

HOW WE GOT THE BIBLE

HOW LOOSE HAND-WRITTEN LETTERS BECAME ONE AUTHORITATIVE BOOK

History of the Bible Part One
(30-200AD)

Many in our day try to undermine the Bible by claiming that corrupt men had a hand in it from the very beginning. One argument goes that the Catholic church decided which books should be included in the Bible at the Council of Nicea in 325AD. Others argue that books that should have been included were left out and some which were included are untrustworthy. And then there is a group who have claimed that actually the text was penned a generation or two after the disciples died and therefore corruption could have been present in the first writing already.

INTRODUCTION

The Bible was founded on the fact that God chose certain men as vessels for His work. He gave these men authority and marked them out by the supernatural demonstration of His power. It was their writings alone which were considered worthy of forming the scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

Our discussion will disprove 3 common false claims:

- Books that should have been included were left out and some which were included are untrustworthy.
- The New Testament was penned a generation or two after the apostles died.
- The Catholic church decided which books should be included in the Bible at the Council of Nicea in 325AD.

STRUCTURE OF OUR DISCUSSION

We will begin our discussion by looking at the question of authority – who had the God-given right to write the individual letters which finally made up the Bible? Next we will plot when and how these loose letters found acceptance and became a closed collection of scripture we now call the Bible. Finally we will look at how modern findings prove the trustworthiness of the text.

Our discussion therefore has the following sections:

- *Section One:* The authority of the God-Breathed Word
- *Section Two:* Apostolic authorship of the New Testament
- *Section Three:* How apostolic letters were gradually grouped
- *Section Four:* A closed canon of Scripture
- *Section Five:* Can we trust the Bible?

Section One: THE AUTHORITY OF THE GOD-BREATHED WORD

In this section we will discuss who gave the Biblical authors the authority to write portions of the eventual Bible.

GOD IS THE TRUE AUTHOR OF THE BIBLE

The Bible displays supernatural authority like no other text. One of the ways it does this is through an ability to predict future events accurately, sometimes millennia ahead of time. Collectively it contains more than 2000 fulfilled prophecies! We don't mean vague predictions either, but specific names, dates and details are given that can be measured and tested. There is no other text that has ever even begun to evidence this sort of absolute knowledge of future events. **This trait alone proves that the Bible is inspired by a God who exists outside the limitation of time, a God**

who tells us what will happen, and nothing and no one can prevent it – a God like no other. We will go into examples and evidence of this in another piece, namely:

The Supernatural Character of the Bible
<https://www.godsessions.com/evidence-for-the-bible>

When this God offers us His Word, He alone has the authority to choose what is written in it and who He will use to write it. He both establishes it and preserves it through history. It is God's book – not man's.

SACRED TEXTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Every one of the Old Testament writers was chosen by God, and that fact was evidenced in the supernatural power of the Almighty upon their lives. Whether He used them to foretell future events, or to display His miraculous power through, these men were singled out as God's men. We think of Jeremiah, to whom God said:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I sanctified you, I ordained you a prophet to the nations.” – Jeremiah 1:5

Then there was Noah who spent a full 100 years preparing a boat, because the Lord had warned him of a worldwide flood. For all that time men mocked him because of his ridiculous delusion. And yet we will show in another piece just how much scientific evidence supports the fact of a world-wide catastrophic flood, see:

The Scientific Accuracy of the Bible
<https://www.godsessions.com/evidence-for-the-bible>

Take Moses as another example: After 40 years of isolation in the desert, God appeared to this one poor, stuttering man. That encounter made him brave enough to walk into the great Pharaoh's halls demanding (with no army or weapons, except the supporting authority of his God), that the Israelite slaves be set free. Egypt absolutely refused, but the hand of God plagued them until they gave the Israelites great riches and begged them to leave. Go all through Moses' life and you see miracle after miracle. These marked him out as God's man, and mouthpiece.

In Daniel we have another form of God's power on display. He was offered numerous visions and dreams of events hundred and even thousands of years ahead of his time. He accurately predicted the rise and fall of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and the Roman Empire. He even foretold the exact year when Jesus Christ would begin His earthly ministry (600 years before it came to pass). And so this man was marked out as God's own.

We could go on listing all the prophets, kings and men of God whose acts were done in full view of the world's great nations and kings, so that even secular history and archaeology confirm Biblical history. We discuss the vast evidence of this in another piece, namely:

Historical Evidence behind the Bible
<https://www.godsessions.com/evidence-for-the-bible>

It was these men who demonstrated the foreknowledge and power of God on their lives, who were used to write the Old Testament text. Their writings were preserved and carefully re-written, using an extremely rigorous process of checks and balances, to ensure that no error crept in over time. The Jewish means of preserving what we now call the Old Testament is unrivalled in all of human history for their almost fanatical – or should we say God-fearing – care.

