

CHRISTIAN
education

The Canon of Scripture

The Canon of Scripture

- may be generally described as the "collection of books which form the original and authoritative written rule of the faith and practice of the Christian Church," i.e. the Old and New Testaments.



All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17



knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, **but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**

2 Peter 1:20-21



How do I know if the Canon (i.e. the 66 books) of the Bible are part of the Scripture, breathed out by God?



Old Testament



The Old Testament

- God made the Jews the custodians of the Old Testament record. Though their eyes may be blind to its truth (Isa. 6:10; John 12:40; Rom. 10:1-3; 11:7), they have guarded its transmission with great accuracy.



The Old Testament

- To ensure this accuracy, later scribes known as the Masoretes developed a number of strict measures to ensure that every fresh copy was an exact reproduction of the original. They established tedious procedures to protect the text against being changed.



The Old Testament

- The Masoretic text of the Hebrew Old Testament contains twenty-four books, beginning with Genesis and ending with 2 Chronicles.



The Old Testament

- This twenty-four book division in its three-fold division (which are the same thirty-nine books in the Christian Old Testament) is as follows:



The Old Testament

- (1) The Law or The Pentateuch (5 books)—
Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers,
Deuteronomy



The Old Testament

- (2) The Prophets (originally 8 books, then 21)
 - The Former Prophets (originally 4 books, then 6) — Joshua, Judges, Samuel (1 & 2), Kings (1 & 2)
 - The Latter Prophets (originally 4 books, then 15)
 - Major: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel (3 books)
 - Minor: The 12 (originally 1 book, then 12)



The Old Testament

- (3) The Writings (originally 11 books, then 13)
 - Poetical (3 books) — Psalms, Proverbs, Job
 - The Rolls (5 books) — Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther
 - Historical (originally 3 books, then 5) — Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah (2), Chronicles (1 & 2)



The Old Testament

- By the time of the New Testament, the Canon of the Old Testament was completed. No more canonical writings have been composed after Malachi and no additional material was ever included from 425 B.C. to A.D. 90.



How do I know if the **Canon of the Old Testament** is part of the Scripture, breathed out by God?



Jesus testified to their
authenticity.



Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the **Law of Moses** and the **Prophets** and the **Psalms** must be fulfilled."

Luke 24:44



"Do not think that I have come to abolish **the Law** or **the Prophets**; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

Matthew 5:17-18



New Testament



The New Testament

- Although the New Testament does not speak of a completed canon of Scripture, it does testify to writings already considered to be the Word of God.



And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother **Paul also wrote** to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all **his letters** when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, **as they do the other Scriptures.**

2 Peter 3:15-16



For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "**The laborer deserves his wages.**"

1 Timothy 5:18



The New Testament

- The formation of the New Testament canon began in the early part of the second century A.D.



The New Testament

- By the end of the fourth century all twenty-seven books in our present canon were recognized by all the churches of the West.



The New Testament

- After the Damasine Council of Rome in A.D. 332 and the third Council of Carthage in A.D. 397 the question of the Canon was closed in the West.



Who decided these 27 books are
part of the New Testament Canon?

