

Chapter One:

The Development of the New Testament Canon:

Introduction:

It is not uncommon to see a program on media that purports to have found letters and writings that will disprove the validity and authenticity of Christianity. The reality, though, is quite different. There were tens of thousands possibly hundreds of thousands, who heard the words of our Lord Jesus Christ over his 3 year ministry on earth, throughout Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Many who heard his words and saw his miracles in real time, believed in Jesus as the promised Messiah. Some who heard his words and saw the miracles in real time mixed the Lord's teachings with their own beliefs; and some who heard his words and saw the miracles in real time, did not embrace Christianity, or follow the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and Messiah. The eastern Roman Empire had a relatively high rate of literacy and some were using papyri to record their daily thoughts and events.

So, of the many papyri writings, of the tens of thousands of folks who listened to and witnessed the Lord Jesus Christ, some who did not embrace him as the Messiah; and conversely, the many papyri writings of the tens of thousands who did embrace and believe in our Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah; which papyri writings do we give credence to? Even more fundamental, how were the letters and books that make up the New Testament Canon (and the Old Testament Canon), chosen? What was the process of determining which books and letters would make up the New Testament Canon? We begin the journey.

i. Literacy in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee before, during, and immediately after the Lord Jesus Christ's earthly ministry:

There are several very good books on literacy and papyri writings, which are specific to the Eastern Mediterranean region, during the Roman Empire period. These books were written by a very diverse set of authors who addressed literacy and papyri writings during that specific period, some of whose works are listed at the end of this chapter.

The province of Egypt was the breadbasket of the Roman Empire and the wealthiest of the Roman provinces. The wealth and artisan skills of Egypt, as well as the culture, education, written contracts, and the use of the Greek language, impacted the adjacent Roman provinces such as Judea and Galilee.

For one and a half centuries, Israel was subject to occupation by Greek nation/states and as a consequence, Israel was subjected to the process of Hellenization. Alexander the Great conquered Israel (and Egypt), in 332 B.C.. In 323 B.C. Alexander died and the Greek General Ptolemy, based in Egypt, (the first generation of the Ptolemaic Dynasty in Egypt), maintained

hegemony over Israel from 323 B.C. to 201 B.C.. Ptolemy Sotr instituted the Hellenization process which consisted of immersing a large part of the Israeli population in the instruction and application of the Greek language, math, and Greek culture. The Ptolemaics recruited members of the local population to be government administrators, on behalf of the Ptolemy Empire. The Ptolemaics encouraged the use of contracts, written in the Greek language, as well as encouraging the use of written Deeds to Land, and Land Sale Contracts scribed in the Greek language. How widespread this practice was in Israel, under the Ptolemy Empire, is open to debate.

In 201 B.C., the neighboring Greek state (the Greek Seleucid Empire, based out of Babylon and Syria), militarily seized Israel from the Greek Ptolemy Empire. The Seleucid Dynasty maintained hegemony over Israel from 201 B.C. to 140 B.C. The Seleucid Empire took the process of Hellenization of Israel to extremes, one of the Seleucid Kings, King Antiochus IV Epiphase, attempted to replace Yahweh with Greek Gods and to essentially outlaw Judaism. The Israelites were forced to give up their sabbath, and the Seleucid's instituted sacrifices to Zeus in the second Temple in Jerusalem (167 B.C.). This gave rise to the Maccabee revolt, which resulted in Israeli self-rule, (home-rule), under the Hasmonean Dynasty (140 B.C. to 37 B.C.). The Seleucid Empire was, during this period, pre-occupied with the Roman Armies invading their empire in what is today Turkey.

The Romans invaded Israel in 63 B.C., and replaced the Hasmonean Dynasty with their own proxy, King Herod the Great, in 37 B.C.. Herod had married into the Hasmonean Dynasty. Herod married Mariamne 1, the granddaughter of Aristobulus II (The Hasmonean King: 66 B.C. to 63 B.C.), as well as the granddaughter of Hyrcanus II (The Hasmonean King: 67 B.C. to 66 B.C.). In 40 B.C. the Roman Senate voted to endorse Herod the Great, as King of Galilee, Judea, and Samaria; which he assumed in 37 B.C..

