see Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 1.14); 1 Cor 15:33 from Menander (*Thais*, 218). Charlesworth J. H. The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. – P. 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. deSilva, p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Dunbar, p. 307; Jannes and Jambres (2 Tim 3:8) are mentioned in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* 1:3; 7:2; 40:6; *Damascus Document,* 5:18; *b. Менаchos*, 85a and *Exodus-Rabbah*, but most of these instances were written after the New Testament, and some of them only partially overlap with 2 Tim 3:8 (See Mounce, p. 550; Grabbe L. The Jannes/Jambres tradition in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and its date // Journal of Biblical Literature. 1979. 98(3). P. 393-401). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. For a confirmation of this point, see Green W. S. Scripture in Classical Judaism // Neusner J., Avery-Peck A. J., Green W. S. The Encyclopedia of Judaism. – New York, NY: Brill, 2000. – P. 1307. Beckwith also claims that the formulations “it is written,” “it is said,” or “He says” were used to indicate inspired books not only in the New Testament, but also in the writings of Qumran, Philo and the Mishna (Beckwith, p. 74). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. According to Sundberg’s research, Origen connected 1 Cor 2:9 with the *Apocalypse of Elijah* (see *Commentary on Matthew,* 27.9). Sundberg, The Old Testament, p. 26-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Sundberg claims that Jerome connected Eph 5:14 with an apocryphal book (see *Commentary on Ephesians*, 3.5.15). Epiphanius connected it with the *Apocalypse of Elijah* (see *Against heresies,* 1.3.42) (see Sundberg, The Old Testament, p. 26-27). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Geisler N. L. Christian аpologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976. – P. 360. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Verkler H. A. Hermeneutics: Principles and processes of biblical interpretation. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 24-25 (page number from Russian edition). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Ibid, p. 25 (page number from Russian edition). [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. A question arises about what Melito meant by “Wisdom also.” F. F. Bruce believes that “Wisdom” refers the book of Proverbs (Bruce, p. 71). The Early Church characteristically referred to the Proverbs of Solomon as “Wisdom.” (see Eusebius, *Church History*, 4.22.8). [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Harris R. L. Was the Law and the Prophets, p. 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Beckwith, p. 187-188. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Robinson, Harrison, v. 1, p. 595. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Augustine, *City of God*, 18.26, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. See Robinson, Harrison, v. 1, p. 595; Bruce, p. 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Bruce, p. 45; Harris R. L., Inspiration and сanonicity, p. 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. https://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/2010/06/for-general-orientation-to-this-series.html; Harris R. L. Was the Law and the Prophets, p. 168; Harris R. L. Chronicles and the canon in New Testament times // Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 1990. 33(1). P. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. deSilva, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Ryle, p. 224-228. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Constantelos D. J. The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books: An Orthodox view // Kohlenberger J. R. The parallel Apocrypha. – Oxford: Oxford University, 1997. – P. xxviii. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Allert claims that still other Church Fathers considered some apocryphal books to be Scripture: Athanasius, Basil the Great, the Council of Ephesus (431), Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen, Hippolytus, Dionysius of Alexandria (Allert, p. 177-185). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Ibid, p. 72-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Noted in Dempster, The Old Testament canon, p. 457. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Origen also related that not all the churches recognized *1 Enoch* as inspired (see *Against Celsus*, 5.54). [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. *Letter to Africanus*, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Ibid, 9. Justin Martyr also claimed that the Jews removed certain verses from Scripture (*Dialogue,* 71-72). [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Sundberg, The Old Testament, p. 147. Nonetheless, Gregory considered *Judith,* 5.6 (see *Orations*, 45.15) and *Wisdom of Solomon*, 7.25 (see *Orations*, 29.16-17) to be Scripture. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Nonetheless, Cyril attributed *Wisdom of Solomon*, 22.5 to Solomon himself (*Catechetical Lectures*, 9.2) and, along with other passages from canonical books, quoted Sirach 3:21-22 (*Catechetical Lectures*, 6.4). [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council\_of\_Laodicea#Biblical\_canon. This council also forbade the reading of non-canonical books during the worship service (Bruce, p. 80). [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Noted in McDonald L. M., The formation of the Christian Biblical canon, p. 112-113. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. *Apostolic Canons*, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. See *On Christian Doctrine*, 2.8.13. Also, Bruce, p. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. One must keep in mind here, that these councils were not Ecumenical (all-church) councils, but local ones. Nevertheless, in Sundberg’s opinion, their determination may well have reflected the feeling of the entire Church (Sundberg, The Old Testament, p. 130-131). F. F. Bruce agrees, especially in regard to the Western Church (Bruce, p. 97). [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Dempster, The Old Testament canon, p. 456. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Gallagher, Hebrew Scripture, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Robinson, Harrison, v. 1, p. 594. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 120.