The Coming Messiah

But of all the Old Testament prophecies, none is more impressive or important than those of the coming Messiah. Scattered from the first book to the last, we find no less than 300 details about Him.

We are told He would come from the tribe of Judah, be born in Bethlehem, travel to and back from Egypt and bring light to Galilee. We are told He would speak in parables, open blind eyes, be rejected by His people and hated without a cause. We are told He would ride into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey and be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, which

would be used to buy a potter's field. He would be forsaken by His friends, falsely accused, spat upon, struck and mocked. They would pierce His hands, feet and side and cast lots for His clothes. He would die with sinners, be buried with the rich and rise from the dead and so much more.

Two scientists calculated the statistical likelihood of any man fulfilling just 8 of the prophecies of Him and determined there to be a chance of one in 100 000 000 000 000 000. And that is for only 8 of the actual 300 which all came to pass. Without any question then, everything He would do, be and endure was foreknown by God, and told to His prophets more than 400 years before it ever came to pass.

And when this Messiah finally came, a new era of God's work with mankind began. Before we discuss that, it is of interest that Jesus Christ never made any correction to the collection of Old Testament scriptures the Israelites were using. Instead He quoted from them repeatedly – even when rebuking Satan – which confirmed beyond any doubt that the Old Testament was both true and approved by God.

SACRED TEXTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

When it comes to the New Testament, we find that God-given authority to write the scriptures rests on exactly the same principal as the Old Testament. The only difference being that **in the New Testament, it is through Jesus Christ that we trace that authority.** This is because Jesus Christ walked the earth as God manifest as a man.

“God was manifested in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16).

“For in Him [Christ] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” – Colossians 2:9

We will go into the Biblical fact of Jesus' divinity in far more detail in another piece, namely:

The Centrality of Christ

<https://www.godsessions.com/clear-christianity>

It was Jesus Christ then, who called out and chose the men He would use as vessels to write the New Testament scriptures. He called these men apostles.

“...[Jesus Christ] called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles” – Luke 6:13

To those apostles He gave the authority to teach men His gospel:

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” – Matthew 28:18b-20

“...the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering” – Acts 1:2-3a

Apostles then were the ones with the God-given authority to lay down the foundations of the Christian faith and write it's scriptures.

*“Now, therefore, you are... fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone**” – Ephesians 2:20*

*“Paul, called to be **an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God...** According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder **I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it.**” – 1 Corinthians 1:1, 3:10*

“Let a man so consider us [Apostles], as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” – 1 Corinthians 4:1

We need to know who these apostles were, so that we can check that against the writings of the New Testament.

THE CHOSEN APOSTLES

Jesus began His ministry by selecting 12 apostles, but by the time of His resurrection that number had grown. These men exhibited certain characteristics to identify them, let's briefly go through these:

Criterion 1:

They had witnessed the resurrected Lord before His ascension.

Only a very limited number of men fell into this group. Paul goes through the list of just over 500 men who witnessed the Lord after His resurrection (before His ascension), in his letter to the church at Corinth.

*“He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas (Peter), then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once... After that He was seen by James [Jesus’ half-brother], then by all the apostles. Then **last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.**” – 1 Corinthians 15:4-8*

In calling himself, “one born out of due time,” Paul is referring to the fact that he was the only apostle in that list who witnessed the Lord after His ascension – essentially after the window of opportunity for being named an apostle had closed. But Jesus made a remarkable exception to appear to Paul personally. Though he entered their ranks last and in a peculiar way, the three main apostles, (Peter, John and James) all confirmed that he was called of God and chosen as one of their rank. Besides that, all the other Biblical evidence shows that he was not an inferior apostles in any way – possibly he was the most powerfully used of them all.

Criterion 2:

*Each one was personally chosen as an apostle by Jesus Christ
(just as the Old Testament prophets were chosen by God).*

We have shown how Jesus chose the first of the apostles. This pattern continued in the others and last of all in Paul.

“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” – Acts 13:2

“Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father...)” – Galatians 1:1a

Criterion 3:

*The supernatural power of God rested on their lives to publicly confirm them before men
(just as with the Old Testament prophets).*

And finally, there was the witness of God, approving them as His chosen men. He did this by performing exceptional signs and wonders through them. Peter, for example, had such an extraordinary healing ministry that:

“they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.” – Acts 5:15

Paul exhibited the same traits, raising a man from the dead, being unharmed by a venomous snake bite and more.

