

The origin of the Bible

Additional study material

A discipleship training to equip Christians for works of service, so that the Body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:11-16).

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PART I. THE ORIGIN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT (39 BOOKS)

Christianity did not begin with the first coming of Christ, but with the creation. The whole Bible (the Old Testament and the New Testament) is the foundation for the teachings and life of Christians.

A. EVENTS THAT LED TO THE WRITING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. God spoke directly to people

The special revelation of God began before the fall of mankind into sin. God spoke directly to the first people (Genesis 1:28). In the book of Genesis, God spoke especially to Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28), Noah, Abraham (2167-1992 B.C.), Isaac (2067-1887 B.C.), Jacob (2007-1860 B.C.) and Joseph.

2. God's words were passed on orally

From Deuteronomy 6:6-9 and Psalm 78:1-8 it is clear that God himself was concerned that his words would not be forgotten. So he gave fathers, grandfathers and the following generations the responsibility to pass his words on to the next generation. The words of God should be taken into the heart, memorised, discussed and lived.

In later times there existed complete schools where God's words were learned without mistakes by heart! There are two reasons why the oral tradition of God's words remained without error:

- the human race was relatively small and not yet spread over all the earth
- people lived several hundreds of years and thus several generations overlapped one another

3. The writers made use of older manuscripts (from creation to 1447 B.C.)

God also commanded some people to record his words. More than 4000 years ago in Babylonia and Egypt there already existed libraries filled with 'books' and 'recorded history', which were written on clay tablets (Exodus 34:27-28) and scrolls or books (Deuteronomy 31:24) made from papyrus. These histories were also used to write the Old Testament. The first Bible book, Genesis, reveals that much older "written genealogical and historical accounts" existed. The discovery of the **Tel Amarna Letters** (360 clay tablets in Assyrian language as diplomatic language)(15-14th centuries B.C.) in Egypt proves that the exchange of letters was already a fixed tradition during the time of Moses (1447 B.C.). Also different alphabets and scripts were widely known in that period. It is therefore only very probable that God's words and acts were recorded in several documents. Moses composed the Book of Genesis from such documents.

B. THE BOOKS OF THE LAW (MOSES)(1447-1407 B.C.)

The books of the Law (or just the Law) consist of the five books of Moses in the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The books of the law were written by Moses between 1447 and 1407 B.C.

1. Moses: a historian (1527-1407 B.C.)

"Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians and was a man of power in words and deeds" (Acts 7:22) Moses grew up in Egypt as the adopted son of Pharaoh's sister Queen Hatshepsut, who was regent of Pharaoh Thutmose III (1501-1447 B.C.) for the first 21 years of his reign. He was well acquainted with the geography, cultures and languages of Egypt and Sinai. He was a historian who collected "written genealogical and historical accounts" (Hebrew: sefer toldot) that formed the basis of the Book of Genesis. Genesis consists of "the historical account of the heavens and the earth on the day they were created" (Genesis 2:4), "the written historical account of Adam's line" (Genesis 5:1), of Noah (Genesis 6:9), of Noah's sons: Shem, Ham and Japhet (Genesis 10:1), of Terach, which included his son Abraham (Genesis 11:27), of Abraham's son Ishmael (Genesis 25:12), of Abraham's son Isaac (Genesis 25:19), and of (Isaac's sons) Esau (Genesis 36:1) and Jacob (Genesis 37:2), which included his son Joseph. Some of these accounts were from thousands of years before Moses. In order to compile the Books of the Law (John 1:17) Moses made use of these ancient genealogical and historical accounts, "the Book of the Wars of the LORD" (Numbers 21:14), other written records available in Egypt and finally God's direct speaking to him (Exodus 3:1-22).

God spoke directly to Moses (Exodus 3:4) and revealed himself and his will to him. He especially told him how he would save his people from slavery in Egypt, and about his moral, ceremonial and civil laws for his people Israel. God commanded Moses to record his words (Exodus 17:14; Exodus 24:4,7; Exodus 34:27-28; Numbers 33:2; Deuteronomy 31:9,24,26). An authorised copy of **the Book of the Law** was placed beside the Ark of the Covenant as a witness against God's people (Deuteronomy 31:26-27). The five books of the Law were immediately acknowledged by God's people as the words of God to man.

Joshua succeeded Moses and he was acquainted with the Book of the Law (Joshua 1:8). Joshua even copied the Law on stones for public reading by everyone, including the women, children and aliens (Joshua 8:32-35).

God not only inspired the writing of the books of the Law, but also preserved them throughout history, in spite of the fact that the books of the Law condemned Israel's sins and hardened hearts. Therefore the preservation of the books of the Law cannot be added to Israel's credit.

The books of the Old Testament were originally written in the Hebrew language, except for a few chapters that were written in the Aramaic language (Daniel 2:4b-7:28).

2. The contents of the books of the Law

The book **Genesis** (1447 B.C.) describes the history of God's deeds and words from the beginning of the creation and humanity until the time Jacob (Israel) and his descendants moved to Egypt (1877 B.C.)(Genesis 47:28; 50:22; Exodus 12:40).

The book **Exodus** (1447 B.C.) describes the history of how Israel became a large nation in Egypt, how the Egyptians oppressed them and made slaves of them and how God saved them from this slavery in Egypt. The book contains God's moral law (Exodus 20:1-17), a series of social laws (Exodus 21:1-23:33) and a number of ceremonial laws, especially about the tabernacle (Exodus 25-40).

The book **Leviticus** (1446 B.C.) contains God's ceremonial laws about sacrifices, the priesthood and the religious festivals.

The book **Numbers** (1446-1407 B.C.) describes the history how God led Israel through the desert for a period of 40 years until they reached the Promised Land, Canaan (1447-1407 B.C.).

The book **Deuteronomy** (1407 B.C.) contains a reminder of all God's great deeds and laws. Moses called this book "the Book of the Law" (Deuteronomy 31:24-26).

The words "Book of the Law" or simply "the Law" (Hebrew: Torah) refers to all the five books of Moses. They were

written before 1407 B.C. and contain the histories of God's deeds with people, God's words and the effect his deeds and words had on people.

3. God's words are inspired and authoritative

The words of God in the Books of the Law were written, not only in books, but had to be written in the hearts and minds of God's people. God commanded that his people should talk about his words, memorise them and live according to them (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). God commanded that his people should meditate and obey his words (Joshua 1:7-8). The Books of the Law were immediately acknowledged by Israel as God's Word for man (Exodus 19:3-8; Exodus 24:3-4,7; Deuteronomy 26:17).

Jesus Christ believed that the Books of the Law were inspired by God and were authoritative (Matthew 4:4; cf. Deuteronomy 8:3). Also the apostles of Jesus Christ said that the Law was written by Moses (John 1:17; John 5:45-47; Romans 10:5).

C. THE HISTORICAL BOOKS (1400–460 B.C.)

The historical books in the Old Testament are the 12 books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. The historical books were written by the prophets and their disciples between 1400 and 460 B.C. In the Hebrew Bible they are called "the Early Prophets" instead of "the Historical Books".

1. God commanded that the history of his people must be recorded

God himself commanded the Israelites not to forget his deeds and words. They had to tell them to their children and grandchildren so that they would not forget God's deeds and commands (Deuteronomy 4:9; Psalm 78:1-8)! This stimulated the Israelites to record the history of Israel and to gather them together in books.

The nations around Israel also wrote books, but they mixed history with fantasy and myths. In contrast to them, the historians of Israel recorded real facts from history which have been corroborated again and again by the discoveries from archaeology and secular history! The fact that these historians not only recorded the good aspects of Israel's history, but also the sin and rebellion of Israel, proves that the historical records in the Bible were not simply based on the decisions and choices of historians, but are based on the command and inspiration of God himself! The historical books in the Bible recorded God's acts and words within Israel and within the surrounding nations. It particularly describes how Israel broke God's covenant again and again, how God punished their sins and how God saved only "a remnant" from the whole natural nation of Israel (2 Kings 19:4,30-31).

The Historical Books could have been compiled as follows:

- Joshua basically composed by Joshua himself with evidence of later editorial work (1405-about 1300 B.C.)
- Judges and Ruth, probably composed by the prophet Samuel or his student (about 1000 B.C.)
- 1&2 Samuel by other prophets making use of prior written sources (between 931 – 721 B.C.)
- 1&2 Kings probably written by the prophet Jeremiah or someone in Babylon (after 586 B.C.)
- The great Book: Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah probably written by the scribe Ezra making use of prior written sources (between 450-425 B.C.)
- Esther written by an unknown eye-witness (about 465 B.C.).

2. The writers made use of smaller historical compilations

In the Old Testament we read about smaller historical collections that were later gathered into larger collections and thus formed the historical books we possess in the Bible today. The general Joshua and the prophet Samuel made use of "the Book of Jashar (the upright)" (Joshua 10:13; 2 Samuel 1:18). Various short compilations were made of the histories of the kings of Israel. We read of "the Book of the annals of Solomon" (1 Kings 11:41), "the Book of the annals of the kings of Israel" (1 Kings 14:19), "the Book of the annals of the kings of Judah" (1 Kings 14:29) and that Esther decreed that the regulations concerning the Purim Festival had to be recorded for their descendants in regard to their times of fasting and lamentation (Esther 9:31-32).

3. The writers were inspired by God

Although we do not know who compiled the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, we do know that these books were written by the prophets. The prophets wrote history from God's point of view: "the records of Samuel *the seer*, the records of Nathan *the prophet* and the records of Gad *the seer*" (1 Chronicles 29:29-30) and "the vision of *the prophet* Isaiah in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel" (2 Chronicles 32:32)! History was evaluated and recorded from God's point of view. For example: "Asa did what was right *in the eyes of the LORD* as his father David had done" (1 Kings 15:11) and "Nadab did what was evil *in the eyes of the LORD*, walking in the ways of his father and in his sin, which he had caused Israel to commit" (1 Kings 15:26).

D. THE POETICAL BOOKS (1900–400 B.C.)

1. The poetical books.

The poetical books in the Old Testament are: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. Lamentations of Jeremiah is also a poetical book. The poetical books were written between 1900 and 400 B.C.

Job was probably written in North-Arabian or Aramaic and translated into Hebrew in about 1900 B.C.

Psalms are songs accompanied by a stringed instrument, embodying a personal response of the believer toward the goodness and grace of God. A few Psalms contain the thoughts and revelations from God Himself (Psalm 2). The Psalms have been written by various authors between 1400 and 400 B.C. and were brought together in larger collections. Psalm 90 was composed by Moses (1407 B.C.). David's, Asaph's and Solomon's Psalms were composed before 971 B.C. The Psalms by the sons of Korah and the Esrahite were composed before the exile in 587 B.C. Psalm 126 and 137 are from after the return from exile. There is no evidence of any Psalm after 500 B.C.

The Psalms were collected and divided into 5 Books.

- Book I (Psalm 1-41) was probably arranged by David. Possibly the earliest edition of the Psalter also contained Psalm 51- 72 of David (between 1020-975 B.C.).
- Book II (Psalm 42-72) included the Psalms of Asaph and the sons of Korah (Psalm 42-50).
- Book III (Psalm 73-89) may have been collected during the revival movement under king Josiah (638-608 B.C.) or just as likely during the reform programme of king Hezekiah (726-686 B.C.).
- Book IV (Psalm 90-106) and Book V (Psalm 107-150) are two collections of miscellaneous Psalms of uncertain date, any time between the Exodus and the Exile.
- Book V (Psalm 107-150) is a collection of miscellaneous Psalms of uncertain date.

No historical allusions or situations are presupposed in Psalm 90-150 which do not accord with the events in Hebrew History prior to 430 B.C.

Proverbs. 800 verses with a title and 8 sections, of which Proverbs 1:7 to 9:18 and Proverbs 10:1 to 22:16 are Solomon's own sayings and Proverbs 22:17-24:22 and Proverbs 24:23-34 are the sayings of the wise collected by Solomon before 931 B.C. Proverbs 25 to 29 were collected by the committee of Hezekiah before 685 B.C. We have no information about Agur, Lemuel or the author of "the wife of noble character" in Proverbs 30-31.

Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon before 971 B.C.

Song of Songs was written by Solomon before 971 B.C.

2. Hebrew poetry was memorised and recorded.

The discovery of a growing number of poetry of the Akkadians in Babylon and the Egyptians confirms the fact that Israel's neighbours wrote poetry as early as 2000 B.C. Poems in Ugaritic (a Canaanite language close to Hebrew) from 1500 B.C. have been found. Thus, the Israelites not only composed poetry, prayers and songs and learned them by heart, they also recorded them at the time they were composed and transmitted them to the next generations. Hebrew poetry consisted of songs accompanied by a stringed instrument and embodying a personal response of the believer towards the goodness and grace of God. The Messianic Psalms are revelations from God himself (Psalm 2).

Most characteristic of the Semitic Wisdom Literature are the practical principles and instructions about how one could best live and should live. They are based upon a canny observation of the laws of human nature, human behaviour and their consequences. They record rules how to succeed in social life, commerce and even politics. They establish morality on the basis of principles common to humanity everywhere. In its highest form, the Hebrew Wisdom Literature sought to discover the essence of God's truth and grasp the general spiritual principles. Hebrew wisdom was of a practical rather than theoretical nature (Proverbs 1:1-7). The wise man was a person who knew how to do things well (Exodus 31:3-5). He could find the right solutions in critical situations (Genesis 41:39). The word came to be applied to the art of getting along successfully with God and with man: with the rich and the poor, with kings and slaves, with friends and enemies, with neighbours and people from the opposite sex. A wise man could come up with the right answer in a critical situation (Genesis 41:39; 2 Samuel 14; 1 Kings 3).

There seems to have been a prominent school of wise men in the ancient Hebrew Society, who applied themselves to the observation of human character as such, seeking to analyze conduct, studying actions in its consequences, and establishing morality upon the basis of principles common to humanity at large. In its highest form, the Hebrew Wisdom Literature sought to look into the essence of God's truth and grasp the general idea. It reflected upon all natural and moral phenomena and experiences in order to apprehend more perfectly the final ground of life and the principles by which it is governed. Men of all nations came to listen to the wisdom God gave to Solomon (1 Kings 4:29-34).

E. THE PROPHETICAL BOOKS (788–420 B.C.)

1. The prophetic books.

In the Hebrew Bible they are called “the Latter Prophets”. The prophetic books in the Old Testament are the four major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah (and his Lamentations), Ezekiel and Daniel and the 12 minor prophets. The prophetic books were written between 788 and 420 B.C. The prophetic books were written in approximately the following years: Amos (788-737 B.C.), Jonah (783-743 B.C.), Hosea (754-714 B.C.), Isaiah (740-680 B.C.), Micah (737-680 B.C.), Nahum (660 B.C.), Zephaniah (639-630 B.C.), Jeremiah (627-586 B.C.), Habakkuk (608-605 B.C.), Daniel (605-537 B.C. and the 2nd century B.C.), Ezekiel (593-571 B.C.), Obadiah (586 B.C.), Haggai (520 B.C.), Zechariah (520-518 B.C.), Joel (500-400 B.C.?), Malachi (432-420 B.C.).

2. God spoke through the prophets.

All the prophetic books in the Bible maintain that the God of the Bible is the Author of the prophetic books. More than 2700 times the prophetic books say: “The word of the LORD came to me, saying” (Jeremiah 1:4) or “This is what the LORD says” (Jeremiah 2:5)! These words show that the prophets were the inspired mouthpieces of God. God revealed himself, his words and his will to the prophets and spoke to his people through his prophets. Note that the God who spoke through the prophets is called “the Spirit of Christ” (1 Peter 1:10-11) or “the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21) in the New Testament.

3. God commanded the prophets to record his words.

The prophet Isaiah had to record God’s words twice: first on a clay tablet so that people could read it immediately and secondly in a book made of papyrus or leather so that later generations could also read it (Isaiah 30:8). Thus the recording of God’s Word served as a witness to all later generations. Sometimes the prophet made use of a scribe to record what he dictated. For example, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: “Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now. Perhaps, when the people of Judah hear about every disaster I plan to inflict on them, each of them will turn from his wicked way; then I will forgive their wickedness and their sin.” So Jeremiah called Baruch, son of Neriah, and while Jeremiah dictated all the words the LORD had spoken to him, Baruch wrote them on the scroll (Jeremiah 36:1-4). Thus the recording of God’s words served as a testimony for all later generations!

The Book of Jeremiah probably had several editions, the first three during his lifetime:

- 1st edition destroyed by king Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 36:4)
- 2nd edition (Jeremiah 36:32)
- 3rd edition (a shorter edition with chapters arranged in a different order, published in Egypt during Jeremiah’s lifetime. This edition was preserved in the Septuagint)
- 4th and final edition (a more comprehensive collection probably made by Baruch with material arranged in a more logical order and published after Jeremiah’s death. This edition was preserved in the Masoretic Text.)

Daniel made a Bible study out of several “books” (plural) of Jeremiah (Daniel 9:2).

4. The prophetic books were studied and quoted and survived the prophecies of the false prophets

The Latter Prophets (i.e. the prophets after the exile)(607-538 B.C.) studied and quoted the books of the Earlier Prophets (i.e. the prophets before the exile) and pointed out that the prophecies of the earlier prophets proved to be true and trustworthy (Zechariah 7:7-10). They regarded the books of the earlier prophets as God’s Word, inspired by the Spirit of God (Zechariah 7:12).

The prophets studied the books of the earlier prophets. For example, the prophet Daniel studied the book of the prophet Jeremiah (Daniel 9:2). They also quoted one another’s prophecies in their books, because they regarded them as words inspired by God. For example, the words in Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-3 are exactly alike. Because they were contemporaries of each other, we cannot tell who quoted who.

It is remarkable that in spite of the fact that the prophets spoke openly against the sins and disobedience of the Israelites and the false prophets (Jeremiah 23:9-32), the Israelites did not and could not destroy these prophecies against them! While the prophecies of the false prophets in Israel were lost, the prophecies of the true prophets were preserved through all the centuries! In a sovereign way God saw to it that these prophecies were preserved for all later generations.

F. Events that led to the writing of the New Testament

The books of the New Testament came into being due to four important events:

- The first coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, into the world
- The calling of the disciples of Christ to be his witnesses
- The oral tradition of the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42)
- The special circumstances that led to the writing of each book

1. The coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, into the world

From the very first people, Adam and Eve, and throughout the whole Old Testament period the prophets announced the coming of the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. He came and his deeds and words made such a deep impression on the people in the world that the news about Jesus Christ spread fast. All four writers of the Gospels describe this greatest event in all of human history, namely, that God took on the human nature in Jesus Christ (John 1:1,14; Romans 9:5; Colossians 1:19; 2:9; Hebrews 1:3; Revelation 1:8). Mark, Luke, Matthew and John each made a selection of the most important things Jesus said and did (Luke 1:1; John 21:25; Acts 1:1). They made their selection in accordance with the purpose of their Gospel.

2. The calling of the disciples of Jesus to be his witnesses

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as his acts and teachings, did not take place in a corner of the world (Acts 26:26). There were very many witnesses. They saw the works of Jesus *with their own eyes* and heard his teachings *with their own ears* (2 Peter 1:16-18; John 19:35; Luke 1:1-4; 1 Corinthians 15:5-6). And what they saw and heard they passed on to very many people in many places in the world (1 John 1:1). Before Jesus Christ ascended into heaven he appointed his disciples as his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:2,8). All these eye- and ear witnesses could affirm that what the apostles of Jesus Christ proclaimed and later recorded in the New Testament was the absolute truth!

But there were also many enemies of Christ and Christians. If the apostles would have proclaimed lies, these enemies would have been the first to bring that into the light. They would have unmasked the apostles as false witnesses. One of the strongest proofs that the apostles proclaimed the truth was that they made an appeal to the knowledge of their enemies! So great was their confidence that there were many people who could affirm what they proclaimed (Acts 2:22; cf. Matthew 22:15-16)!

3. The oral transmission of the apostles' teaching

The message of the gospel was first proclaimed by the apostles and consequently recorded in their four Gospels (Acts 2:22; Acts 2:42). By proclaiming the same message again and again to people in many different places, the message received more and more the form it now has in the four recorded Gospels.

The three main parts of the apostles' teaching are:

- An introduction about Jesus Christ: his origin, his birth and the beginning of his ministry
- His ministry in public to the crowds and his ministry in private to his disciples
- His death, resurrection and ascension

4. The inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit

Jesus promised his disciples that he would not leave his disciples alone, but return to them as the Holy Spirit and be with and in them for ever (John 14:16-18). The Holy Spirit would remind them of the life, acts and teachings of Jesus Christ (John 14:26), convince them of sin, salvation and judgement (John 16:8-11), teach them all things they had to know and guide them into the whole truth (John 16:13-15). The Holy Spirit would take what is of Christ and make it known to the disciples. The writers of the Gospels wrote their Gospels under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Jesus Christ himself (Romans 8:9-10).

The disciples of Jesus Christ were a very unique group of people and were called 'apostles' (meaning: the ones sent out), because they were chosen and 'sent out' by Jesus Christ himself (Luke 6:12-16; Acts 26:16; Romans 1:1). They complied with the requirements of 'an apostle': An apostle of Jesus Christ had to be *an eyewitness* of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:21-22), God recommended their ministry through much spiritual fruit (2 Corinthians 10:18) and miracles (2 Corinthians 12:12) and the Holy Spirit used them to write the books of the New Testament (2 Peter 3:2,15-16).

So, just as the whole Old Testament was written under the inspiration of “the Spirit of Christ”, the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:9-12; 2 Peter 1:19-21), likewise the whole New Testament was written under the inspiration of the Spirit of Christ, “the Holy Spirit” (John 14:26; 16:13-15). Every part of the Holy Bible is “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16) and therefore infallible (Titus 1:2) and the final authority for doctrine and life (1 Corinthians 4:6).

The books of the New Testament were originally written in the Greek language, which was the common language in the Roman Empire at that time.

G. The four Gospels (A.D. 44-98)

The purpose of each Gospel is the following:

1. Mark

Mark, written in Rome in the years 44–46, teaches that Jesus Christ is the mighty King. Mark was a disciple of the apostle Peter (1 Peter 5:13) and wrote his Gospel mainly for Romans.

2. Luke

Luke, written in Rome in the period 60-61, teaches that Jesus Christ is the compassionate High Priest. Luke was a disciple of the apostle Paul (Colossians 4:14) and wrote his Gospel mainly for the intellectuals at Rome (Luke 1:1-4).

3. Matthew

Matthew, probably written in Jerusalem (cf. his references to events and situations in and around Jerusalem)(cf. Matthew 28:15) in the period 63–66, teaches that Jesus Christ is the great Prophet. Because Matthew wrote his Gospel mainly for Jews he made much use of quotations from the Old Testament.

4. John

John, most probably written in Ephesus in the period 70–98, teaches that Jesus Christ is the Son of God or the Word of God. The apostle John wrote his Gospel originally for people who had a great need for the truth in a time when there were many false teachings.

H. The book of Acts (A.D. 61)

1. Luke, the writer of Acts

Luke was a disciple, co-worker and fellow-traveller of the apostle Paul. Luke first made an accurate study of his resources in Jerusalem, Caesarea, Asia Minor and Greece with regard to the life, works and words of Jesus Christ (Luke 1:1-4) and especially of the two apostles Peter and Paul. Luke wrote the book of Acts of the Apostles in 61 in Rome. The book of Acts is one of the most accurate history books in the world!

2. Luke wrote Acts with three purposes

▪ Luke wanted to record the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ through his apostles

The purpose of the Gospel of Luke was to record *the beginning* of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The purpose of the book of Acts was to record *the continuation* of the ministry of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit working in his apostles (Acts 1:1). Jesus Christ built his Church on the foundation of the apostles and the New Testament prophets (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20).

▪ Luke wanted to win the intellectuals to Christ

He wanted to make the message of Jesus Christ known to learned people in Rome. It was common in that time for a group of intellectuals to gather to listen to the reading of a new book, generally by the author himself, and then to discuss it. In this way Luke could proclaim the message of Jesus Christ to learned people.