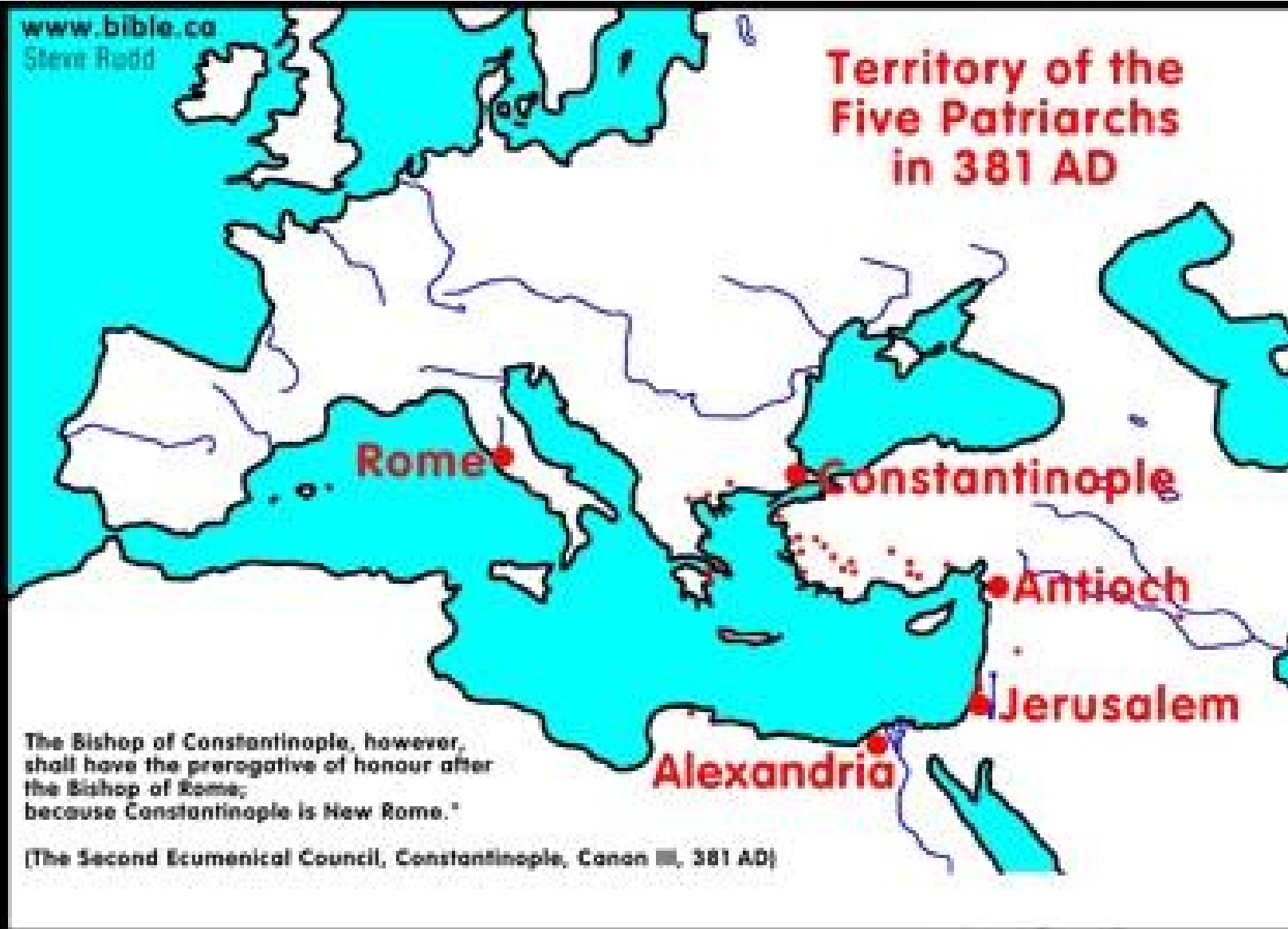


God decided.





Territory of the Five Patriarchs in 381 AD



The Bishop of Constantinople, however,
shall have the prerogative of honour after
the Bishop of Rome,
because Constantinople is New Rome."

(The Second Ecumenical Council, Constantinople, Canon III, 381 AD)

The New Testament

- **The church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity.** God gave us gravity, by his work of creation, and similarly he gave us the New Testament canon, by inspiring the individual books that make it up.

(J. 1. Packer, *God Speaks To Man*, p. 81)



The New Testament

- One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, **the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired**, recognizing their innate worth and generally apostolic authority, direct or indirect.



The New Testament

- The first ecclesiastical councils to classify the canonical books were both held in North Africa-at Hippo Regius in 393 and at Carthage in 397-**but what these councils did was not to impose something new upon the Christian communities** but to codify what was already the general practice of these communities.