“(for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me [Paul] toward the Gentiles). – Galatians 2:8

*“Truly **the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you** with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.” – 2 Corinthians 12:12*

“For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much

assurance...” – 1 Thessalonians 1:5a

“And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” – 1 Corinthians 2:4

So we conclude then that these men were given their authority by Jesus Christ. That is why they had the God-given right to write the scriptures and establish the church, who:

“continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” – Acts 2:42

Now let’s have a look at how apostolic authority relates to the collection of letters we find in the New Testament.

Section Two: APOSTOLIC AUTHORSHIP OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

In this section we will show how the apostles’ authority rested on those texts which eventually found their way into the New Testament. And that every text with such authority was included.

WE KNOW PETER, JOHN, JAMES, MATTHEW & PAUL BUT WHO WERE THE OTHERS?

It should come as no surprise at this point, that all the writings known to be written by approved apostles, finally found their way into the Bible. This includes the writings of Peter (2 letters), John (5 letters), James (1 letter) and Matthew (1 letter) along with all the letters of Paul (14 letters). We know of only one lost letter of Paul. That means that of the 27 letters which make up the New Testament, 23 are written by well known and confirmed apostles. That leaves us with 3 writers which we need to discuss, namely: Mark, Luke and Jude. Who were these men?

Mark wrote a gospel *(Peter’s interpreter and scribe)*

Mark was converted as a young man when Peter preached at his mother’s house. He then went on one of Paul’s mission trips, and later became the travelling companion of Barnabas, but most of his time was spent following Peter. Mark was very well acquainted with Peter’s testimony of the years he walked with Jesus Christ. Mark was also Peter’s interpreter and scribe, and so his gospel account was written under Peter’s apostolic eye and possibly on his behalf.

Papias, a follower of the Apostle John, (also known as “the Elder”), gives us historical details about this gospel.

“The Elder [John] used to say this also: ‘Mark, having been the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately all that he (Peter) mentioned, whether sayings or doings of Christ, not, however, in order. For he was neither a hearer nor a companion of the Lord; but afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who adapted his teachings as necessity required, not as though he were making a compilation of the sayings of the Lord. So then Mark made no mistake, writing down in this way some things as he (Peter) mentioned them; for he paid attention to this one thing, not to omit anything that he had heard, not to include any false statement among them.’” – McDowell, Josh. Evidence that Demands a Verdict.

Mark’s gospel can be dated as possibly the first New Testament book, with surviving fragments of copies from 50AD. His gospel is considered worthy of inclusion into the New Testament because of Peter’s apostolic oversight, the approval of the apostle John and the acceptance it had among the churches even during the era when Peter, Paul and many other apostles were still alive and preaching (and could therefore easily have exposed errors if they found any).

Luke wrote a gospel and Acts *(Paul’s travelling companion and historian)*

Luke, similarly, was Paul’s travelling companion. He was the one who stood faithfully by the apostle’s side when all others abandoned him at the end of his life. Luke witnessed Paul’s missionary trips first hand, and wrote the accounts in

the book of Acts. Before that, Luke also wrote a gospel, probably compiling the story from multiple apostle's accounts along with those of Jesus's brother, James. He was a very careful historian, recording meticulous details in his text.

Paul's apostolic oversight of Luke would have played a big role in the church accepting the authority of his writings. We might add that his texts were historical in nature (not revelatory). In other words, Luke was not establishing any doctrine, simply recording the words and deeds of those who were anointed to establish doctrine. Our earliest surviving fragment of a copy of Luke's letters is from the book of Acts. It has been dated to just after Paul's martyrdom which means that both his books would have been written while at Paul's side. Only a generation later, in 100AD, Justin Martyr made multiple references to how the four "gospels of the apostles," were being read in the churches every week for as long as time allowed. So we know that all four gospels were accepted by the church right from the beginning.

Jude wrote an apostolic epistle *(An apostle and the half-brother of Jesus)*

That leaves us finally with the book of Jude which is placed as the last apostolic letter and is very nearly the shortest book in the New Testament. Jude opens with a clue as to who he is, calling himself the brother of James.

"Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James" – Jude 1:1

James lead the church in Jerusalem alongside Peter. This James, with Peter and John, were the ones who gave Paul the right hand of apostolic fellowship (Galatians 2:9). But this is not the James we know from the gospels. That James was the first of the apostles to be martyred by King Herod in roughly 45AD (see Acts 12:2). The James in question here, was the half-brother of Jesus. We know for certain that he was an apostle and key leader in Jerusalem. But Acts 1:14 tells us of Jesus' brothers who were apostles, which means that there were at least two of them. We also know the names of His half-brothers. One was indeed called James and another, Jude or Judas (they are spelled the same in Greek).

"Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?" – Mark 6:3

The early church adopted this letter as New Testament scripture because Jude was both an apostle and Jesus' brother.