▪ Luke wanted to defend Christianity

Luke wanted to justify the attitude of the apostles Peter and Paul and other Christians towards the Roman government and its law. Throughout the book of Acts the respectful behaviour of the Christians towards the Roman government and its laws is made evident.

3. A short summary of the history that is recorded in Acts

▪ Acts chapters 1–7 describe the founding of the Church in Jerusalem and its surroundings.

The events in Acts chapters 1-7 took place in the years 30–33/34. Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in May of the year 30, the Spirit of the resurrected Christ (John 14:16-18) came to dwell in the hearts and lives of all Christians in order to give them courage, power, endurance, joy, and spiritual insight. The proclamation of the gospel led to the conversion of many people and the founding of the very first congregation (church) in history in Jerusalem in the year 30. However, the fast growth of the number of Christians (Acts 2:42-47) led to the persecution by

the Jewish authorities. Finally, a great persecution broke out against especially the Greek speaking Jews who had become Christians (Acts 6:9; 7:57–8:3)!

▪ **Acts chapters 8–12 describe the spreading of the Church to the south and to the north.**

The events in Acts chapters 8-12 took place in the period 33/34–44. Jewish Christian congregations were founded in Judea, Galilee and Samaria (Acts 9:31). The first Gentile Christian congregation was established in Caesarea by Peter in about the year 40 (Acts 10:28-29,34, 47-48; Acts 15:7-9). While the apostles remained in Jerusalem, the Greek speaking Jews, who had become believers in Jesus Christ, were scattered because of the great persecution against them. They proclaimed the gospel wherever they went and so people in Africa (Ethiopia) and the Middle East became Christians. By the year 44 they had founded the congregation in Antioch of Syria (Acts 8:1,4,27-28; Acts 11:19-26; Galatians 1:21).

▪ **Acts chapters 13–20 describe the expansion of the Church to the west: to Asia Minor and Europe.**

The events in Acts chapters 13-20 took place in the period 45–57. Jews lived in very many countries since the time of the exile to Assyria (721 B.C.) and the exile to Babylon (586 B.C.). They spread the knowledge of the Old Testament in these countries (Acts 15:21). Paul ministered together with Barnabas in Antioch in about the years 45-46. Paul made several missionary journeys to spread the gospel among the Jews and especially among the Gentiles. From Antioch in Syria Paul made three missionary journeys:

- **The first missionary journey of Paul** was during the years 47–48 (Acts 13–14). His companions were Barnabas and Mark. They travelled to Cyprus, Pamphylia, South Galatia and Cilicia. They founded congregations in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch in Asia Minor (Acts 14:23).
- **The second missionary journey of Paul** took place during the years 50–52 (Acts 15:40–18:22). His companions were Silas and Timothy. They travelled from Syria to Cilicia and South Galatia in Asia Minor. Accompanied by Luke they crossed over to Europe and founded congregations in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea) and in Achaia (Athens and Corinth) (Acts 15:41; Acts 16:1,11-12; Acts 17:1,10,15; Acts 18:1,18-22).
- **The third missionary journey of Paul** was during the years 52–57 (Acts 18:23 to Acts 21:14). His companions were among others Timothy and Titus. They ministered throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia (Acts 18:23). They laboured for three years in Ephesus and founded the congregations in the province of Asia (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea and Colosse) (Acts 19:8-10; Colossians 4:16; Revelation chapters 2-3). They also ministered three months in Macedonia and Greece and then returned via Macedonia and Asia Minor (Troas and Miletus) (Acts 20:1-5,13-16). On the return journey Luke was again with Paul (Acts 20:5-6). The journey to Jerusalem is described in detail (Acts 21:1-8,15).

▪ **Acts chapters 21–28 describe the extension of the Church to Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire**

The events in Acts chapters 21–28 took place in the period 57–61. During this time Paul was in prison most of the time. He was imprisoned in Jerusalem and Caesarea during 57-59 and in Rome during 60-61.

I. THE THIRTEEN LETTERS OF PAUL (A.D. 50-65)

1. The apostle Paul, a Pharisee and persecutor of Christians, became a Christian

Paul was a Jew, born in Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia. He automatically received the Roman citizenship. He was educated as a Pharisee by Gamaliel in Jerusalem and ardently strived to live according to the Jewish law. He persecuted Christians in many places (Acts 22:2-5,25-29; Acts 26:4-11). Paul was converted in about the year 34, four years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He immediately went from Damascus to Arabia and later returned to Damascus. There he proclaimed the gospel until his escape from Damascus three years later (Acts 9:19b-25; Galatians 1:17). In about the year 36 Paul ministered a brief period in Jerusalem and was then sent to Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 9:26-30; Galatians 1:18-23) where he ministered for almost 10 years until he joined Barnabas in Antioch in Syria in the year 45-46.

2. The letters of Paul during his second missionary journey, 50–52

Paul travelled with his co-workers Silas, Timothy and Luke to Syria, Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece.

He wrote his 1st letter **Galatians** in the year 50 from Corinth to the congregations in the province of Galatia in Asia Minor. His purpose was: “to defend the gospel of righteousness by faith without the works of the law”.

He wrote his 2nd letter **1 Thessalonians** in the autumn of the year 50 from Corinth. His purpose was: “to encourage the growth of the new congregation”.

Shortly thereafter he wrote his 3rd letter **2 Thessalonians** also from Corinth. His purpose was: “to exhort the new congregation to remain calm with a view to the second coming of Christ”.

3. The letters of Paul during his third missionary journey, 52–57

Paul travelled with his co-workers Timothy and Titus to Asia Minor.

He wrote his 4th letter **1 Corinthians** in the year 56 from Ephesus. His purpose was: “to teach that the Christian Church is *in* the world, but *not of* the world”.

And he wrote his 5th letter **2 Corinthians** in the autumn of the year 56 from Macedonia. His purpose was: “to witness that God’s strength is manifested through the weakness of his apostle”.

He wrote his 6th letter **Romans** in the spring of the year 57 from Corinth. His purpose was: “to teach that justification is only by grace through faith”.

4. The letters of Paul during his first imprisonment in Rome, 60-61

Paul wrote four letters in the years 60-61 while he was imprisoned in Rome.

He wrote his 7th letter **Colossians** in the year 60 to the Christians in the city of Colosse in Asia Minor. His purpose was: “to teach that Jesus Christ is supreme in the world and his work of salvation is all-sufficient”.

He wrote his 8th letter **Philemon** in the year 60 to his co-worker and friend Philemon “to exhort him to welcome his runaway slave Onesimus”.

He also wrote his 9th circular letter **Ephesians** in the year 60 to the Christians living in Ephesus and the surrounding cities. His purpose was: “to teach Christians about the unity of the world-wide Body of Christ (the Christian Church)”.

Finally he wrote his 10th letter **Philippians** towards the end of the year 61 to the Christians in the city of Philippi in Macedonia. His purpose was: “to open up his heart and life to the Philippians”.

5. The letters of Paul to his co-workers, 61–64/65

After his release from his first imprisonment in Rome, Paul travelled much. He sent Timothy to Philippi (Philippians 2:19-23), while he himself travelled to Asia Minor via Crete. He left Titus on the Island Crete (Titus 1:5) and travelled to Colossae where he visited Philemon (Philemon 22). Then he travelled to Ephesus where he met Timothy again and urged him to continue to work in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3). Paul travelled to Philippi in Macedonia (Philippians 2:24). He hoped to return to Ephesus shortly, but rather expected that his absence might be prolonged (Ephesians 3:14-15).

He wrote his 11th letter **1 Timothy** to his co-worker Timothy in the period 62–63 from Macedonia. His purpose was: “to instruct his co-worker Timothy about the organisation of the congregation in Ephesus”.

He wrote his 12th letter **Titus** to his co-worker Titus in the period 62–63 from Macedonia. His purpose was: “to instruct his co-worker Titus how to advance the sound teachings and sanctification in the personal lives, families, congregation and society”.

Paul requested Titus to meet him in Nicopolis in Greece (Titus 3:12), travelled to Nicopolis and spent the winter there. He then probably travelled to Spain (Romans 15:24,28). Details are unknown. After he returned from Spain, he travelled to Asia Minor again. He left Trophimus sick in Miletus, just south of Ephesus (2 Timothy 4:20). Possibly at this time he met Timothy and they shed much tears (2 Timothy 1:4). He met Carpus at Troas where he left his cloak and valuable parchments (2 Timothy 4:13). He left Erastus at Corinth (2 Timothy 4:20).

He was again imprisoned in Rome. During his second imprisonment in Rome only Luke was with him (2 Timothy 4:11). His arrest may have taken place in Troas, Corinth or Rome. The cruel Caesar, called Nero, who had murdered his step-brother, his mother, his wife, his teacher and many others, was reigning. In July 19 to 24 of the year 64 Nero probably set Rome on fire, but falsely accused the Christians of doing this. A terrible persecution broke out against the Christians. Paul’s second Roman imprisonment was severe and short (2 Timothy 1:16; 2:9).

Paul wrote his 13th (final) letter **2 Timothy** probably during the winter of the year 64–65 once more from prison in Rome. His purpose was: “to instruct Timothy to proclaim the sound Christian message”.

Paul was sentenced to death (cf. 2 Timothy 4:6-7) and according to tradition of the early church fathers he was beheaded on the Via Ostia, a highway outside Rome. Whether Timothy and Mark reached Rome before Paul’s death we do not know.

6. The reading, exchange and collection of the letters of Paul

The apostle Paul stimulated the reading of his letters to the congregations (1 Thessalonians 5:27) and also the exchange of his letters with the other congregations (Colossians 4:16). Timothy had been his faithful co-worker for 14 years and had good relationships with all Paul’s other co-workers and all the congregations which Paul had either founded or built up. Timothy was also in possession of Paul’s valuable parchments (2 Timothy 4:13). From his second imprisonment at Rome Paul gave an important commission to Timothy: “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses (all these people and congregations) entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others”

(2 Timothy 2:2). One way to do this was that Timothy collected all Paul's letters, made copies and spread them to each congregation.

J. THE EIGHT GENERAL LETTERS (A.D. 43-98)

1. The letter to the Hebrews

It is not known who wrote Hebrews, to whom he wrote or when and from where this letter was written.

The Hebrews were Jewish Christians, converts from a Jewish sectarian background. They probably belonged to a Jewish sectarian community in Rome (cf. Hebrews 13:24) and their religion was characterised by ceremonial washings or 'baptisms' (ablutions for ritual cleansing)(Hebrews 6:2). When these Jews became Christians they took with them certain sectarian customs into the Christian congregation.

The 1st general letter is to the **Hebrews**. It was written before 64 to the Jewish Christians in Rome who kept holding on to the conservative teachings of traditional sectarian Judaism. The purpose of the letter to the Hebrews was: "to teach that the message of the Old Testament had been fulfilled by the message of the New Testament". Jesus Christ is the highest exalted Person in history. His work of salvation by his life, death and resurrection has been perfectly fulfilled. The message of the New Testament is God's final word to all people (Hebrews 1:1-2; cf. Revelation 22:18-19).

2. The letter of James

James was the brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3) and one of the leaders in the congregation of Jerusalem, which consisted of thousands of Jewish Christians (Acts 21:18-20).

The 2nd general letter of **James** was written to Greek speaking Jewish-Christian congregations. It was probably written before the year 43 from Jerusalem. It is the earliest written book in the New Testament. The purpose of James was more or less the same as that of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), namely, "to explain the true standards of the Christian life in the kingdom of God". James directed his letter to "the twelve tribes scattered among the nations", that is, to the Greek speaking Jewish Christian congregations. These congregations came into being due to the heavy persecution that broke out in Jerusalem especially against the Greek speaking Jews who had converted to Christ. They were scattered from Jerusalem (Acts 6:8 to Acts 8:3) and persecuted (Acts 22:5). Everywhere they went they proclaimed the gospel only to Greek speaking Jews and non-Jews who had converted to Judaism (Acts 11:19) and founded Christian congregations among them.