The Greek culture and language continued to be emulated, copied, and incorporated into Roman culture, during the Roman Empire period. The Greek language was the linguistic coin of the realm, although the Romans continued to promote the use of the Latin language and script. In the Eastern Mediterranean region, the written and spoken Greek language dominated the Eastern Roman Empire, (even the Romans had their earliest Roman Coins minted using the Greek language).

Papyrus letters excavated at archaeological sites in Egypt revealed the common practice of parents sending their children to tutors arranged by groups of parents. The Papyrus letters detailed the cost and quality of their education, during the Ptolemaic Empire and the Roman Empire periods. Parents felt obligated to have their children at least attain a basic literacy in both reading and writing in the Greek language. In the case of children whose parents who were well off, and for government officials, or military officials, their children pursued more advanced studies, not only in reading and writing in the Greek language, but also math, philosophy, science, and rhetoric. The books listed at the very end of this chapter, address ancient literacy in Egypt, Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, during the Roman Empire period, and are considered significant works. Keep in mind, Israeli children were also taught to read and write in the Hebrew language, by their local synagogue leaders.

B. The New Testament Canon:

The Apostle Paul wrote his books and epistles as he was teaching and preaching the Good News. The Apostle John also wrote his books and epistles, during the period that he was teaching and preaching the Good News; and the Apostle Peter wrote his epistles, during the time he was preaching and teaching the Good News. We recognize that some of these letters may have been dictated by the Apostles to one of their followers, (pupils), who would scribe the Apostle's words and dictation onto Papyri. We know that the Apostles Matthew and John wrote their Gospels (chronicling the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ), in the period following the Lord's crucifixion and resurrection and ascension. The same is true of the Apostolic Fathers Luke and John Mark, with regard to their respective Gospels. The following addresses the selected books and epistles of the New Testament Canon, and why they were chosen.

i. The Gospel According to the Apostle Matthew, (written by the Apostle and disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ, Matthew):

The Gospel of Matthew was written primarily to a Jewish audience. Many believe that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Syrian Antioch, (50 to 60 A.D.). Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea Maritima (260 A.D. to 339 A.D.), wrote in Book 3 Chapter 24 of his work: Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, in paragraph 6: "(6) For Matthew, who had at first preached to the Hebrews, when he was about to go to other peoples, committed his Gospel to writing in his native tongue . . . "

Bishop Eusebius, in a later chapter, quoted Origen, who was an early Christian theologian and a graduate of the Catechetical School of Alexandria, Egypt, (one of the first Christian Seminaries/Academies, in the ancient world). In Book 4, Chapter 25 of Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, paragraph 3 and 4 (quoting Origen), Eusebius writes: "(3) In his first book on Matthew's Gospel, maintaining the Canon of the Church, he testifies that he knows only four Gospels, writing as follows: (4) Among the four Gospels, which are the only indisputable ones in the Church of God under heaven, I have learned by tradition that the first was written by Matthew, who was once a publican, but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, and it was prepared for the converts from Judaism, and published in the Hebrew language. "

Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis (60 A.D. to 130 A.D.), had his early writings republished by Bishop Eusebius, (260 A.D. to 340 A.D.); in his work "Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History" Book 3, Chapter 39, paragraph 16, Eusebius quoted Bishop Papias's writings, as follows: "But concerning Matthew he writes as follows: So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language . . . "