THE NEW TESTAMENT APOSTOLIC TEXT

Therefore we conclude that **the entire New Testament was either written by chosen apostles themselves or by their scribes. No text that was written outside of apostolic authority was considered inspired by God in the same way. This is where the line was drawn between what belonged in the collection of inspired scripture and what did not.** All the known writings of approved apostles were included, no matter how minor they seemed to be. And any writings by later Christians were considered to have less authority and therefore could not be added to the eventual Bible.

First false claim disproved

This clearly explains why it is false to argue that books were left out or included in the New Testament incorrectly. To say that is to deny the authority of God to select what He deemed fit for His Word. **Only those text which bore the marks of God's authority had any right to find their way into the Bible.**

Exclusion of known forgeries

Some may argue, well then what of the Gospel of Judas or the Revelation of Peter, were they not apostles too? Why were their writings excluded? The reason these letters were rejected is because they were known forgeries. From around 100AD a number of new letters arrived on the scene, claiming to be written by the apostles, when in actual fact they were written by Gnostics or other anti-Christian groups. These men knew that Christians only followed the apostles and therefore, in an attempt to infiltrate the church with their own distorted doctrines, they falsely claimed apostolic authorship for their texts. But three things exposed their attempts:

- Their letters all appeared after the deaths of the apostles, since while they were still alive they would easily have exposed the lie.
- They all contained doctrine which contradicted the writings of the apostles and so exposed their devious nature.

- In the case of a great many of them, the early church actually knew who had penned the text, therefore they also knew they were not apostolic.

Now let's take a look at the following quote from roughly 170AD:

*“There is also in circulation a letter to the Laodecians and another to the Alexandrians, forged in Paul’s name for the dissenting group of Marconion, as well as several others that cannot be accepted by the whole church everywhere, for it will not do to mix gall with honey. Certainly the letter of Jude and two bearing the name of John are accepted by the whole church... **The Shepherd was written very recently in our times (140-155AD) by Hermas of Rome when his brother Pius occupied the chair of the church at Rome... yet to the end of time, it cannot be read aloud to the people in the church either with the prophets, who’s number is complete, or with the apostles.**” – Muratorian Canon*

Notice two things here, firstly that because the Shepherd of Hermes was written after the apostolic age (100AD), it could not be considered of equal value as the apostolic writings. And also how certain letters were **known forgeries**. Exposing the “gall” of these false texts became a key reason behind the eventual declaration of an official Christian canon of scripture. We will come back to this point in a moment,

For now, let's move on to how Christians began to make their own collections of the apostolic letters right at the beginning of church history.

Section Three: HOW APOSTOLIC LETTERS WERE GRADUALLY GROUPED

In this section we will go through the first three generations of the early church, showing how the apostles letters were circulated. Christians then began to collect these letters until we find nearly complete New Testaments being bound together as one book with the Old Testament. By 200AD Christians had access to basically all of the 27 letters which now form our New Testaments.

THE ORGANIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE BIBLE

To track how the Bible gradually developed into its finished form, we need to look at the many surviving writings from the very earliest days of Christianity. These give us a wonderful picture of the church after the Biblical era closed. It is from these sources that we discover how quickly the letters of the apostles began to circulate. John, Paul, James and Peter all encouraged that their letters should be shared amongst the churches, and the evidence shows that they were.

“I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.” – 1 Thessalonians 5:27

It might be helpful to start by establishing a timeline of the Apostolic Era to fit our information into:

- 30AD – Jesus was crucified
- 33AD – Stephen was the first martyr
- 34AD – Paul was converted
- 45AD – James was martyred, Peter was imprisoned and freed by angels
- 54AD – Phillip was martyred
- 60AD – Matthew was martyred
- 65AD – Nero’s persecution of the church kills Peter and Paul
- 68AD – James (Jesus’ brother) and Mark were martyred
- 70AD – The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed
- 72AD – Jude and Thomas were martyred
- 73AD – Barnabas was martyred
- 81AD – Domitian’s persecution of the church banishes John to the Isle of Patmos
- 95AD – John return from Patmos
- 100AD – The death of John and close of the apostolic era

Evidence of a collection of apostolic letters made by Clement between 70-99AD

Even before the last apostle died in 100AD, we find a letter by Clement who was the leader of the church in Rome. It is dated somewhere between 70 and 99AD (which is the year Clement died). His letter has 95 quotes from 10 different New Testament apostolic letters (or books as they are now known). He refers to them as “scriptures” (which means sacred or inspired writings), which shows that he believed them to be God-breathed Word. This letter takes quotes from the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, I Corinthians, I Peter, Hebrews, Titus and at least two others. And if we look further into Clement’s whole collection of writings, we find that he quoted from an astounding 22 of the eventual 27 letters which formed the New Testament! **That makes him familiar with 80% of New Testament – even during the Apostolic age.**

This is even more impressive when you consider that the churches were spread out and transportation was slow, difficult and sometimes perilous. And Clement lived in Rome, which was a long way from where most of Paul’s letters originated and even further from Jerusalem.