3. The two letters of Peter

The apostle Peter was 'the rock' on which Jesus Christ built his Church. Peter was a Jew from Capernaum in the province of Galilee (Mark 1:21,29). He and his brother Andrew were fishermen (Mark 1:16). After John and Andrew, Peter probably became the third disciple of Jesus Christ (John 1:40-42). Jesus had promised Peter (Greek: petros) that he would build his Church on 'the rock' (Greek: petra), that is, especially on the apostle Peter and the other apostles (Matthew 16:18; cf. Ephesians 2:20; Revelation 21:14-16) and their testimony concerning Jesus Christ, who is the real 'Rock' (Daniel 2:44; 1 Peter 2:8; cf. 1 Corinthians 3:11).

The apostle Peter was one of the leaders in the congregation of Jerusalem between the years 30-33/34 (Acts 1:15; Acts 2:14; Acts 3:12; Acts 4:8; Acts 5:3,29; Acts 6:2,4; Acts 15:7, etc.).

About the year 40 Peter was the first to proclaim the gospel to *the non-Jews (the Gentiles)* in Caesarea. God had to take extreme measures to convince Peter that the gospel was not only intended for Jews, but also for the Gentiles in the world! In the year 44, when king Herod Agrippa I died, Peter was imprisoned, but miraculously delivered. He then went away from Jerusalem (Acts 12:1-19). Thereafter, James, the brother of Jesus, became one of the important leaders in the congregation of Jerusalem (Acts 21:17).

Peter wrote two letters to the congregations which Paul had founded in Asia Minor. Although we do not know whether Peter had ever ministered in Asia Minor, it is possible when you take into consideration that he travelled much. These congregations in Asia Minor consisted mainly of Gentile converts. They were being oppressed and persecuted, probably by their own countrymen.

The 3rd general letter is **1 Peter**. It was written in the period 62-63 from Rome to the congregations in Asia Minor (1 Peter 1:1). The purpose of Peter was "to strengthen the Christians amidst their sufferings and to urge them to live godly lives with a view to their future hope".

The 4th general letter is **2 Peter**. It was written in the year 64 from Rome, not long before Peter died (2 Peter 1:14) during the persecution instigated by Caesar Nero in the year 64/65. He wrote this letter to the same congregations in Asia Minor (2 Peter 3:1). His purpose was: "to equip the Christians against the false teachers and their false doctrines".

While 1 Peter addresses the danger coming mainly *from outside* the congregation (their hostile countrymen), 2 Peter addresses mainly the danger coming *from the inside* of the congregation (false teachers).

4. The three letters of John

After the death of the apostles Paul and Peter, God gave the Christian congregations in Asia Minor a new leader: **the apostle John**. The church father Irenaeus (130–200) said that the apostle John lived permanently in Ephesus in Asia Minor and that he ministered until the time of Caesar Trajan (98–117).

After the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in the year 70 by the Roman army under Titus, the heathen religions with their heathen philosophical teachings and customs began to influence the Christian teachings and habits. John wrote three letters during this period.

The 5th, 6th and 7th general letters are **1 John**, **2 John** and **3 John**. They were written in the period 70–98 in Ephesus to the congregations in the area of Ephesus. The purpose of John was “to warn the Christian congregations against the false teaching of Cerinthus”. Cerinthus was a Jewish convert to Christianity in Alexandria in Egypt and a contemporary of John. Cerinthus and other adherents of Gnosticism were Christian heretics who falsely claimed that they possessed more spiritual knowledge than the knowledge that was revealed in the Bible.

5. The letter of Jude

Jude was also a brother of Jesus and James (Mark 6:3).

The 8th general letter is **Jude** and was written in the period 64–68, probably to the same congregations in Asia Minor to which Peter had also written. The purpose of Jude was “to warn the Christian congregations against the false teachers and to urge them towards love, faith and prayer” (Jude 1:20-21). It seems that the false teachers had already penetrated and infiltrated the Christian congregations with their destructive work.

K. THE BOOK OF REVELATION (A.D. 81-96)

1. The back-ground of the book

The church father Irenaeus said that the book of Revelation was written towards the end of the reign of Caesar Domitian (81–96), who during the final three years of his reign persecuted Christians. He demanded that all people must worship him as ‘god’ and opposed the growth of the Christian Church. The opposition and persecution under Caesar Domitian was the example for the social, economic and religious conditions revealed in the book of Revelation, which also characterises such conditions in the history of the world during the whole period between the first and the second coming of Jesus Christ.

2. The Author of the book

Although God in Jesus Christ is the real Author of the book of Revelation, Christ revealed its contents via an angel to **the apostle John** by means of visions and symbolic language.

John recorded these visions in the book of **Revelation** in about the period 95–96 while he was exiled on the isle of Patmos.

The purpose of the book

The purpose of the book of Revelation on the one hand is: “to encourage the persecuted Christians throughout history in their struggle against the evil political, economic and religious powers, because genuine Christians are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ (Romans 8:37; Revelation 17:14)”.

The purpose of the book of Revelation on the other hand is: “to warn the careless and negligent Christians who are tempted to conform to this evil world, that unless they repent, their lampstand would be removed from its place (Revelation 2:5)”.

The theme of the book

**The victory of Christ and his Church
over the dragon (Satan) and his helpers
(the antichrist, the false prophet, the great prostitute and the kings of the world).**

PART III. THE TRANSMISSION AND TRANSLATION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND THE CANON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

L. THE TRANSMISSION OF THE COPIES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

1. The hand-written Old Testament Hebrew manuscripts.

How could the original revelation from God be passed on from one generation to the next generation?

Almost all the original books of the Old Testament were written in the Hebrew language. A hand-written document in the Hebrew language is called “a Hebrew manuscript”. The Hebrew text we possess today is called **the Masoretic Text** and has been transmitted to us by making hand-written copies over a period of more than 2000 years. The earliest book of the Old Testament was written about 1900 years B.C. and the latest book (Daniel chapters 7-12) was completed about 150 years B.C.

In the early days there were no printing presses and every book was copied by hand. After many years of use, these hand-written documents would begin to tear and become too old for use. So people carefully made hand-written copies of these original documents. After many more years of use also these hand-written copies became too old for use. So again new hand-written copies were made of these old copies, etc. We no longer possess the infallible original documents of the various books of the Old Testament. The earliest Hebrew manuscripts which have been preserved to us are in some instances no closer than a thousand years to the time of original composition.

2. The Old Testament manuscripts before the Christian era.

The most important Old Testament manuscripts we possess before the Christian era were part of **the Dead Sea Scrolls**. In 1947 thousands of fragments of Hebrew manuscripts in clay pots were discovered that were hidden in caves in a dry desert near Qumran in Palestine in about 68 A.D. before the destruction of Jerusalem. About 40 000 fragments were carefully pieced together to form about 500 scrolls, dated between 200 B.C. and 68 A.D.

The two most important scrolls were both Hebrew manuscripts of the book of Isaiah. The first so-called **Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah** was a complete copy of the book of Isaiah and was dated 125 B.C. It belonged to the same manuscript family as the Masoretic Text and was about 1000 years older than the next oldest Hebrew manuscript that still exists (850 A.D.). The second so-called **Hebrew University Scroll of Isaiah** consisted of large parts of Isaiah chapters 41-66 and was dated 50 B.C. The text was even closer to the Masoretic Text. Nothing in the discoveries found at Qumran endangers the essential reliability and authority of our standard Hebrew Bible Text (Kittel’s Biblia Hebraica).

When we compare the Hebrew text we possess today (the Masoretic Text) with the Hebrew texts of these two scrolls of Isaiah, we must conclude that the Old Testament manuscripts were very accurately transmitted throughout the centuries.

3. The faithful copying of the Old Testament manuscripts.

What was done to ensure the faithful copying and transmission of the original Bible books, so that we can have confidence in God’s Word today?

Three groups of people contributed to the faithful transmission of the Hebrew text through many centuries. They were the Sopherim, the Talmudists and the Masoretes.

▪ **The Sopherim (the transmitters of the Hebrew text with consonants)**

The Sopherim were an order of scribes and teachers of the law which had its beginning under Ezra, the scribe. In Ezra 7:6,10 we read, “Ezra was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses”. “Ezra had devoted himself to the study and the observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel”. And in Nehemiah 8:13 we read how the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the scribe to give attention to the words of the Law. The Sopherim functioned between about 457 B.C. to about 200 A.D.

For more than 600 years the Sopherim were the official Bible Publication Society of that time. Their great achievement was to standardise a pure text of the Hebrew Bible. The material found at Qumran point to the existence of a Pre-Maccabean Recension (before 174 B.C.) of the Hebrew Bible and to the activity of a standardizing committee under official auspices, who consulted all the earliest and best manuscripts then available, no doubt including the official copies in the temple archives, and produced a sort of resultant Standard Text much in the manner of Westcott and Hort or Nestle-Aland in their New Testament editions. This standardizing of the consonantal text of the Old Testament took place around 100 B.C. The Sopherim made sure that every hand-written copy of an Old Testament book would conform to the standard text.

From about 100 B.C. they counted all the verses, all the words and all the letters (consonants) of each book of the Old Testament and wrote these figures at the end of each book concerned! In this way, anyone could check if he had a perfect copy of the Old Testament text before him or one with a mistake.

▪ **The Talmudists (the transmitters of the interpretations of the Hebrew text)**

The Talmudists were those Jews who first by oral tradition and later in writing preserved an enormous amount of traditional interpretations of the Law and the rest of the Old Testament Books. They functioned between 100 B.C. and 500 A.D. (600 years) and were the transmitters of the interpretations of the Old Testament books. Their products included interpretations of the Old Testament books, together with folklore embellishments, anecdotes and homilies of various sorts. Much of the material was practical and legal questions or intricate details of ritual matters. This mass of traditions has been preserved in three collections, called **the Midrash, the Talmud and the Tosefta**. They are important, because they contain many quotations from the Old Testament books. These quotations help us to see that the Hebrew text we possess today is very accurate. The many years of transmission by hand did not change the Hebrew text!

- **The Midrash** (means “textual study” or “text interpretation” from the word “darash” which means “to search or investigate”)(100-300 A.D.). It is a doctrinal and homiletical exposition of the Old Testament. It is a Commentary on the five books of the Law. It consists of two parts:
 - **The Halakah** (meaning “procedure”) a commentary on the five books of the Law.
 - **The Hagada** (meaning “explanation”) commenting on the entire Old Testament and including other proverbs, parables and tales. These contain the earliest sermons of the synagogues. They are important because of their numerous quotations from the Old Testament text, occasionally in a slightly different form than the Masoretic Text.
- **The Tosefta** (meaning “supplement”) containing a collection of teachings and traditions of the Tannaim (teachers) which were closely related to the Mishnah.
- **The Talmud** (meaning “instruction”) grew between 100-500 A.D. It has two parts:
 - **The Mishnah** (meaning “repetition”) contains a digest of all the oral laws (supposedly communicated by word of mouth from Moses to his 70 elders), containing traditions and explanations of the Old Testament. It is divided into 6 “Sedarim” (meaning “orders”): agriculture, women, civil law, criminal law, sacrifices or holy things, and unclean things.
 - **The Gemara** (meaning “completion”) was composed in Aramaic and consists of a supplement or expanded commentary of the Mishnah. There are two forms:
 - *The Palestinian Gemara (about 200 A.D.) is smaller.
 - *The Babylonian Gemara (about 500 A.D.) is much larger.

▪ **The Masoretes (the transmitters of the Hebrew text with vowels)**

The Masoretes were the scholars who gave the final form to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament books. They functioned between 500 - 950 A.D. As we said above, almost all the original books of the Old Testament were written in the Hebrew language. The Hebrew script originally had only 22 letters and all of them were consonants. The vowels were added mentally when the Hebrew text was read.

Only after 500 A.D. points were added to represent the vowels. The Masoretes received the Hebrew text written only in these 22 consonants from the Sopherim and they inserted the vowels in the form of points. This gave each Hebrew word its exact pronunciation and grammatical form. They committed themselves to the accurate preservation of the Hebrew Old Testament books. They were more diligent and devoted to the accurate preservation of the Hebrew Old Testament books than any other endeavour to preserve ancient secular or religious literature in the history of human civilisation! They were so conscientious in their task that they did not even venture to make the most obvious corrections in the consonant text, but handed the ancient Hebrew consonant text down to us exactly as it came to them!