Some liberal leaning contemporary "theologians" argue that Matthew was not written by the Apostle Matthew. However, Bishop Papias, who was Bishop of Hierapolis (60 A.D. to 130 A.D.); and Bishop Irenaeus, who was Bishop of Lyon (130 A.D. to 202 A.D.); and Origen, who was a graduate of the Catechetical School of Alexandria, Egypt, and professor at the Christian Academy in Caesarea (185 A.D. to 253 A.D.); and Bishop Eusebius, who was Bishop of Caesarea Maritima (260 A.D. to 339 A.D.); were all quite persuaded that the Apostle Matthew,

disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, wrote The Gospel According to Matthew. Bishop Papias, Bishop Irenaeus, and Bishop Eusebius, were elected Bishops of the early ancient Christian Churches in their respective cities: Hierapolis (60 A.D. to 130 A.D.), Lyon (130 A.D. to 202 A.D.), and Caesarea Maritima (260 A.D. to 339). Papias and Irenaeus, and Origen, had the discomfort of waiting for their potential arrest and potential martyrdom every night of their lives in service to the Church and to our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, considering the source, we should take Bishop Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis (60 A.D. to 130 A.D.), and Bishop Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon (130 A.D. to 202 A.D.), and Bishop Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, (260 A.D. to 339 A.D.), and Origen (185 A.D. to 253 A.D.), at their word, that The Gospel According to Matthew was written by the Apostle Matthew, disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

ii. The Gospel According to Mark, (written by the Apostolic Father, John Mark, who accompanied and served the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter.)

Mark wrote his Gospel in Greek. Mark is generally thought to have written his Gospel while he was in Rome (64 A.D.- 70 A.D.). Mark, was known as John Mark, a cousin of Barnabas, (Colossians 4:10). Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys (Acts 12:12, Acts 12:25, Acts 13:5, Acts 15:37-41, 2 Timothy 4:11, and Philemon 1:24). Mark later joined Peter on his missionary journeys, (1 Peter 5:13). After the martyrdom of the Apostle Peter in Rome, Mark moved to Alexandria, Egypt, where he would become the first Bishop of the Christian Church for the city of Alexandria, Egypt, and there he was ultimately martyred.

Papias, (60 A.D. to 130 A.D.), Bishop of Hierapolis, had his writings republished by Eusebius. Eusebius, in his work "Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History", quoted Bishop Papias's writings as follows: ". . . This also the presbyter said: Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adopted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord's discourses, so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them. For he was careful of one thing, not to omit any of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely. These things are related by Papias concerning Mark . . .", "Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History", Book 3, Chapter 39, Paragraph 15. Bishop Papias (60 A.D. to 130 A.D.), endorsed the authenticity and accuracy and authorship of The Gospel According to Mark, as being written (authored) by John Mark.

Ancient Papyri and Codexes are available online for viewing. The Papyrus scrolls and Codexes (small bound books) are indexed by number. Part of Mark's Gospel was published in Papyrus 137, (175 A.D. to 225 A.D). In addition, Papyrus 45, (Early Third Century 200 A.D. to 250 A.D.), Papyrus 77, (middle Second Century to early Third Century 150 A.D. to 220 A.D.), and Papyrus 103, (middle Second Century to early Third Century 150 A.D. to 220 A.D.), these Papyrus booklets/scrolls, contain some or all of The Gospel According to Mark. Later Codexes, (bound pages in a book format), contain Mark's entire Gospel along with Matthew's entire Gospel, Luke's entire Gospel, and John's entire Gospel.

The earliest Papyri and Codexes which contain The Gospel According to Mark, actually end The Gospel According to Mark, at Chapter 16, verse 8. But, Mark Chapter 16, verses 9 to 19, only repeat what Mark had already stated in other verses of The Gospel According to Mark. Whether Mark Chapter 16, verses 9 to 19, is in the New Testament Canon or not, it does not change the meaning or content or context, of a single verse of Mark, other than to repeat what has already been stated in prior verses contained in The Gospel According to Mark. What I enjoy the most is Mark Chapter 16, verse 4 to verse 8 , which is contained in the original Papyri and Codexes:

“(4) And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back– it was very large. (5) And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. (6) And he said to them, Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. (7) But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you. (8) And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” (Mark 16:4-8, ESV)

“(4) But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. (5) As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. (6) ‘Don’t be alarmed’, he said. ‘You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. (7) But go, tell his disciples and Peter. He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you’. (8) Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. . . “ (Mark 16:4-8, NIV).