Evidence of churches being familiar with multiple apostolic letters even before 65AD

But let’s go back to before Clement’s era, to a quote from the Bible. In Peter’s second letter he writes to the many churches in Asia Minor which the apostle Paul established. Notice in this quote how Peter expects these churches to be familiar with – not one or two – but all of Paul’s letters.

“...as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.” – 2 Peter 3:15b-1

Peter assumes that Paul’s letters have already been well copied and circulated before the year 65AD, since that was the date of Roman Emperor Nero’s persecution, during which both Peter and Paul were martyred.

Further evidence of circulated letters dated before 68AD

The discovery made in cave 7 of the Dead Sea Scrolls was of New Testament fragments dating back to no later than 68AD. The caves were sealed in that year to protect them from a Roman invasion which swept through the area. They have now become definitive proof of the early origins of New Testament writings.

Amongst them were found fragments of 4 separate copies of the Gospel of Mark, dated to 50AD. A fragment from the book of Acts and one from James. Also found was a fragment from the book of Romans, along with what appears to be a commentary on Romans. This shows that not only was the letter of Romans in circulation but it was so widely known that there was a need for a commentary on it already.

Think about that for a moment: Paul was killed only three years before this cave was sealed. By gleaning information from the Biblical text, it is deduced that the book of Romans was written from Corinth in 56AD. That means that Paul wrote the letter from Greece, then sent it to Rome with Phebe, where copies were made and circulated back to Asia Minor and Jerusalem. There, possibly a commentary was written and stored with a copy of the Romans letter for safekeeping – all this within a twelve year period – how remarkable a find this evidence is!

Also found in Cave 7 was a fragment from 2 Peter. This was exciting because for many years critics had claimed that the letter did not belong in the Bible, saying that Peter never wrote it because (they argued), it only appeared many decades after his death. Yet here is a fragment of a copy of the letter, dated only two or three years after his death, proving all the theories of its critics to be false.

Second false claim disproved

So we have strong evidence that the New Testament letters were being well circulated amongst the churches even before the apostolic age ever closed. This means that living apostles could have verified the authenticity of them (as we see in Peter's second letter to Asia Minor). This evidence also completely destroys the theory that the New Testament letters were written a generation or two after the apostles died.

Now let's go on to see how collections of these letters began to grow under the next generation of church leaders.

FIRST GENERATION CHURCH FATHERS (100-150AD)

With John's death, a new era in church history began. We call this the age of the Apostolic Fathers. The first generation of these church fathers were the direct disciples of the apostles. These men were acquainted with large sections of what would finally be called the New Testament, we know this because of the number of scriptures quoted in their own writings.

Polycarp (a disciple of John)

Polycarp made more than 120 quotes from 20 books of the New Testament which he refers to as "scriptures".

Ignatius (a disciple of John and other apostles)

Ignatius' writings hold quotes from 16 New Testament letters. He:

"was martyred for his faith in Christ... His seven epistles contain quotations from: Matthew, John, Acts, Romans, I Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Galatians, Colossians, James I and II, Thessalonians I and II, Timothy and I Peter." – McDowell, Josh. Evidence that Demands a Verdict.

Justin Martyr (a disciple of John)

Justin Martyr was familiar with 16 New Testament books at the very least.

"Justin Martyr (whose writings span the period from 100–163AD)... quotes the letters of Paul. References are found to Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians, and possible ones to Philippians, Titus, and 1 Timothy, 1 Peter, and Acts." – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_of_the_New_Testament_canon

Collections of scriptures made by early church fathers

The surviving writings of the early church fathers are so vast, and their references to the apostles' writings are so common, that if we counted just those from before the Council of Nicea (in 325AD), there are well over 32 000 quotes. So to simplify our efforts to prove how well the New Testament texts were circulated, we have drawn up a table comparing 8 early church fathers. All of these men wrote before the formation of an official New Testament.

The point we are making here is this: It wasn't that men began to use these letters as doctrine because an official Biblical text was named in 367AD. Instead, the Biblical text was so-named because the church had always been using these apostles' letters as inspired scripture.

We have ticked next to every book which a writer either quotes from or endorses as scripture. We have left a period for unmentioned books. We should point out that an unmentioned book does not mean the writer did not know of or endorse it. In some cases, like the books of Philemon, Jude, 2 and 3 John, there is very little content within the letter

to quote from, and so their “minor” importance could also be the reason they were not cited in the works of the early church fathers. All we know for certain is which books they did have access to and use.