Conclusion: The faithful copying and transmission of the original Bible books was ensured by maintaining the standard text, by counting verses, words and letters and by never making any changes in the text. Today we possess a form of the Hebrew Scriptures which in all essentials duplicates the recension which was considered authoritative already a century before the days of Jesus Christ and his apostles! And this in turn, judging from the Qumran evidence goes back to an authoritative revision of the Old Testament text which was drawn up on the basis of the most reliable manuscripts available for collation from the previous centuries. This brings us very close to the original autographs themselves and furnish us with an authentic record of God’s revelation.

4. The Old Testament manuscripts after the Christian era.

The most important Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts we possess today are the following:

- A manuscript dated 850 A.D. containing the five books of the Law (**the British Museum Oriental Codex**).
- A manuscript dated 895 A.D. containing the historical books and the prophetic books (**the Codex Cairensis**).
- A manuscript dated 900 A.D. is withheld from publication by Sephardic Jews in Aleppo (**Aleppo Codex**)
- The oldest **Samaritan Pentateuch** in Nablus is withheld from publication.
- A manuscript dated 916 A.D. containing the prophetic books (**Leningrad MS**)
- A manuscript dated 1010 A.D. containing the entire Old Testament (**Leningrad MS B-19A or the Codex Babylonicus Petropolitanus**).

This last manuscript forms the basis for **the Hebrew Masoretic Text** of the Old Testament we use today (Kittel's Hebrew Bible, 3rd edition onwards). All translations of the Old Testament in other languages in the world are based on this manuscript!

Conclusion. Because of the faithfulness of the people who transmitted the copies of the Hebrew Old Testament books throughout the centuries to us, we have today the most accurate possible Hebrew Old Testament!

M. THE EARLIEST TRANSLATIONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

Why are the earliest translations of the Old Testament books important?

1. The Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Old Testament (Aramaic Targums).

During the exile of the Jews to Babylonia between 607-538 B.C., the international language of the Persian Empire, Aramaic, replaced the Hebrew language of the Jewish exiles in Babylonia. During the services it became necessary to repeat the reading in Hebrew Scriptures with a translation into Aramaic, but the interpreter would often (especially with the Prophets) explain the message by a paraphrase. This continued after the exiles returned from Babylonia. During the Babylonian Exile (586-538 B.C.) and especially after the banishment of the Jews from Palestine (138 A.D.) these interpretations were committed to writing as **Targums** (interpretations). These translations are important, because they were made more than 500 years before Christ! They help us to see that the original Hebrew text, on which these translations were based, was very accurate.

The best known Targums are:

Targum of Onkelos, an interpretation of the Torah produced by Jewish scholarly circles in Babylon (3rd century A.D.).

Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel, more free rendering interpretations of the prophets (Joshua-Kings, Isaiah to Malachi) produced by Babylonian circles (4th century A.D.)

2. The Greek translations of the Hebrew Old Testament (Greek Septuagint).

▪ **The translation of the Alexandrian Jews (the Septuagint).**

About 285 B.C. the Egyptian king caused a **Greek** translation to be made from the Old Testament and this was completed by about 150 B.C. The Greek speaking Jews received their copies from the Royal Library at Alexandria. The translation was done for the convenience of the Greek speaking Jews who lived in Egypt and knew no Hebrew. The word 'Septuagint' means 'seventy' (LXX), because it was translated by about 70 translators from another Hebrew text than the Hebrew Masoretic Text. The five books of the Law were translated with greater accuracy than the other books, because they had to serve as a kind of Targum (interpretation) at synagogue worship services for Jewish congregations in Egypt. The historical books and Psalms were translated with considerable fidelity to their Hebrew text. However the Prophets and other Writings show a tendency towards paraphrase (freedom of rendering).

When we study the Septuagint, we must make allowance for this tendency to paraphrase and for actual mistakes. A Jew from Palestine, Jesus the son of Sirach (about 130 B.C.) in his prologue to a book written by his grandfather said about the Septuagint: "For the same things expressed in Hebrew do not have equal force when translated into another language. Not only so, but even the Law and the prophecies and the rest of the books differ not a little as to the things said in them." Nevertheless, the passages where the Septuagint differs from the Jewish text accord with the Samaritan text and in the whole the Septuagint text accords much more with the Jewish text than with the Samaritan text. However, the Alexandrian Jews attached the greatest possible authority to the Septuagint and so it spread all over the Greek speaking Roman Empire. Especially the Greek Septuagint was used in early times to make translation into other languages.

The Septuagint added the so-called 'apocryphal books' as well as some additions to the books of Esther and Daniel.

The original the Septuagint of course is extinct. But we possess fragments of the Septuagint translation in the John Rylands Papyrus (458) (150 B.C.), the Chester Beatty Papyrus (Oxyrynchus) from Egypt (150 B.C.) and the Qumran Septuagint (100 B.C.), the Freer Greek manuscript V containing all the Minor Prophets except Hosea (3rd century A.D.), the Codex Vaticanus (B) containing most of the Old Testament in Greek, the Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph) containing parts of the Old Testament in Greek (375-400) and the Codex Alexandrinus (325-250) containing parts of the Old Testament in Greek. The variations (in some cases considerable variations) in the Septuagint from the Masoretic Text may have been a Hebrew Text from a different family. But we must make considerable allowances for the liberty of paraphrasing and actual mistakes.

During the time of Jesus and the apostles, Greek was the most important language in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. Jesus and the apostles quoted from both the Hebrew Old Testament as well as the Greek Old Testament in the books of the New Testament.

▪ **Three other translations into Greek.**

The addition of the apocryphal writings in the Septuagint and the polemic between the Jews and Christians caused a need for more accurate translations in the Greek. Three translations into Greek are important.

- The **translation of Aquila**, a Jewish proselyte from Pontus (northern Turkey) in 126 A.D. directed to oppose passages which Christians were accustomed to cite from the Septuagint as applicable to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is so literal that the sense is sacrificed.
- The **translation of Symmachus**, an Ebionite (a kind of semi-Christian) in the second century A.D. written in pure and good Greek.
- The **translation of Theodotion**, an Ebionite in the second century. Because his knowledge of Hebrew was limited, his translation was based on the Septuagint.

The inspiration and authority of the Septuagint was not universally accepted by all Christians. The use of the book of Daniel in the Septuagint fell in disuse and was replaced by the book of Daniel in the translation of Theodotion.

▪ **The Hexapla.**

The church father Origin (185-254 A.D.) worked in Alexandria and Caesarea. He amended the Septuagint by his Hexapla (a book in 6 columns), which contained the Hebrew text, the Hebrew text expressed in Greek letters, the version of Aquila, the version of Symmachus, the Septuagint and the version of Theodotion. The Hexapla is best known from a Syriac version which was made from it.

▪ **The recensions of Lucian and Hesychius.**

In the fourth century A.D. two recensions of the Septuagint were made as attempts to revise the Septuagint: the recension of **Lucian**, a presbyter of Antioch and the recension of **Hesychius**, an Egyptian bishop. These two recensions were much used in the Eastern churches.

3. Other translations of the Hebrew Old Testament.

The Old Testament was also translated in other languages:

- **Latin**, the language of the Western Roman Empire
- **Syrian**, an important language in the Eastern Roman Empire
- **Coptic**, the language of Egypt

N. THE CANON OR LIST OF THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS

1. The books which truly belong to the Old Testament.

Why does the Old Testament have these 39 books?

The Old Testament has these 39 books, because these books claim divine inspiration and authority. The books of the Old Testament say very clearly that they were inspired by God. It was God himself who spoke the words and who commanded the writers to record his words in books. The writers of the Bible books also acknowledge that the Author of the Old Testament books is God himself, because they again and again use the words, "Thus says the Lord". The historical books in the Bible show that the Old Testament books received immediate recognition and acceptance by the faithful believers as soon as they were made aware of these books.

The books which are regarded as truly belonging to the Old Testament are called '**canonical**'. The word 'canon' means a straight reed or a ruler used as a measuring stick. Applied to literature, the word 'canon' means **the list of books which conform to the standard of divine inspiration and authority**.

The Jews throughout the centuries and the Apostolic Church, that is, the early Christian Church and the Protestant Churches after the Reformation, all considered these same 39 books of the Old Testament as canonical, that is, as divinely inspired and authoritative for what one should believe and how one should live.

2. The division of the Old Testament books.

How are these 39 books divided in the Old Testament?

▪ **The Hebrew Masoretic Text**

The Hebrew Masoretic Text is divided into three parts: **the Law, the Prophets and the Writings**. Already about 130 B.C. the prologue of the apocryphal book Ecclesiasticus spoke of the three main divisions of the Old Testament books, namely "the Law, the Prophets and the Books by others who have followed in the steps of the prophets". In about 130 B.C. the apocryphal book 1 Maccabees quotes from the Psalms and describes two scenes from the book of Daniel, apparently regarding both as canonical.

The New Testament usually refers to the Hebrew Scriptures as simply: "**the Law and the Prophets**" (Matthew 5:5:17; 7:12; 22:40). In one place even a passage from the Psalms (Psalm 82) is spoken of as being written "in your Law" (John 10:34). In about 30 A.D. Jesus said, "Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in **the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms**" (Luke 24:44). So also Jesus knew that the Old Testament was divided into three parts.

Besides the Psalms, other books belonging to the Writings are also used in the New Testament as the Word of God. Daniel (9:27; 11:31; 12:11) is used in Matthew 24:15, Proverbs (3:11-12) is used in Hebrews 12:5-6 and Lamentations (2:1) is alluded to in Matthew 5:35.

In about 90 A.D. a famous Jewish writer, called **Flavius Josephus**, wrote (in *Contra Apionem* 1:8) about the canon or “the fixed list of the Old Testament books, which were regarded as inspired and authoritative.” He said, “We do not have tens of thousands of books, which disagree and conflict with each other, but only 22 books containing the record of all time, which people rightly believe to be divine.” He mentions that the Law consists of the 5 books of Moses, the Prophets consists of 13 books and the remaining 4 books consists of hymns and practical wisdom for people how to conduct their lives. He said that the succession of the prophets ceased during the time of king Arthaxerxes, who died in 424 B.C. (However cf. Matthew 11:13; Luke 16:16). He also said that since that time “no one has dared to add anything to them, or to take anything from them, or to alter anything in them”! He alluded to the apocryphal material, but it is plain that he used them merely as a historical source and not as divinely inspired books.

Flavius Josephus thus maintains that:

- The canonical books of the Old Testament are the same 39 books of the Old Testament we have today! Together with the Jews of his time he combined the following books into one book: Judges and Ruth formed one book, the two books of Samuel formed one book, the two books of Kings formed one book, the two books of Chronicles formed one book, Ezra and Nehemiah formed one book, Jeremiah and Lamentations formed one book, and finally the twelve minor prophets formed one book. Thus, the 39 books were ordered into 22 books.
- No more canonical books were written after the time of the prophet Malachi (432-420 B.C.)
- Josephus’ division shows that the assignment of Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel and Song of Songs to the third division of the Hebrew Canon was later than the 1st century A.D. and therefore the argument against the authenticity of the book Daniel, based on its final assignment to the Writings, lacks validity.

Thus hundreds of years before the New Testament period, the list of 39 Old Testament books in our Bible were firmly fixed as the only inspired and authoritative books in the Old Testament!