We have established in Mark Chapter 16, verses 4-8, that the Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified, has Risen from the Dead, and that He was going ahead of them into Galilee. The young man dressed in white we can assume is an angel.

iii. The Gospel According to Luke and the Book of Acts: (written by the Apostolic Father, Luke, colleague and fellow worker with the Apostle Paul):

Luke was a Greek Physician and a close associate of the Apostle Paul. The early church leaders ascribe authorship of The Gospel According to Luke and the Book of Acts, to Luke. Many historians believe that Luke was originally from Antioch, Syria. Luke’s association with the Apostle Paul is referenced in Colossians 4:14, Philemon 1:24, and 2 Timothy 4:11. Most historians believe that Luke first joined the Apostle Paul at Troas. Luke may have been a resident of Troas and a practicing Physician there. Luke was with the Apostle Paul on Paul’s second missionary journey, including Paul’s imprisonment and martyrdom in Rome. Most historians agree that Luke was either a Hellenized Jew or a Gentile. Evidence that Luke was with Paul in Rome, through the Apostle Paul’s martyrdom, is found in: 2 Timothy 4:11, Acts 28:14, and Acts 28:16, (“When we got to Rome”), (NIV). Luke was a loyal companion and co-worker with the Apostle Paul. The books written by Luke, (The Gospel According to Luke and The Book of Acts by Luke), were written in the Greek language and the unique sentence structures used indicate that both books were written by the same person. Some of the early Church

Bishops and leaders believed that Luke was also the scribe for the Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews. Origen, (184 A.D. to 253 A.D.), a graduate of the Catechetical School of Alexandria, Egypt, and Clement of Alexandria, (150 A.D. to 215 A.D.), one of the professors at the Catechetical School of Alexandria, Egypt, believed that while the Apostle Paul wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, that Luke scribed the Epistle to the Hebrews, for Paul, in Greek. As previously indicated, the Catechetical School of Alexandria, Egypt, was very influential and a prominent Seminary/Academy/Graduate school, in the ancient world and in early Christianity.

Bishop Eusebius, (260 A.D. to 339 A.D.), in his work "Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History", wrote in Book 3, Chapter 24, Paragraph 15: ". . . But as for Luke, in the beginning of his Gospel, he states himself the reasons which led him to write it. . . . delivered in his own Gospel an accurate account of those events in regard to which he had learned the full truth"

Additionally, Eusebius in his work "Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History", in Book 3, Chapter 4, Paragraphs 7 & 8 states: ". . . (7). But Luke, who was of Antiochian parentage and a physician by profession, . . . has left us, in two inspired books, proof of that spiritual healing art which he learned from them. One of these books is the Gospel, which he testifies that he wrote as those who were from the beginning eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered unto them, all of whom, as he says, he followed accurately from the first. (Luke 1:2-3). The other book is the Acts of the Apostles which he composed not from the accounts of others, but from what he had seen himself. (8). And they say that Paul meant to refer to Luke's Gospel whenever, as if speaking of some gospel of his own, he used the words, 'according to my Gospel'"

The earliest fragments of The Gospel According to Luke are found in Papyrus 75, (written approximately, 175 A.D. to 225 A.D.). The surviving leaf pages of Papyrus 75, contain The Gospel According to Luke: Chapter/Verse: 3:18 to Chapter/Verse: 24:53. Papyrus 75 also contains The Gospel According to John Chapters 1 through Chapter 15. The Gospel According to John begins on the same page, (leaf), on which The Gospel According to Luke ends, indicating that the Gospels were grouped together and were circulating throughout the early Church in books (bound pages of parchment known as Codexes). A Codex would have leaves of bound, double sided, pages of parchment. Codexes that were circulating in the Early Church commonly would have 72 leaves of double sided parchment, (or 144 pages), which were bound as a Codex, (or book). With respect to Papyrus 75, 102 pages of the original 144 pages (approximate) survived to the present day. Papyrus 75 was found in Egypt, not far from Alexandria. Papyrus 75 was written in Greek. The scribe of Papyrus 75 made grammatical and stylistic improvements in keeping with the Alexandrian Scriptorial Tradition. The scribes copied from the original letters and books, letter by letter and syllable by syllable. Papyrus and Codexes containing the texts of Ancient Christian Books, Letters, and Texts, were copied by literate, skilled, professional and semi-professional copyist. Egypt, (and especially Alexandria, Egypt), was a region of strong scholarship with an established knowledge of textual criticism. The Christian Community in Alexandria, Egypt (125 A.D. to 225 A.D.) was large enough to use highly skilled professional scribes. As one scholar has said: ". . . We value the tireless work of the thousands of anonymous copyists. They worked on behalf of the true author of the Bible who long ago wrote: 'The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever'", (Isaiah Chapter 40 Verse 8).