BIBLE BOOK	EARLY CHURCH FATHER – QUOTES								TOTALS
	Clement 35-99 ^{AD}	Ignatius 35-140 ^{AD}	Polycarp 69-155 ^{AD}	Justin M. 100-165 ^{AD}	Irenaeus 130-200 ^{AD}	Tertullian 155-220 ^{AD}	Muratorian Text 170 ^{AD}	Athanasius 296-373 ^{AD}	
Matthew	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8/8
Mark	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8/8
Luke	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8/8
John	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8/8
Acts	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8/8
Romans	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8/8
1 Corinthians	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8/8
2 Corinthians	✓	·	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	6/8
Galatians	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8/8
Ephesians	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8/8
Philippians	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8/8
Colossians	✓	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7/8
1 Thessalonians	✓	✓	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	7/8
2 Thessalonians	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8/8
1 Timothy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8/8
2 Timothy	✓	·	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	6/8
Titus	✓	·	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6/8
Philemon	·	·	·	·	·	✓	✓	✓	3/8
Hebrews	✓	·	✓	·	✓	✓	·	✓	5/8
James	·	✓	·	·	✓	·	·	✓	3/8
1 Peter	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	·	✓	7/8
2 Peter	·	·	·	·	✓	·	·	✓	2/8
1 John	✓	·	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	6/8
2 John	·	·	·	·	✓	·	✓	✓	3/8
3 John	·	·	✓	·	·	·	·	✓	2/8
Jude	✓	·	·	·	·	✓	✓	✓	4/8
Revelations	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7/8
Totals	22	16	20	16	24	23	22	27	

Table Key:

- Means no mention of the book is made in their writing.
- ✓ Means the book is quoted from and/or endorsed as scripture.

This table clearly shows that from the earliest days of Christianity, roughly the period of 70-320AD, churches had access to large portions of the New Testament.

Also worth mentioning is the fact that we have no record of any of these men questioning the authority or authenticity of any New Testament letter. This fact becomes very important because a generation or two down the line, certain characters began introducing mis-doctrines and with them, they stirred doubts about the authenticity and trustworthiness of some New Testament letters.

So thus far we have shown that **from the very beginning of Christian history, the apostles’ letters were circulated and accepted by the churches as scripture (inspired writings). And within 100 to 150 years, these formed collections of nearly complete New Testaments. No individuals or church structure claimed the authority to drive this process, it was a natural**

response to the authority exhibited by the original apostles.

The looming threat of mis-doctrine

This first generation of church fathers (like Ignatius and Polycarp), were faithful in following the example of their teachers and holding back the waves of mis-doctrine and false writings trying to invade the church. In their days, the church's greatest threat were their Roman rulers and the Gnostic false teachers outside their ranks. They had listened to warnings like this one from Paul:

*"...take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that **after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.**" – Acts 20:28-29*

But as this era of church leaders began to die out, a storm of mis-doctrine brewed just outside the church's gates which the next generation of men could not keep out. Polycarp was the last of the generation that stood firm against them. He was martyred at age 86.

Polycarp often exclaimed, "Dear God for what times hast thou preserved me, that I should endure these things!" He even went so far as to call a leader of the Gnostic movement the firstborn of Satan. Under no circumstance would the Christians recognise anything 'Christian' in this 'Gnosis' or 'mystery knowledge'... the slightest contact with these counterfeits was considered dangerous beyond measure. – The Early Christians in their Own Words by Eberhard Arnold, p31

SECOND GENERATION CHURCH FATHERS (150-190AD)

The second generation of church fathers faced a brand new problem. Trouble was beginning to seep into the church. With the spiritual power of the first generation now extinct, men of high intellect began to rise in their place. The church slowly developed a mixed leadership, some clinging to God, His Holy Spirit and the simple ways of the apostles, others clinging to philosophy, learning and the "higher" ways of Greek ideology. This new group wanted to establish a church structure with authority based on rank and learning, something foreign to the church before that time. Men like Irenaeus and Tertullian stood fast, dedicating their lives to upholding all the apostles had taught.

Irenaeus

In around 180AD Irenaeus lists the letters he considered inspired and:

"names the author he thought wrote the text. He mentions the four gospels, Acts, the Pauline epistles with the exception of Hebrews and Philemon, as well as the first epistle of Peter, and the first and second epistles of John, and the book of Revelation. Irenaeus argued that it was illogical to reject Acts of the Apostles but accept the Gospel of Luke, as both were from the same author... He may also refer to Hebrews and James and maybe even 2 Peter but does not cite Philemon, 3 John or Jude. – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_of_the_New_Testament_canon

Speaking of the four gospels Irenaeus tells us that even the heretics dared not to touch them, so highly they were regarded:

Irenaeus, who was a student of Polycarp (who in turn was a student of the apostle John), wrote: "So firm is the ground upon which these Gospels rest, that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them, and, starting from these, each one of them endeavours to establish his own particular doctrine" – McDowell, Josh. Evidence that Demands a Verdict.