An authoritative copy of the Law was placed beside the ark (Deuteronomy 31:26). The prophets belonged to the prophetic order (Deuteronomy 18:14-22) and transmitted their messages directly from a revelation from God or composed their account of Israel’s history from God’s point of view. The inspired books that did not belong to the first two groups were included under the Writings. Later, rabbis divided the Hebrew Masoretic Text (the Hebrew Bible of today) as follows:

• Law (Torah)	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy	5
• Prophets (Nebi’im)	Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings	(4)
	Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, 12 Minor prophets	(4) 8
• Writings (Ketubim)	Poetry and wisdom: Psalms, Proverbs, Job	(3)
	Rolls (Megilot): Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther	(5)
	Historical: Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, 1&2 Chronicles	<u>(3) 11</u>
		24

Thus, the Masoretic text today has 39 books arranged in 24 books

The reason why Ruth was separated from Judges and Lamentations from Jeremiah was because they were later used in the Jewish liturgical year as follows:

- Song of Songs read during 1st month (Passover)
- Ruth read during 3rd month (Pentecost)
- Lamentations read during 5th month
- Ecclesiastes read during 7th month (Feast of Tabernacles)
- Esther read during 12th month (Purim)

The reason Daniel was assigned to the Writings was because he was regarded as a civil servant. Although he possessed a prophetic gift he was not anointed to be a prophet. Ezra was a scribe and Nehemiah a governor.

In 170 A.D. bishop Milito of Sardis went to the Orient to investigate the number and order of the Old Testament Books. He mentions all the Bible books except Lamentations (which was arranged under Jeremiah) and Nehemiah (which was arranged under Ezra). He only left out Esther for some unknown reason. He included no book of the Apocrypha.

Christian apologists appealed to the Old Testament in their polemic with the Jews and utilised the Jewish division of Bible Books. Thus, Tertullian (160-250 A.D.) mentions 24 canonical books and Origenes (185-254 A.D.), Athanasius (365 A.D.) and Jerome (340-420 A.D.) mention 22 canonical books.

• **The Greek Septuagint**

The Greek Septuagint follows a more topical order and has several apocryphal additions.

- **Law** Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
- **History** Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings (the last 4 books are generally called 1-4 Kingdoms), 1&2 Chronicles, 1 Esdras (apocryphal), 2 Esdras (=Ezra), Nehemiah, Tobith (apocryphal), Esther (+ apocryphal additions)

- **Poetry** Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom of Solomon (apocryphal), Wisdom of Sirach or Ecclesiasticus (apocryphal)
- **Prophecy Minor:** Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
Major: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Baruch (apocryphal), Lamentations, Epistle of Jeremiah (apocryphal), Ezekiel, Daniel (+apocryphal portions called: Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, Song of Three Holy Children)
- **Supplement History** 1&2 Maccabees (apocryphal)

▪ **The Latin Vulgate**

The Latin Vulgate follows the Greek Septuagint order with some exceptions. There are considerable additions to Esther.

▪ **Modern translations of the Bible**

Modern translations of the Bible follow the Latin Vulgate **order**, of course without the apocryphal books, and the Hebrew Masoretic Text in **content**.

3. The books of the Old Testament spoken against (the “Antilegomena”).

▪ **Jewish controversy about the Canon of the Old Testament**

The Mishnah (100-200 A.D.) mentions the existence of a controversy in some Jewish circles during the 2nd century A.D. about the canonicity of the books Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes and Esther. Some had doubts about Proverbs. The Gemara (before 300 A.D.) mentions discussions about the authority of the book Ezekiel. The disciples of the rabbi Shammai contested the canonicity of Ecclesiastes, while the disciples of the rabbi Hillel upheld it vigorously. The scholarly discussions held at Jamnia (90 A.D.) sustained the claims of both Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs to divine authority.

▪ **Jewish charges brought against certain Old Testament Books**

• **Ecclesiastes.**

The book was charged with alleged pessimism, Epicureanism and denial of the life to come. However, the purpose of Ecclesiastes is to convince people of the uselessness of any worldview which does not rise above the horizon of man himself. Having shown the vanity of living for worldly goals, the author claims the way for a truly adequate worldview which recognizes God himself as the highest value of all, and the meaningful life as the one which is lived in his service.

• **Song of Songs.**

The book was charged with physical attractiveness in bold and enthusiastic imagery bordering on the erotic. However, the allegorical interpretation of Hillel and later Christians saying that the book speaks about the relationship between God and man gives people a rich insight into the relationship of love between God and man.

• **Esther.**

The objection was that God is not mentioned in it at all. However, the drawback was more than offset by the unavoidable manifestation of divine providence working through every circumstance to deliver his Jewish race from the greatest threat to its existence ever faced in history.

• **Ezekiel.**

The problem was that it disagreed in some details in its description of the latter-day temple and ritual with the Mosaic tabernacle and Solomon temple. However, they accepted the book, explaining that it might not describe the second temple of Zerubbabel, but possibly a future temple. Anyway, they believed that the coming Elijah would explain these difficulties to the faithful.

• **Proverbs.**

The problems centred on apparent contradictory precepts as in Proverbs 26:4-5.

These minor objections should not be construed as having delayed the canonicity of the above books, any more than Martin Luther’s 16th century objections against James and Esther delayed canonical recognition of these books.

4. The books which do not belong to the Old Testament (the “Apocrypha”).

The word “Apocryphal books” means “books of doubtful authenticity. The apocryphal books may not be called “deuterocanonical books” as if these books are part of the Canon of the Bible!

▪ **Arguments in favour of including the Apocrypha.**

• **The Early Versions (translations) contained the Apocrypha.**

This is only partly true. The Aramaic Targums did not recognize the Apocrypha. The Syrian Peshitta in earliest form did not contain the Apocrypha. Jerome, the translator of the Bible into Latin, did not recognize the Apocrypha as being of equal authority with the Canonical Books. The only Earliest version that contained the Apocrypha was the Greek Septuagint. Later versions based on the Septuagint are the Latin Itala, Coptic, Ethiopian and later Syrian versions.

But even in the Septuagint the Apocrypha maintained a rather uncertain existence. The Codex Vaticanus (B) lacks 1&2 Maccabees (regarded by Roman Catholics as canonical), but includes 1 Esdras (regarded by Roman Catholics as non-canonical). The Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph) omits Baruch (regarded by Roman Catholics as canonical), but includes 4 Maccabees (regarded by Roman Catholics as non-canonical). The Codex Alexandrinus (A) includes 1 Esdras and 3 and 4 Maccabees (regarded by Roman Catholics as non-canonical). Thus the three oldest manuscripts of the Septuagint show considerable uncertainty as to which books constitute the list of Apocrypha. The 14 Apocrypha accepted by the Roman Catholic Church are by no means substantiated by the testimony of the great uncials of the 4th to 6th century A.D.

- **The so-called Alexandrian Canon included the Apocrypha.**

It is by no means certain that all the Apocrypha in the Septuagint were considered canonical even by the Alexandrian Jews themselves. Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C. to 40 A.D.) frequently quotes from the canonical books, but not once from any apocryphal book. The Alexandrian Jews in the 2nd century A.D. accepted Aquila's Greek Version (130 A.D.) even though it did not contain the Apocrypha. A more reasonable deduction of these facts is what Jerome says. The Alexandrian Jews chose to include in their edition of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) both the books they recognized as canonical and also the books they regarded as "ecclesiastical" that is, considered valuable and edifying though not inerrant. This view is supported by the discovery of at least two apocryphal books (Ecclesiasticus and Tobith) at Qumran in the heartland of Palestine where the so-called Palestinian Canon should have been authoritative.

- **The New Testament usually employs the Septuagint in its quotations from the Old Testament and since the Septuagint contained the Apocrypha, the apostles must have recognized the authority of the entire Septuagint as it was then constituted.**

It is true that the New Testament sometimes makes appeal to the works outside the Hebrew Palestinian Canon. Only of one quotation (Jude 14-16) has the source (the apocryphal book of Enoch 1:9) survived in the Ethiopian language. In the New Testament there are also quotations from pagan Greek authors. In Acts 17:28 Paul quotes from the Phaenomena of Aratus (line 5). In 1 Corinthians 15:33 he quotes from the comedy Thais of Menander. Surely no one would suppose that quotations as these establish the canonicity of either Aratus or Menander!

On the contrary, the testimony of the New Testament is most decisive against the canonicity of the 14 apocryphal books. The New Testament authors quoted from all 39 Old Testament Books except from Ruth, Ezra, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs (Romans 8:20 seems to reflect Ecclesiastes 1:2). While it is true that mere quotation does not necessarily establish canonicity, it is inconceivable that the New Testament authors could have considered the 14 Apocrypha of the Roman Catholic Canon as canonical and yet never once quoted from them or even alluded to any of them!

- **The Church Fathers quoted from the Apocrypha.**

While some early Christian writers (1 Clement, Epistle of Barnabas and Augustine of Hippo) appear to accept the Apocrypha, others (Athanasius) take a clear stand against the Apocrypha.

This argument is presumptive, because Jude can quote Enoch as containing a true account of one ancient episode without necessarily endorsing the whole book of Enoch as canonical.

Augustine was rather uncritical and even inconsistent. On the one hand he was in favour of including the Apocrypha in the Canon at the Council of Carthage (397 A.D.). On the other hand, when an appeal was made by an antagonist to a passage in 2 Maccabees to settle an argument in his favour, Augustine replied that that person's cause must be weak if he had to resort to a book not in the same category as those received and accepted by the Jews.

Athanasius (276-373)(bishop of Alexandria in 328) was highly regarded by Christians in the East and in the West, discussed in his 39th letter (paragraph 4) "the particular books and their number" and proceeded to enumerate the same books as found in the Masoretic Text and in approximately the same order as in the Protestant Bible. Then (in paragraph 6 and 7) he says that "the extra biblical books (the Apocrypha) were not included in the Canon, but were merely appointed to be read".

The Eastern (Orthodox) Church nevertheless accepted the Apocrypha at the second Trullan Council (692 A.D.). Many Christians in the East continued to have their misgivings about some of the Apocrypha. Finally the Greek (Orthodox) Church in Jerusalem in 1672 narrowed the number of Apocrypha down to four: Wisdom, Ecclesiastes, Tobith and Judith.

- **The 14 Apocrypha included in the Roman Catholic Canon**

- (1) 1 Esdras (150 B.C.) – rebuilding after the exile.
- (2) 2 Esdras (100 A.D.) – seven apocalyptic visions
- (3) Tobith (2nd century B.C.) – Pharisaic novel
- (4) Judith (2nd century B.C.) – Pharisaic novel
- (5) Additions to Esther (100 B.C.) – prayers and letters from Arthaxerxes
- (6) Wisdom of Solomon (40 A.D.) – purposed to keep the Jews from scepticism, materialism and idolatry
- (7) Wisdom of Sirach or Ecclesiasticus ((180 B.C.) – proverbs
- (8) Baruch (100 A.D.) – explains Jerusalem's destruction in 70 A.D.
- (9) History of Susanna (Daniel chapter 13)(1st century B.C.)

- (10) Bel and the Dragon (Daniel chapter 14) (1st century B.C.) – legend
- (11) Song of Three Hebrew Children (added after Daniel 3:22 in the Septuagint and Vulgate)
- (12) Prayer of Manasseh (2nd century B.C.) – purpose to explain 2 Chronicles 33:19
- (13) 1 Maccabees (1st century B.C.) - history of three Maccabean brothers, Judas, Jonathan and Simon and together with Flavius Josephus relates the history between the Old and the New Testaments
- (14) 2 Maccabees (1st century B.C.) – parallel history, but only of Judas Maccabee.

There are other books included under the Apocrypha: the Epistle of Jeremiah, 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees.

▪ **A historical summary of the exclusion of the Apocrypha.**

The philosopher, Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C. to 40 A.D.) quoted from the Old Testament, but never once from the Apocrypha! The historian, Flavius Josephus (37-95 A.D.) described the Canon as consisting of 22 books and says that no other book had been added since 425 B.C.! He excluded all the Apocrypha from the Canon! Jesus Christ (30 A.D.) and his apostles (43-97 A.D.) quote from almost all the 39 books in the Old Testament, but not once from the Apocrypha! The Jewish scholars of Jamnia (90 A.D.) rejected the Apocrypha. No Christian Council during the first 4 centuries A.D. ascribed inspiration to the Apocrypha. Many Church Fathers rejected the Apocrypha, notably Origenes (185-254 A.D.), Athanasius (276-373 A.D.) and Cyrillus (315-386 A.D.). Jerome (340-420 A.D.) translated the Greek Septuagint into the Latin Vulgate, including the Apocrypha, but rejected the Apocrypha as part of the Canon. Many Roman Catholic Scholars rejected the Apocrypha during the Reformation. All leaders of the Reformation rejected the Apocrypha.