As we shall see later, The Gospel According to Luke and The Gospel According to John, found in Papyrus 75, are very close to being identical copies of both The Gospel According to Luke and The Gospel According to John contained in Codex Vaticanus, a widely respected and widely used Codex (dated to the Fourth Century, approximately 300 A.D. to 325 A.D.). The surviving leaf pages of Papyrus 4, which were written (220 A.D. to 240 A.D.), also contain The Gospel According to Luke, Chapters 1 through 6.

Finally, Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (A.D. 260 to 339 A.D.), in his work Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, quoted Origen, (as previously mentioned, Origen was an early theologian and a graduate of the Catechetical School of Alexandria, Egypt), Eusebius writes quoting Origen's published works: “. . . **3**. In his first book on Matthew's Gospel, maintaining the Canon of the Church, he testifies that he knows only four Gospels, writing as follows: **4**. Among the four Gospels, which are the only indisputable ones in the Church of God under heaven. I have learned by tradition that the first was written by Matthew, who was once a publican, but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, and it was prepared for the converts from Judaism, and published in the Hebrew language. **5**. The second is by Mark, who composed it according to the instructions of Peter, who in his Catholic Epistle acknowledges him as a son, saying 'The church that is at Babylon elected together with you, salutes you, and so does Marcus, my son'. (1 Peter 5:13). **6**. And the Third by Luke, the Gospel commended by Paul, and composed for Gentile converts. Last of all that by John. . . “, Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History”, Book VI, Chapter 25, Paragraph 3 to 6.

iv. The Gospel According to the Apostle John (written by the Apostle John, the disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ):

Bishop Eusebius, in his work Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, quoted an extract from Clement 1st (Clement was the third or fourth Bishop of Rome, and was martyred in 99 A.D.). Eusebius quoting Clement 1st, writes: “. . . **11**. They say, therefore, that the apostle John, being asked to do it for this reason, gave in his Gospel an account of the period which had been omitted by the earlier evangelists, and of the deeds done by the Saviour during that period; . . . “. “Eusebius Ecclesiastical History”, Book III, Chapter 24, Paragraph 11.

The early Christian Church Bishops, Bishop (Pope) Clement 1st, Bishop Irenaeus, and Bishop Eusebius, all verify that the Apostle John wrote The Gospel According to John.

v. The Books/Epistles written by the Apostle Paul:

- a. Romans
- b. 1. Corinthians
- c. 2. Corinthians
- d. Galatians
- e. Ephesians
- f. Philippians
- g. Colossians
- h. 1. Thessalonians
- i. 2. Thessalonians

- j. 1. Timothy
- k. 2. Timothy
- l. Titus
- m. Philemon
- n. Hebrews (some difference of opinion)

Of the New Testament Canon Books/Epistles written by the Apostle Paul, there seems to be agreement that the Books and Epistles attributed to the Apostle Paul, were written by him. With respect to The Book of Hebrews, there is some difference of opinion as to the authorship, but the Bishops of the early Christian Church never doubted that The Book of Hebrews should be included in the New Testament Canon

Bishop Eusebius states in his work: Eusebius Ecclesiastical History “. . . Paul’s fourteen epistles are well known and undisputed. It is not indeed right to overlook the fact that some have rejected the Epistle to the Hebrews saying that it is disputed by the church of Rome, on the ground that it was not written by Paul. But what has been said concerning this epistle by those who live before our time, I shall quote in the proper place . . . “ (Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History: Book III, Chapter 3, paragraph 5).