Tertullian was a contemporary of Irenaeus, and he also defended the Gospels and their apostolic authority powerfully.

Tertullian

“He distinguishes between the four Gospels and insists upon their apostolic origin as accrediting their authority”

In around 190AD, Tertullian makes a very interesting comment. He mentions that **in his day the Old and New Testament writings could be found together in “one volume”**. This is the first mention we have of a single bound book holding something that must have looked much like our Bibles today.

“the law and the prophets she [the church] unites in one volume with the writings of evangelists and apostles, from which she drinks in her faith.” – Tertullian, The Prescription Against Heretics.

Archaeology supports this statement, because we have a surviving codex (ancient book), from the same period called the Chester Beatty Papyri. The surviving pieces of this ancient book show Old and New Testament texts all bound together. So even though an official Bible list had not been pronounced yet, it is clear that a Biblical text (a single bound volume of writings) already existed, which the church used as authoritative.

Between Iranaeus and Tertullian then, we can find endorsements of every New Testament book, with the exception of the third letter of John (a book of only one very short chapter).

A nearly complete New Testament in 200AD

We conclude then that the apostolic letters were guiding the church for all of the 300 years it took to finally proclaim an official closed canon. By as early as 200AD, the New Testament had basically taken on its final form.

Section Four: A CLOSED CANON OF SCRIPTURE

In this section we show that because of the rising surge of false doctrine in church circles, it became ever more necessary to name a definitive list of faithful apostolic scriptures. Athanasius, who dedicated his life to opposing false doctrines was the first to name the 27 books which now form our New Testament as the complete list of known, faithful apostolic writings.

FALSE DOCTRINES THREATEN THE CHURCH

As the years passed, Gnosticism’s influence began to spread within the church’s own leadership through a man named Arius. He argued that Jesus was not God-eternal but a created being, and the heresy was sweeping through the church. His movement became so problematic that when Constantine became the Roman Emperor in 313AD, he realised that this rift in Christianity threatened the stability of his empire, so he ordered the whole church to gather for a catholic council in the city of Nicea to decide on the matter.

We must point out here that in the early days of Christianity, the word catholic simply meant universal – all inclusive – and therefore everyone was expected to be there, as the following quote of attendees shows. It would be centuries before the word “catholic” would come to mean specifically the Roman Catholic Church.

“In effect, the most distinguished of God’s ministers from all the churches which abounded in Europe, Libya, and Asia were here assembled... Syrians and Cilicians, Phoenicians and Arabians, delegates from Palestine, and others from Egypt; Thebans and Libyans, with those who came from the region of Mesopotamia. A Persian bishop too was present at this conference, nor was even a Scythian found wanting to the number. Pontus, Galatia, and Pamphylia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Phrygia, furnished their most distinguished prelates; while those who dwelt in the remotest districts of Thrace and Macedonia, of Achaia and Epirus, were notwithstanding in attendance. Even from Spain itself, one whose fame was widely spread took his seat as an individual in the great assembly. The prelate of the imperial city [Rome] was prevented from attending by extreme old age; but his presbyters were present, and supplied his place.” – Eusebius, Life of Constantine

Nothing about the records suggest that the church of Rome was in any way the authority over the council or even

due a special mention. More relevant was the fact that this council was held only a few years after the last major Christian persecution of the Roman Empire. The next quote gives us an idea of just how many faithful Christians were among their ranks, men who had offered so much up for the truth already:

“[Paul of Neo-Caesarea], had been deprived of the use of both hands by the application of a red-hot iron, by which the nerves which give motion to the muscles had been contracted and rendered dead. Some had had the right eye dug out, others had lost the right arm. Among these was Paphnutius of Egypt. In short, the Council looked like an assembled army of martyrs.” – The 5th century historian Theodoret

So Constantine called these Christian leaders together to talk out the issue of Arianism. And how did that go?

*“There were a handful of staunch supporters on both sides, pro-Arian and anti-Arian, but most did not have a strong position one way or the other concerning Arius’ views. Their neutrality rapidly evaporated when Arius’ views were explained more fully, however. **Eusebius of Nicomedia was first to speak. As he proceeded to explain the Arian position to the bishops, they became so angry that they grabbed his notes out of his hands and proceeded to tear them to pieces.**” – [https://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Council_of_Nicea_\(325_A.D.\)](https://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Council_of_Nicea_(325_A.D.))*

In response the council decided to create a creed to define true Christian doctrine. The first half of the creed is still the basic foundation of all Protestant creeds to this day. But the second half of the creed detailed all the ways in which Arius’ doctrine was rejected as heresy. That portion of the Nicene Creed is little known today. When the council voted, of the 380 men who attended, only two rejected the creed. So the purpose of the Council of Nicea had nothing to do with choosing the official books of the Bible, and everything to do with preserving the church against the Arian heresy.