     http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc\_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c1a1.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. *Questio de Magisterio Infallibili*. Noted in Allison, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Walden W. Luther: the one who shaped the canon // Restoration Quarterly. 2007. 49(1). P. 9; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deuterocanonical\_books#Eastern\_Orthodoxy. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Constantelos, p. xxix; Filson, p. 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. http://www.crivoice.org/creeddositheus.html [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Filson, p. 95; Geisler, Nix, p. 269. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Иларион (Алфеев). Православие. – http://www.hilarion.ru/materials/books. – V. 1. – P. 224. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. deSilva, p. 19; Elliott, p. 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deuterocanonical\_books#Eastern\_Orthodoxy [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Иларион, v. 1, p. 224. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Constantelos, p. xxix. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Noted in Filson, p. 74; deSilva, p. 38; Bruce, p. 102; Walden, p. 5; Balge, p. 285. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Noted in deSilva, p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Allison G. R. Historical theology: An introduction to Christian doctrine. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. – P. 52-53; Sundberg, Bible canon, p. 353. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Sundberg, The Old Testament, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Allison, p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Harnack A. von. The origin of the New Testament. – Covent Garden, W.C.: Williams & Norgate, 1925. – P. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Filson F. V. Which books belong in the Bible? A study of the canon. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1957. – P. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Harris R. L. Inspiration and canonicity of the Bible. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1957, 1969. – P. 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Dayton W. T. Factors promoting the formation of the New Testament canon // Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 1967. 10(1). P. 30-31; Jowers D. W. The sufficiency of Scripture and the biblical canon // Trinity Journal. 2009. 30ns. P. 53-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Grudem W. A. Scripture’s self-attestation and the problem of formulating a doctrine of Scripture // Carson D. A., Woodbridge J. D. Scripture and truth. - Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992. – P. 46-47. Grudem adds that the pronoun “we” in 1 Cor 2:10-13 may refer to all the apostles. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Geisler N. L., Nix W. E. A general introduction to the Bible. – Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986. – P. 287. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Henry C. F. H. God, revelation and аuthority. – Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books. – V. 4. – P. 135-137. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Grudem, p. 46-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. See *1 Clem.* 5, 42, 47; Ignatius, *Magnesians*, 7, 13; Papias (see Eusebius, *Church history,* 3.39.4), Polycarp, *Philippians*, 6; *Barnabas*, 5, 8; Justin Martyr, *1 Apology*, 39, 66; Irenaeus, *Against heresies,* 3.1.1; 3.14.2-3; 3.5.1-2;Dionysius of Alexandria (see Eusebius, *Church history*, 4.23.12; Tertullian, *Prescription against heretics*, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Bruce F. F. The canon of Scripture. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1988. – P. 150; McDonald L. M. The formation of the Christian Biblical canon. – Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995. – P. 17; Allison G. R. Historical theology: An introduction to Christian doctrine. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. – P. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. For example, see McDonnell K. The formation of the canon and the recognition of Scriptural authority as an ecclesiological process // Mid-Stream. 1999. 38(1). P. 14-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Geisler, Nix, p. 284-286. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Knox D. B. Problems of the canon // The Reformed Theological Review. 1977. 36(1). P. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Ibid, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. For example, Polycarp (2nd c.) quoted Ps 4:4 and Eph 4:26 with the introductory formula “it is declared then in these Scriptures” (*Philippians*, 12.). In Barnabas 4.14 (2nd c.), Matthew 22:14 is directly quoted with the formula “it is written” (2.4). Eusebius informs us of persecuted believers in Gaul during the 2nd century, who called Revelation 22:11 “Scripture” (*Church history,* 5.1.58). He also cites Dionysius of Alexandria (2nd c.), who spoke of the “Lord’s writings” (*Church history,* 4.23.12). [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Von Campenhausen, p. 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. For example, Ignatius (2nd c.) placed the “Gospels and Apostles” on the same level as the Old Testament (*Philadelphians*, 5). Also, see *Smyrnæans*, 7 and *Philadelphians*, 8. While speaking of the order of the worship service, Justin Martyr (2nd c.) stated that together with the prophets (i.e. Old Testament), the Church read the “memoirs of the apostles,” i.e. the Gospels (*1 Apology*, 67.3). Also, Clement of Alexandria (2nd c.) spoke of the “Law and Prophets” in conjunction with the “Apostles” and the “Gospels” (*Stromata*, 6.11). Tertullian indicates that “the law and the prophets (the Church) unites in one volume with the writings of evangelists and apostles” (*Prescription against heretics*, 36). [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Bruce, p. 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Harnack, p. 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Dunbar D. G. The Biblical canon // Carson D. A., Woodbridge J. D. Hermeneutics, authority and canon. – Grand Rapids, MI: Academic Books, 1986. – P. 321-322. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. For example, in the canon of Athanasius, after an enumeration of the canonical books, we encounter the statement: “Let no man add to these, neither let him take ought from these.” He then discusses the non-canonical books (Athanasius, *Festal letter*, 39). [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Warfield B. B. The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Vol. 1 - Revelation and inspiration – New York, NY: Oxford Press, 1932; Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2008. – V. 1. – P. 452. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. McDonald L. M. Identifying Scripture and canon in the Early Church: The criteria question // McDonald L. M., Sanders J. A. The canon debate. – Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002. – P. 433. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Bruce, p. 191, 194; Metzger B. M. The canon of the New Testament. – Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987. – P. 132-133. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Bruce, p. 191, 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Hanson R. P. C. Origen’s doctrine of tradition. – London: SPCK, 1954. – P. 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Foster L. The earliest collection of Paul’s epistles // Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 1967. 10(1). P. 46; Meye R. P. Canon of the NT // G. W. Bromiley. The international standard Bible encyclopedia. – Revised ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 1. – P. 603. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Bruce, p. 130. Balla feels that the Pastoral Epistles are absent due to damage to the document (Balla P. Evidence for an early Christian canon (second and third century) // McDonald L. M., Sanders J. A. The canon debate. – Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002. – P. 377. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Bruce, p. 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. See Eusebius, *Church history*, 6.25.14. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Bruce, p. 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. McDonald L. M., The formation of the Christian Biblical canon, p. 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Geisler, Nix, p. 298. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muratorian\_fragment. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
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157. Hahneman, p. 413. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Aland K. Problem of the New Testament canon // Contemporary studies in theology. – London: A. R. Mowbray, 1962. – P. 20-21; Metzger, The canon of the New Testament, p. 104-105. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
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176. See Von Campenhausen, p. 254. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Bruce, p. 258. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. See Eusebius, *Church history*, 7.25.7-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
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181. Guthrie, p. 808-809. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Ibid, p. 881-882. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
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187. Noted in Clark, p. 462. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
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190. See Eusebius, *Church history*, 7.25.1-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Aland K., Problem of the New Testament canon, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Bruce, p. 227, 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. McDonnell K., p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
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205. Geisler, Nix, р. 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Some feel that the writer of the Epistle of James was James the son of Alphaeus, one of the Twelve (see discussion in в Harris R. L., Inspiration and сanonicity, p. 261-263). Although the evidence is sufficient to confirm the authorship of James, the brother of the Lord, the former view does not nullify our thesis that all New Testament books were written by apostles or their coworkers, but is fully consistent with it. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Bruce, p. 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Noted in Harris R. L., Inspiration and сanonicity, p. 252, 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Some feel that the writer of the Epistle of Jude was Judas, the son of James, one of the Twelve (see discussion in в Harris R. L., Inspiration and сanonicity, p. 261-263). Although the evidence is sufficient to confirm the authorship of Jude, the brother of James, the former view does not nullify our thesis that all New Testament books were written by apostles or their coworkers, but is fully consistent with it. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
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269. deSilva, p. 153-155, 162-168; 181-186; Charles, ed. Apocrypha of the Old Testament; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sirach. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
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282. Andrews, p. 37. deSilva, p. 92; Charles, ed. Apocrypha of the Old Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
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291. Andrews, p. 33; deSilva, p. 127-132; Filson, p. 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
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293. See *On the Trinity*, 4.5, 10; 8.2; 17.28; 24.44; 15.2.3; 3.21; 2.5.6; 2.8.14; 3.3 (Taken from deSilva, p. 152). [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. See Ignatius, *Ephesians,* 19.2-3*; Magnesians,* 8.2; Origen, *de Principiis,* 1.2.9, *Against Celsus,* 3.62; 5.10; 6.63; 8.14 (Taken from deSilva, p. 152). [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Noted in Charles, ed. Apocrypha of the Old Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. Charles, ed. Apocrypha of the Old Testament; Charlesworth J. H., The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament, с. 84; deSilva, p. 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. DeSilva also sees parallels between 1 Cor 2:7-12 and *Wisdom*, 9.13, 17; and between 1 Pet 1:6-7 together with Heb 8:2-5 and *Wisdom*, 3.5-6 (deSilva, p. 151). [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. Charles, ed. Apocrypha of the Old Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. deSilva, p. 141-148. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. Ibid; Charles, ed. Apocrypha of the Old Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Charles, Apocrypha of the Old Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letter\_of\_Jeremiah; deSilva, с. 216; Charles, ed. Apocrypha of the Old Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
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304. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letter\_of\_Jeremiah; deSilva, p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
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317. In spite of this observation, some contemporary scholars still believe that the original was in Hebrew (see deSilva, p. 224; Charles, ed. Apocrypha of the Old Testament). [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
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319. Andrews, p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. Charles, ed. Apocrypha of the Old Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
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322. deSilva, p. 222-224; Charles, ed. Apocrypha of the Old Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
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326. See Irenaeus, *Against heresies*, 4.5.2; 4.26.3; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 1.21; Tertullian, *On idolatry*, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
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