Origen, (184 A.D. to 253 A.D.), (an early Church Father, and a graduate of the Catechetical School of Alexandria), wrote some 2,000 treatises (commentaries) on the various Books and Epistles of the New Testament Canon. Bishop Eusebius quotes Origen, (from Origen’s writings), as follows: “. . . the Epistle to the Hebrews is the work of Paul, and that it was written to the Hebrews in the Hebrew language; but that Luke translated it carefully and published it for the Greeks, and hence the same style of expression is found in this epistle and in the Acts. But he says that the words, Paul the Apostle, were probably not prefixed, because, in sending it to the Hebrews, who were prejudiced and suspicious of him, he wisely did not wish to repel them at the very beginning by giving his name. . . . “, Eusebius Ecclesiastical History, Book VI, Chapter 14, Paragraphs 2-3.

Clement of Alexandria, (150 A.D. to 215 A.D.), who was a teacher at the Catechetical School of Alexandria, Egypt, according to tradition, suggested that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews and that Luke translated the Epistle to the Hebrews into the Greek language.

Tertullian (160 A.D. to 220 A.D.), an early Christian theologian and author from Carthage, thought that Barnabas may have translated Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrew’s, into Greek. Others have posited that John Mark, (Acts 12:25), (the author of The Gospel According to Mark) was the author. At the end of the day, the early Bishops and the Church Fathers determined that The Book of Hebrews was Canonical and that The Book of Hebrews was to be included in the New Testament Canon. The early Councils of Bishops ascertained that the Epistle to the Hebrews, (The Book of Hebrews), was written by an Apostolic Father of the early Christian Church. For further reading in this area, consider obtaining the book: “Letters to the Church: A survey of Hebrews and the general Epistles” Karen H. Jobes, (2011) Zondervan.

vi. The Catholic Epistles:

- a. James
- b. 1. Peter
- c. 2. Peter
- d. 1. John
- e. 2. John
- f. 3. John
- g. Jude

Next, in the New Testament Canon, are the “Catholic Epistles”: James, First Peter, Second Peter, First John, Second John, Third John, and Jude. These Epistles are collectively known as the “Catholic Epistles”. These Epistles were not addressed to a specific church but to the whole church or “the church at large”, thus, the “Catholic Epistles”. The book of James was not written by the Apostle James but by James the half-brother of Jesus. James wrote The Epistle of James, while serving as Bishop of the Jerusalem Church. James was assigned the position as Bishop of Jerusalem, after the Apostle Peter left for Rome. The Apostle James had already been martyred in Jerusalem, by King Herod (Acts 12:1-2), prior to the time the Epistle of James was written. The Epistle of James was written to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem before the Jewish uprising of 70 A.D.. The Epistle of James is probably the oldest of the New Testament Epistles (written prior to the Apostle Paul’s Epistles).

The First Epistle of Peter, was written later in Peter’s life, to the churches in Asia Minor. The First Epistle of Peter was written both to Jewish and Gentile Christians, whose churches had previously been planted by the Apostle Paul. Bishop Eusebius, (A.D. 260 to A.D. 339), states in his work, Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History: “. . . One epistle of Peter, that called the first, is acknowledged as genuine. And this the ancient elders used freely in their own writings as an undisputed work. But we have learned that his extant second Epistle does not belong to the canon; yet, as it has appeared profitable to many, it has been used with the other Scriptures”, Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History, Book III, Chapter 3, Paragraph 1. As we shall see in the upcoming early Christian Bishops Councils, 2nd Peter does become part of the final New Testament Canon, and was considered by the early Christian Bishops to be canonical.

Eusebius, in his book “Ecclesiastical History” continues, “. . . After this must be reckoned the epistles of Paul, next in order the extant former epistle of John, and likewise the epistle of Peter, must be maintained’ After them is to be placed, if it really seems proper, the Apocalypse of John, concerning which we shall give the different opinions at the proper time. These then belong among the accepted writings. . .”, “Eusebius Ecclesiastical History” Book III, Chapter 25, Paragraph 2.