But it wasn’t long before Arius was back promoting his ideas again. It was a man named Athanasius (who had attended the council), who stood up to resist him and his followers. He had a back and forth battle with them for many years, and Arius’ camp fabricated numerous false accusations against Athanasius which sent him into a total of 5 exiles between 336 and 366AD. It was on his final return home, at the age of about 70 years, that he felt it critical to finish what Iranaeus and Tertullian had started, and finalise a list of inspired Christian writings. This was when he wrote his letter to encourage the churches to remain faithful, listing the 27 trusted writings of the apostles worthy of “being canonised.” Saying, “In these alone the teaching of godliness is proclaimed. No one may add to them, and nothing may be taken away from them.”

As we have shown in this piece, **Athanasius was not introducing anything new to church doctrine, only recognising those books which had been held as inspired and true by the church from the days of the apostles. This list finally became our New Testament.**

Third false claim disproved

The Council of Nicea was not called to decide on the list of acceptable scriptures. The first time the full list of New Testament letters was made was a full 42 years later and not by the Roman church. Another 15 years after that, in 382AD, the Roman Catholic Church declared its own official list of scriptural texts which included numerous apocryphal (non-apostolic) works that the larger church did not recognise as authoritative. Jerome then translated these texts into latin in what became the official Roman text called the Latin Vulgate. More on that in Part 2.

Section Five:

CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE?

In closing we will show that archaeology proves that the Biblical text has survived the test of time. We should note that we go much deeper into this topic in Part Two of our discussion.

A PRESERVED TEXT

Now it is time for us to ask how, all of 2000 years later, we can be sure that we still have a true copy of those early writings? Archaeology helps us here, since we have surviving ancient texts and fragments dating back to the time of the apostles. With more than 24 000 fragments and complete copies of the Bible in all, we have an extraordinary wealth of

evidence to check our text against!

*“In an article in the North American Review, a writer made some interesting comparisons... He said: “It seems strange that the text of Shakespeare, which has been in existence less than two hundred and eight years, should be far more uncertain and corrupt than that of the New Testament, now over eighteen centuries old, during nearly fifteen of which it existed only in manuscript... With perhaps a dozen or twenty exceptions, **the text of every verse in the New Testament may be said to be so far settled by general consent of scholars, that any dispute as to its readings must relate rather to the interpretation of the words than to any doubts respecting the words themselves.** But in every one of Shakespeare’s thirty-seven plays there are probably a hundred readings still in dispute, a large portion of which materially affects the meaning of the passages in which they occur.” – McDowell, Josh. Evidence that Demands a Verdict.*

From as early as 200AD we have surviving manuscripts containing large sections of the New Testament, for example the Chester Beatty Papyri which has remains of 15 New Testament books, along with some of the Old. No other book from the ancient world has as small a time gap between writing and the earliest surviving copies.

Two independent studies were done by Hort and Abbot, to calculate the amount of difference found between ancient surviving scriptures and calculated it to be:

- 0,01% by Hort’s estimation.
- 0,025% by Abbot’s estimation.

“While many variations have been discovered between early copies of biblical texts, almost all have no importance, as they are variations in spelling, punctuation, or grammar. Also, many of these variants are so particular to the Greek language that they would not appear in translations into other languages... According to Norman Geisler and William Nix, “The New Testament, then, has not only survived in more manuscripts than any other book from antiquity, but it has survived in a purer form than any other great book—a form that is 99.5% pure.” – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Testament

We are therefore left with no reasonable reason to doubt the fact that the Bible has survived the test of time.

CONCLUSION

New Testament therefore was not the product of the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, this point will become extremely clear in Part 2 of our discussion when we show how she has spent 1900 years trying to destroy it. Nor was the Biblical text decided on at the Council of Nicea in 325AD. Instead it was founded on the authority of the Apostles, who were chosen by Jesus Christ, and approved by the power of God. Their letters alone were worthy of being called scripture and forming the New Testament. These loose letters were faithfully copied, circulated and used to establish Christian doctrine. Over the course of roughly 100 years, the loose letters became grouped in larger and larger collections, until in 190AD we hear that Old and New Testament scriptures were being bound together as a single book. And nearly two thousand years after being written, we have a wealth of archaeological evidence proving that God has indeed preserved His Word as He promised to do:

“The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. **Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.**” Psalm 12:6-7