▪ **A historical summary of the inclusion of the Apocrypha in the Roman Catholic Canon.**

In 382 A.D. Pope Damasus commissioned Jerome to revise **the Itala** (a Latin translation of the Septuagint completed in 200 A.D.) with reference to the Septuagint. However, Jerome perfected his Hebrew and translated the Old Testament including the Apocrypha (from Hebrew Masoretic text and the Greek Septuagint). His translation received more or less official acceptance as the new, authoritative Latin Bible for the Western Church.

Over the subsequent centuries, the Vulgate was published in parallel columns with the Itala, but also received some corruption from the Itala.

Finally, in **1546** the Roman Catholic **Council of Trent** appointed a commission to produce an expurgated edition of the Vulgate and this indirectly resulted in **the Sixtine Edition of the Vulgate** which was published in 1590. This edition was amended in **the Clementine Edition of the Vulgate** in 1592.

Only after many Roman Catholic scholars had debated against the Apocrypha at **the Council of Trent (1546)**, which was called against the Reformation, the Apocrypha were accepted officially by the Roman Catholic Church as part of the canonical books.

Finally the Greek (Orthodox) Church in Jerusalem in 1672 narrowed the number of Apocrypha down to four: Wisdom, Ecclesiastes, Tobith and Judith.

▪ **Evaluation of the Apocrypha.**

Jesus Christ and the apostles quote from almost every one of the 39 Old Testament books, but not once from the apocryphal books! We must therefore conclude that the Apocryphal books in the Roman Catholic Bible do NOT belong to the original Bible! They are not divinely inspired and they are not authoritative for doctrine or life!

5. Summary of the formation of the Hebrew Canon

Whenever the matter comes up, the biblical authors indicate clearly that the various books of the Bible are canonical from the moment of their inception, by virtue of two reasons:

- the books have divine authority: “Thus says the LORD”.
 - the books received immediate recognition and acceptance by the faithful believers as soon as they were made aware of the writings
- An authoritative copy of the Law was made not long before the death of Moses (1407 B.C.).
 - The Prophets were canonized about 400 B.C. The criterion was that an author had to belong to the prophetic order (Deuteronomy 18:14-22). A prophet either received his revelations directly from God (the prophetic books) or composed an account of the history of salvation from the perspective of God (not man)(the historical books).
 - The Writings were also canonized about 400 B.C. The Writings consist of all the inspired books not belonging to the first two groups.

6. The only true test of canonicity.

What makes a book in the Bible “canonical”? “Canonicity” is the testimony of God the Holy Spirit to the authority of his own Word. This testimony found (and still finds) a response of recognition, faith and submission in the hearts of God’s people who walked (and still walk) in a covenant relationship with him.

If canonicity is a quality somehow imparted to the books of the Bible by any kind of human council or decision (e.g. the Roman Catholic Church and also the liberals) , then perhaps a set of mechanical tests could be set up to determine which writings to accept as authoritative and which to reject. The people who reject the claim of the Bible to be the uniquely inspired revelation of God's will, must necessarily cast about for some more rationalistic, down-to-earth explanations of the origins of these books. Because of their anti-super naturalistic presuppositions, they must be true to their philosophical principles in rejecting all biblical data which testify to direct revelation from God. They must regard statements as "Thus says the LORD" as legendary.

But, if, on the other hand, a sovereign God has taken the initiative in revelation and in the production of an inspired record of that revelation through human agents, it must simply be a matter of recognition of the quality already inherent by divine act in the books so inspired.

When a child recognizes his own parent from a multitude of other adults, he does not impart any new quality of parenthood by such an act. He simply recognizes a relationship which already exists. So also with the list of authoritative books drawn up the councils of the Church. The councils of the Church did not impart canonicity to a single page in the Bible. They simply acknowledged the divine inspiration which were inherently canonical from the time these books were first composed. And they formerly rejected other books (e.g. the Apocrypha) for which canonicity had been falsely claimed.

The biblical authors indicate very clearly that the books of the Bible were canonical from the moment of their inception by virtue of divine authority behind them: "Thus says the Lord". The books received immediate recognition and acceptance by the faithful believers as soon as they were made aware of these writings.

PART IV. THE TRANSMISSION AND TRANSLATION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND THE CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

O. THE TRANSMISSION OF THE COPIES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

1. The original New Testament Greek manuscripts.

The original New Testament documents were probably written on papyrus, a thin and fragile kind of paper made from the reeds of the papyrus plant, which grew in the marshes of Egypt and the Middle East. These documents were inscribed by hand "with pen and ink" (3 John 13). All the original books of the New Testament were written in the Greek language. A hand-written document in the Greek language is called 'a Greek manuscript'.

They were usually transmitted by messengers to the churches or persons for whom they were intended. The letter to the Colossians was probably sent by Tychicus. According to Colossians 4:7-9,16, Paul sent Tychicus for the express purpose that the church may know about his circumstances.

2. The earliest copies and collections of the New Testament books.

The Greek text we possess today has been transmitted to us by making hand-written copies over a period of more than 1400 years until the printing press was invented and used.¹ After many years of use, these hand-written copies would begin to tear and become too old for use. So people carefully made hand-written copies of these original documents. After many more years of use also these hand-written copies became too worn-out for use. So again new hand-written copies were made of these old copies, etc. In this way whole family-trees of manuscripts have come into existence. A specific family-tree of manuscripts can be reconstructed by observing the similarities and differences in the manuscripts.

Although we no longer possess the infallible original documents of the various books of the New Testament, nevertheless very ancient copies have been preserved which are less than two hundred and fifty years to the time of original composition. These ancient copies are very much closer to the date of the originals than is the case of any other ancient historical or religious records! Thus Christians have great confidence in the reliability of the New Testament documents!

Copies of the original Gospels and the original Letters of Paul must have been made and circulated at an early date. In 2 Peter 3:2,15-16, the apostle Peter knows of the Gospels and the Letters of Paul. He speaks of "the words given by the Lord through his different apostles", and also of "all the letters of Paul". It is probable that the two Gospels (Matthew and Mark) and the thirteen Letters of Paul were already transmitted as two collections by the year A.D. 64, because they never appear as single documents in manuscript form!

One church father, Justin Martyr, writes that by about A.D. 140 the Gospel of Luke was separated from Acts and combined with the other three Gospels to make 'a fourfold life of Christ'. The General Letters and Revelation did not

¹ The printing of books was invented in Haarlem (Netherlands) (possibly by Lourens Coster) in the year 1440 and was improved in Mainz (Germany) by Johannes Gutenberg in the year 1450.

belong to any collection, because they do not appear in the same sequence in the works of the earliest church fathers. They were gradually drawn into the larger collection with the others, until the whole New Testament as it now exists, emerged in the early third century.

3. The copying of the New Testament books.

The books of the New Testament were first copied either by private individuals for their private use or by professional scribes (writers) for churches and monasteries. Usually, copies were made one at a time. As the demand increased, it is likely that trained slaves transcribed a number of copies simultaneously from dictation. In the process of transcription, errors crept into the manuscripts and these errors were perpetuated by later copyists, so that a large number of variants of copies appeared. However, the fact that we have so very many copies of the New Testament books makes it probable that the original text would be preserved in some of these copies.

After Christianity virtually became the state religion of the Roman Empire in A.D. 313, the emperor Constantine ordered that 50 copies of the whole Bible should be made and distributed to the larger churches in the cities of the Empire. These copies became the so-called “authorised editions” and served as the text which was copied by thousands afterwards.

Between the fourth and twelfth centuries, the New Testament was published either in portions such as the Gospels or the Letters of Paul, or occasionally in complete volumes of the whole New Testament or the whole Bible! Because papyrus was too frail for use in public services or in monastery libraries, the scribes (writers) generally used thin sheets of calfskin (called vellum) or sheepskin (called parchment) to write on. These materials were used until the age of printing in the fifteenth century.

P. THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE GREEK TEXT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

There are greater resources for reconstructing the original Greek text of the New Testament than for any other (historical-, literary-, or religious-) document in any language of the classic age! Three types of sources are presently available:

- Many Greek manuscripts of the New Testament
- Many early translations from the Greek text
- Many writings of the church fathers, who quote the New Testament

1. The great number of Greek manuscripts.

▪ Fragments of manuscripts.

The oldest fragments of the New Testament are a fragment of the Gospel of Mark 6:52-53 dated before A.D. 50 and fragments of the Gospel of John 18:31-34,37-38 dated A.D. 130! This proves that the Gospel of Mark was probably the first Gospel and that the Gospel of John was written before A.D. 100. The Chester Beatty Papyri contain a large part of the New Testament and is dated A.D. 200-250.

▪ Manuscripts with majuscule writing².

The oldest volumes of the New Testament are written in large (printed/block capital) letters (called majuscule or uncials) between the fourth and eighth centuries A.D. Three volumes are especially important, namely:

- The Codex Vaticanus (designated with an “B”), which contains almost the whole New Testament and is dated A.D. 325-350
- The Codex Sinaiticus (designated with an “Aleph”), which contains almost the whole New Testament and half of the Old Testament and is dated A.D. 350
- And the Codex Alexandrinus (designated with an “A”) which contains almost the whole Bible and is dated A.D. 400.

They were made for public reading in the churches and were copied very carefully.

▪ Manuscripts with minuscule writing³.

The other volumes of the New Testament are written in small cursive letters between the tenth and fifteenth centuries A.D. Today we possess about 5000 Greek manuscripts of the Greek New Testament!

2. The very early translations from the Greek text.

Christians spread the gospel to many countries, both towards the West and the East. Therefore the Greek New Testament was translated into Latin, the main language in the western part of the Roman Empire and Syrian, the main language in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. They were translated between A.D. 150-200 and were thus based on Greek manuscripts that were older than any Greek manuscript that now survives. Translations help to ascertain the contents and exact meaning of the underlying Greek text.

² Majuscule writing = rounded unjoined letters (uncials) found in manuscripts of 4th – 8th century from which modern capitals are largely derived.

³ Minuscule writing = a kind of cursive script developed in 7th century from which modern lower-case letters are derived.

- **Earliest translations of the Greek New Testament.**

Translations of the Greek New Testament have been made between the second and fourth centuries A.D. into the following languages: Latin, Syrian, three Egyptian languages (including Coptic), Gothic, Armenian, Ethiopian, Georgian and Arabic. Today we possess about 1000 documents of these other earlier translations of the New Testament!

- **Later Latin translations of the Greek New Testament.**

In A.D. 384 the church father Jerome translated a standard Latin text based on the oldest existing Greek text and this was called **the Vulgate** or Common Version. This text was revised by Alcuin in the eighth century and again by the University of Paris in the thirteenth century before it was declared to be the standard text of the Roman Catholic Church in A.D. 1546. In the early thirteenth century, Stephen Langton (archbishop of Canterbury) divided the Bible into chapters. Today we possess about 8000 manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate.

3. The writings of the church fathers.

The church fathers were the leaders and teachers of Christianity during the first six centuries. They used the language of the Greek New Testament freely in their sermons and their writings. Together the church fathers quoted all the verses except 11 of the whole New Testament! This is amazing!

4. The trustworthiness of the Greek New Testament.

- **The number of manuscripts.**

The most ancient historical books in the West we possess are from Herodotus and Thucydides and are from the 5th century B.C. While we only possess 8 manuscripts of each of these, we have 5000 manuscripts of the Greek New Testament, 1000 manuscripts of the earlier translations of the New Testament and 8000 manuscripts of the Latin New Testament! Thus the text of the New Testament has been preserved better than any other (historical-, literary- or religious-) document of the ancient world!

- **The time interval between copies and their originals.**

The oldest historical books in the West, Herodotus and Thucydides, are from the 5th century B.C., but the oldest copies we have of them are from A.D. 900. While the time interval between the writing of these books and the date of their earliest extant copies is 1300 years, the time interval between the New Testament originals and their oldest extant copies is only 250 years! While classical scholars of history do not doubt the authenticity of the text of Herodotus and Thucydides, the reliability of the New Testament text is many times greater!