(F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1960, p. 27)



So God decided which books are to be included in the NT Canon by inspiring these books, and the church merely recognized them as such.



What criteria were used to recognize
and determine the books that
belong to the NT canon?



The New Testament

- The early church councils applied several basic standards in recognizing whether a book was inspired.
 1. Is it **authoritative** (“Thus saith the Lord”)?
 2. Is it **prophetic** (“a man of God” 2 Peter 1:20)?



The New Testament

3. Is it **authentic** (consistent with other revelation of truth)?

4. Is it **dynamic** – demonstrating God's life-changing power (Hebrew 4:12)?



The New Testament

- 5. Is it **received** (accepted and used by believers – 1 Thessalonians 2:13)?

(Norman L. Geisler & William Nix, A General Introduction To The Bible. pp. 137-144)



How reliable are the NT manuscript documents?

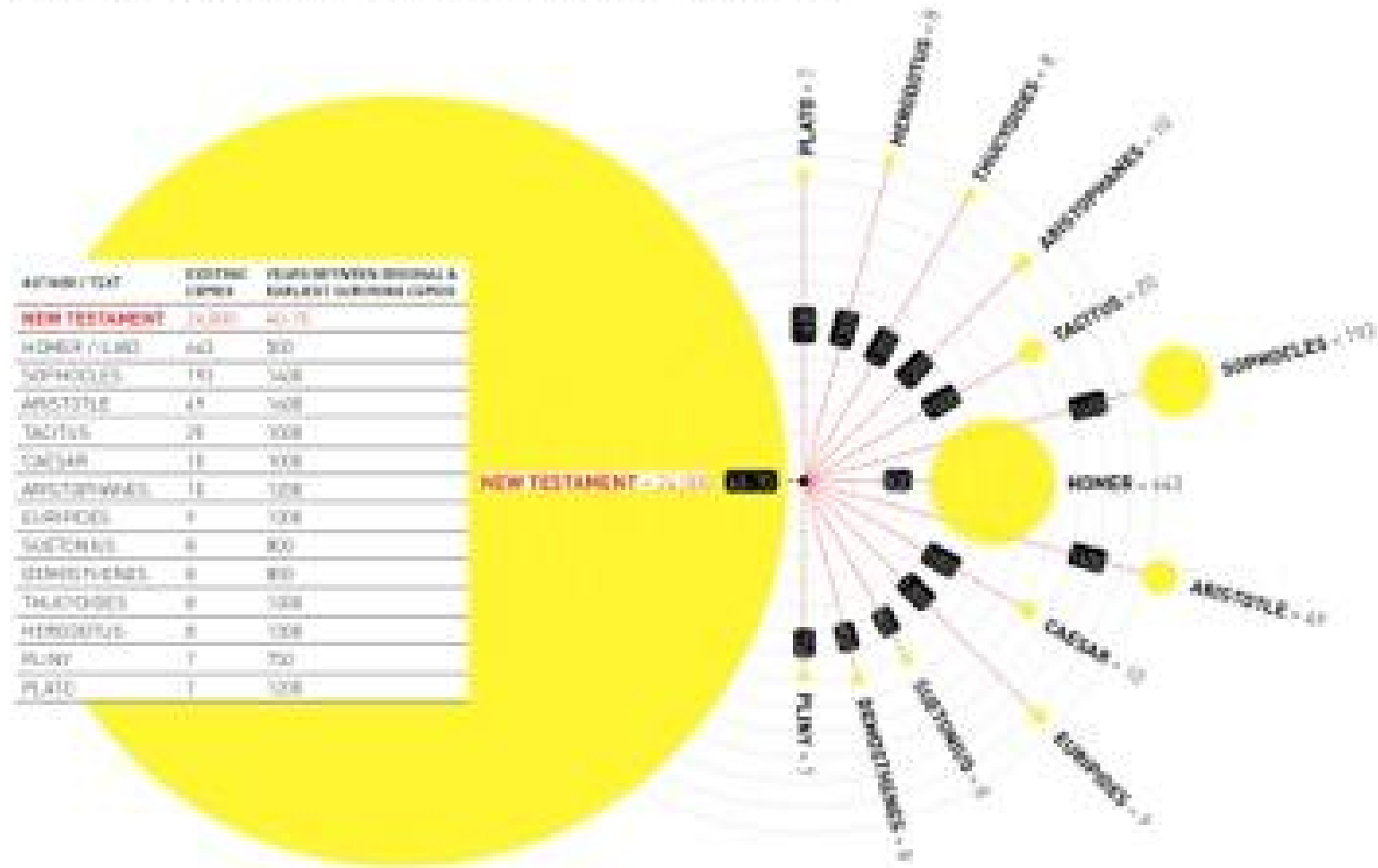


Manuscript Evidence for Ancient Writings

Author	Written	Earliest Fragment/copy	Time Span in Years	Number of Manuscripts
Caesar	100 to 44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,000	10
Plato	427 to 347 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,200	7
Thucydides	460 to 400 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,300	8
Tacitus	A.D. 100	A.D. 1100	1,000	20
Suetonius	A.D. 75 to 160	A.D. 950	800	8
Homer (Iliad)	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500	643
New Testament	A.D. 40 to 100	A.D. 125	25 to 50	24,000

Information in this chart can be found in various sources. This chart was adapted from: *Christian Apologetics*, by Norman Geisler, 1976, p. 307; and *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, by Josh McDowell, 1979, pp. 42, 43.

THE RELIABILITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT COMPARED TO OTHER ANCIENT TEXTS



The New Testament

- The fact of the many documents plus the fact that many of the New Testament documents are very early* assures us we have a very accurate and reliable text in the New Testament.