- **The accuracy of the transcription (copying) of the text.**

The greatest Epic in the West is 'the Iliad' and we possess 643 copies of it. Next to the New Testament, there are more extant copies of the Iliad than any other book of ancient times. Both books are considered sacred and both underwent some changes in their text through copying. But, while 764 lines of the 15600 lines of the Iliad are questioned, only 40 lines of the 20000 lines of the New Testament are questioned, that is 250 times less! However, not one of these 40 lines or 400 words which are questioned in the New Testament Greek text affects either the doctrine or life of Christianity, because it is supported by other parts of the New Testament which stand above any doubt!

We must therefore conclude that from the standpoint of literary evidence, the reliability of the New Testament Greek text is stronger than that of any other ancient written document in the whole world! Scholars are satisfied that we possess substantially the true text of the Greek New Testament.

Q. THE CANON OR LIST OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

1. The books which truly belong to the New Testament.

The books which are regarded as truly belonging to the New Testament are called 'canonical'. The word 'canon' means a straight reed or ruler used as a measuring stick. Applied to literature, the word 'canon' means the list of books which conform to the standard of divine inspiration and authority.

The books of the New Testament say very clearly that they were inspired by God. Jesus says that in John 14:26 and John 15:26-27 and the apostles Paul and Peter say that in 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20-21. In 2 Timothy 3:16 is written, "All Scripture is God-breathed (inspired)". Thus, whatever was given by inspiration of God was Scripture, and whatever did not come by inspiration of God was not Scripture. Scripture is the written record of the inspired and authoritative words of God. The Apostolic Church, that is, the early Christian Church, considered 27 books of the New Testament Scripture as 'canonical', that is, as divinely inspired and authoritative for what we should believe and how we should live.

The books which are not regarded as belonging to the New Testament are called 'apocryphal'. The word 'apocryphal' means 'hidden' and implies that their origin, message and inspiration are invented or of doubtful authenticity.

2. Inspiration is demonstrated by three facts.

- **Inspiration is demonstrated by the contents of a book.**

All the New Testament books have as their central subject the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Four Gospels record his life, his works and his words. The book of Acts records the effects of Jesus Christ in the history of the world. The Letters record the theological and practical teachings based on complete dependency on Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. The book of Revelation records the relationship of Jesus Christ to the present and future of this world.

However, ‘the apocryphal Gospels’ and ‘the apocryphal Acts’ are more concerned with miracle-making than with teaching. And ‘the apocryphal letters’ are pieces taken from the canonical letters. In precision of narrative, in depth of teaching, and in concentration on the person of Jesus Christ, there is a discernible difference between the canonical and apocryphal books.

- **Inspiration is demonstrated by the effect of a book.**

All literature may record human thought. But while some literature may *influence* human thought profoundly, the New Testament books *transform* human thought, values, behaviour and direction of life. The ethical and spiritual effect of the New Testament books are so great, that wherever its message is proclaimed and received, the Church expanded and brought with it a moral and spiritual cleansing of society! An unbridgeable chasm exists between the moral and spiritual standards of paganism and that of the New Testament books!

- **Inspiration is demonstrated by the agreement of the internal testimony of a book with the external testimony of those who use it.**

The test of the divine message and the moral power of these books cannot be applied successfully by a single individual in a limited sphere (for example: by one prophet, in one country and within one century). Testimonies with respect to the inspiration of the Bible books should be made by many different people, living in different places over a great period of time. When the internal testimony of the books themselves and the external testimony of many different people who use them over a great period of time agree that they are works of God, then the criteria of canonicity are made surer. This is explained in the following two points:

3. The internal testimony of the New Testament that it is inspired by God.

From the beginning, the message concerning Christ was passed on from one person to another as ‘the word of God’. Galatians 1:11-12 says that “the gospel is not something that man made up”, but it has been “received by revelation from Jesus Christ”. 1 Corinthians 15:1-3 says that the gospel which the apostle Paul received, he preached and passed on to others. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 says that the message was received by the hearers “as the word of God” and according to 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17, it produced a lasting effect on those who believed it.

The apostles regarded their writings as the inspired and authoritative word of God and warned people against disobedience. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 4:2,8 the apostle says, “You know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. He who rejects this instruction does not reject man, but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.” In 2 Thessalonians 3:14 he says, “If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him and do not associate with him”. In 1 Corinthians 14:37-38 he says, “If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored (by God).”

The collection of the Letters of Paul became canonical very early, because 2 Peter 3:15-16 alluded to it as a body of literature that should be received as “the other Scriptures”. The fact that even the apostle Peter wrestled with their contents and the ignorant and unstable people distorted them proves that they were authoritative. If they were not authoritative, nobody would have paid attention to them!

4. The external testimony of the early church fathers, the formal canons and the church councils.

- **The external witness of the church fathers.**

The earliest church fathers between A.D. 95 and A.D. 150, all quoted from the New Testament books. They were disciples of the apostles themselves or of their students. Justin Martyr lived from A.D. 100-165 and he referred to the Four Gospels, Acts, 8 Letters of Paul, 1 Peter and Revelation by name. He stated that the Gospels were read every Sunday in the church service along with the Old Testament. Irenaeus lived about A.D. 170 and was a student of Polycarp, who was a student of the apostle John. He referred to all the books of the New Testament except Philemon and 3 John.

- **The external witness of the formal canons.**

The Muratorian Canon is an unofficial list of New Testament books and is dated A.D. 170. It includes all the books of the New Testament except the General Letters of Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter. The Festal Letter of Athanasius in A.D. 367 distinguishes sharply between on the one hand “the God-inspired Scripture ... handed down to our fathers by those who were eye-witnesses and servants of the word from the beginning” and on the other hand “the secret writings

of heretics". He stated that only the 27 books of our New Testament is "God-inspired Scripture" and says that "these are springs of salvation. Let no one add to them or take away from them."

- **The external witness of the church councils.**

These church councils were meetings of representatives of all the Christian churches. At the Council of Laodicea in A.D. 363, the subject of the canonical books was discussed for the first time. This council decided that only the canonical books of the New Testament should be read in the church services. The Council of Carthage in A.D. 397 made the same decision and added a clear list of the 27 books in our New Testament as being canonical. The Council of Hippo in A.D. 419 repeated the same decision and the same canonical list.

5. The books which do not belong to the New Testament (the "Apocrypha")

While all the New Testament Books were written before the end of the 1st century A.D., some false prophets wrote apocryphal Gospels, apocryphal Acts, apocryphal Letters and apocryphal Apocalypses since the middle of the second century A.D. claiming that these were originals.⁴ "Apocryphal" means "of doubtful authenticity".

- **Apocryphal Gospels.**

- The Protevangelium of James (second century A.D.)

The Protevangelium of James is a so-called "Infancy Gospel" writing about the birth of the Virgin Mary and the childhood of Jesus Christ. It included the following: The birth and infancy of Mary. Mary became the wife of Joseph through the lot. The pregnant Mary stood the test of innocence. Mary and Joseph slept in a cave on their way to Bethlehem. The midwife Salome's hand was healed by picking up the child Jesus. The mountain split and hid Elisabeth and John the Baptist during the slaughter at Bethlehem. Zacharias was slain, his body was never found, but his blood they found had turned into stone.

- The Gospel of Thomas (second century A.D.)

The Gospel of Thomas is a so-called "Infancy Gospel" writing about the childhood of Jesus Christ. It included the following: Jesus as a five year old boy turned 12 clay sparrows on a sabbath into living birds by clapping his hands. Jesus in anger withered a boy who had spoilt his playing with water. Jesus was provoked to cause a boy to die who had bumped into him (or had thrown a stone at him). Jesus in vexation smote his accusers with blindness. Joseph pinched the ear of Jesus. Joseph took Jesus to a teacher Zacchaeus to teach him the letters of the alphabet, but Jesus derided them saying he existed before the creation. So Jesus became his master. Jesus cursed the Jews and they became maimed and then he healed them all. After a boy Zeno was pushed from the roof and died, Jesus jumped down and raised him from the dead; Jesus healed a bleeding foot cut by an axe. Jesus as a six year old boy accidentally broke the water pitcher, but then filled his garment with water to bring to his mother. Jesus as an eight year old boy sowed one corn of wheat, but reaped a hundred measures, which he gave to the poor of the village. Jesus took hold of one end of a wooden beam and stretched it longer so that his father could complete the bed he was making. Jesus in wrath cursed and then struck another teacher dead after he had tried to teach Jesus the letters of the Greek and Hebrew alphabet and had beaten him on the head. Jesus taught the Law by the Holy Spirit so that everyone listening marvelled and then he healed the teacher he had killed. His brother James was bitten by a viper when he was gathering wood, but Jesus breathed upon the wound, the pain ceased, the viper burst and James continued to live as before. Jesus raised a small child in the neighbourhood from the dead. Jesus raised a builder from the dead. Jesus as a twelve year old child silenced the Jewish elders and teachers and expounded the Law and the Prophets.

These apocryphal Gospels were written by ignorant men, because the Bible clearly teaches that *the first miracle of Jesus* was turning water into wine after he was thirty years old (John 2:11)!

- **Apocryphal Acts.**

The Acts of John, Acts of Paul, Acts of Peter, Acts of Andrew and the Acts of Thomas in the second and third century A.D.

- **Apocryphal Letters.**

The Epistle of the Apostles, about 160 A.D.

- **Apocryphal Apocalypses.**

The Apocalypse of Peter in second century A.D. and the Apocalypse of Paul in the fourth century A.D.

All these New Testament apocryphal books are of doubtful authenticity. Like the Old Testament apocryphal books, these New Testament apocryphal books have never been accepted as a part of the Christian canon or list of books which are regarded as inspired and authoritative for doctrine and life.

⁴ The Apocryphal New Testament, Montague Rhodes James, Oxford, at the Clarendon Press. 1960
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▪ Forgeries.

- The Gospel of Judas⁵, a forgery of the late second century A.D. written by Gnostics. Gnosticism is the belief that the created world was evil, and was totally separate from and in opposition to the world of the spirit. Similar teachings are found in Hinduism. It is a Christian heresy denounced by the Church Fathers in the early Christian centuries.
- The Gospel of Barnabas⁶, a forgery of the fifteenth century A.D. written in Italian by a renegade from Christianity to Islam.⁷

6. The only true test if a book belongs to the New Testament or not.

How did Christians know which books belonged to the list of Old Testament books?

In 2 Peter 1:20-21 we read, "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." In 2 Timothy 3:16 we read, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." The Bible clearly says that it is God the Holy Spirit who inspired the books in the Bible. Therefore it is clear that only the inspiration of the Holy Spirit makes a book a part of the canon or lists of books which are divinely inspired and authoritative for doctrine and life.

A man or a human council can never decide if a particular book is divinely inspired and authoritative for doctrine and life or not. The only thing a human council can do is to recognise the quality already inherent by God's act in the books so inspired! When a child recognises his own parent from a multitude of other adults, he does not impart any new quality of parenthood to his parent by such an act. He simply recognises a relationship which already exists.

The same is true of the canon or list of authoritative Bible books which were drawn up by the early Christian councils. The Christian councils did not impart divine inspiration and authority to a single page of the Bible. They simply recognised and acknowledged the divine inspiration and authority of these religious documents, which were inherently divinely inspired and authoritative from the time they were written. In the same way, the early Christian councils rejected other books for which divine inspiration and authority had been falsely claimed!

⁵ Read the article on the Internet: "The Gospel of Judas", Wikipedia.

⁶ Read the article on the Internet: "The Gospel of Barnabas", by Samuel Green.

⁷ The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam, Harper and Row.1989, p 64. The Muslim scholar Cyril Glassé states: As regards the "Gospel of Barnabas" itself, there is no question that it is a medieval forgery. A complete Italian manuscript exists which appears to be a translation from a Spanish original (which exists in part), written to curry favor with Muslims of the time. It contains anachronisms which can date only from the Middle Ages and not before, and shows a garbled comprehension of Islamic doctrines, calling the Prophet "the Messiah", which Islam does not claim for him. Besides its farcical notion of sacred history, stylistically it is a mediocre parody of the Gospels, as the writings of Baha'Allah are of the Koran.