* hundreds of parchment copies from the 4th and 5th centuries with some seventy-five papyri fragments dating from A.D. 135 to the 8th century



What about the Apocrypha?



The New Testament

- The Apocryphal books are **15 books written in the 400 years between Malachi and Matthew.** They record some of the history of that time period and various other religious stories and teaching.



The New Testament

- The **Catholic Bible** (Douay Version) regards these books as scripture. The Apocrypha includes **some specific Catholic doctrines**, such as **purgatory** and **prayer for the dead** (2 Maccabees 12:39-46), and **salvation by works** (almsgiving – Tobit 12:9).



The New Testament

- Interestingly, the Catholic Church **officially recognized these books as scripture in A.D. 1546**, only 29 years after Martin Luther criticized these doctrines as unbiblical.



The New Testament

- Here are four additional reasons for rejecting the Apocrypha as inspired:

1. The Jews never accepted the Apocrypha as scripture.

2. The Apocrypha never claims to be inspired ("Thus saith the Lord" etc.) – In fact, 1 Maccabees 9:27 denies it.



The New Testament

3. The Apocrypha is never quoted as authoritative in scriptures. (Although Hebrews 11:35-38 alludes to historical events recorded in 2 Maccabees 6:18-7:42).

4. Matthew 23:35 – Jesus implied that the close of Old Testament historical scripture was the death of Zechariah (400 B.C.). This excludes any books written after Malachi and before the New Testament.



Conclusion



The Canon of Scripture

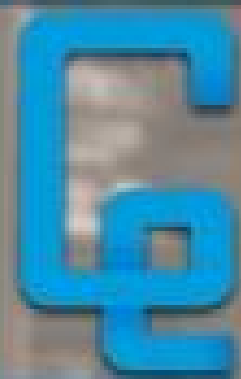
- We can have confidence that God who purposed to **inspire** His Scripture, also has the power to **preserve** His Bible, as well as the passion to **ensure** that the canon of Scripture is indeed His Word to us.



The Canon of Scripture

- The internal (within the Scriptural text) and external (testimonies, historical, and manuscripts, etc.) evidences give us factual and reasonable grounds for our confidence that we do have the Word of God in the 66 books of our Bible today.





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