The accepted writings, referenced by Bishop Eusebius, were the accepted writings, that were embraced and accepted by the Bishops in the early Christian Church, and their councils, and became the canonical books of the New Testament.

vii. The Book of Revelation, (The Apocalypse of John), written by the Apostle John, disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ:

The final book of the New Testament Canon is: The Apocalypse of John, (The Book of Revelation), written by the Apostle John. Papias (who later became Bishop of Hierapolis), was an early student and associate of the Apostle John. Saint Irenaeus, who was Bishop of Lyon, in turn had been a student of Papias. Quoting Saint Irenaeus, Bishop Eusebius in his work, Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, quotes Saint Irenaeus as follows: “. . .**4**. Afterwards John, the disciple of the Lord, who also reclined on his bosom, published his Gospel, while staying at Ephesus in Asia. **5**. He states these things in the third book of his above-mentioned work. In the fifth book he speaks as follows concerning the Apocalypse of John, and the number of the name Antichrist: As these things are so, and this number is found in all the approved and ancient copies, and those who saw the mode of calculation among the Greeks, appears in its letters. . . . **7**. He states these things concerning the Apocalypse in the work referred to . . . “. Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History”, Book V, Chapter 8, Paragraphs 4, 5, and 7. Here, Bishop Irenaeus attributes the authorship of the Apocalypse of John (The Book of Revelation), to the Apostle John.

Papias (Bishop of Hierapolis), refers to the Book of Revelation as the “Apocalypse of John”. Papias also referred to the Gospel and Epistles written by the Apostle John. Papias states that the Apostle John wrote the Apocalypse of John (The Book of Revelation). The Apostle John's authorship of The Apocalypse of John (The Book of Revelation), was also affirmed by the early Christian Church theologians: Origen, Justin, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian.

Eusebius in “Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History” (Book VI, Chapter 25, paragraph 9 and 10), quotes Origen, as follows: “. . . **9**. Why need we speak of him who reclined upon the bosom of Jesus, John, who has left us one Gospel, though he confessed that he might write so many that the world could not contain them? **And he wrote also the Apocalypse**, but was commanded to keep silence and not to write the words of the seven thunders. **10**. He has also left an epistle of very few lines . . . “. Origen states that the Apostle John, wrote the Apocalypse of John (The Book of Revelation), as well as the First Epistle of John and, of course, The Gospel According to John.

C. Determining the Books and Epistles of the New Testament Canon:

i. The Early Christian Bishops, and the vetting of the New Testament Canon:

There was a vetting process by the early Christian Church Bishops, and by the Church Leaders at the Catechetical School in Alexandria, Egypt, and by the Church Leaders at the Catechetical School in Antioch, that determined, (after long discussions, prayer, after numerous meetings of Councils of Bishops, after authentication of authorship), which Books and Epistles would make up the New Testament Canon, (e.g. which books were Canonical).

First, we begin with the earliest published Books and Epistles:

ii. Early Christian Papyrus rolls and Codex texts:

One of the oldest New Testament codexes held in archives, is Papyrus 75 (dated to approximately 175 A.D. to 225 A.D.). As previously stated, Papyrus 75 contains portions of two of the Gospels. Papyrus 75 was a major find, as it contained portions of the original texts of The Gospel According to Luke and the Gospel According to John, which were scribed and copied close in time to the original written Gospels, written by the Apostle John and the Apostolic Father Luke. A review of the Papyrus 75, found that the books were copied by literate, skilled, professional and semi-professional copyist. The scribe of Papyrus 75 made grammatical and stylistic improvements in keeping with the Alexandrian Scriptorial Tradition. The scribe copied letter by letter and syllable by syllable. The job of all professional copyist and theologians for 2,000 years has been to keep the content and meaning of each verse of scripture, in every language, true to the original, whether it is the Gospel According to Luke, or the Books and Epistles of the Apostle Paul, or the Apostle Peter, or the Apostle John. Papyrus 75 was found near Alexandria, Egypt, (Pabau, Egypt), which is not surprising since the Catechetical School of Alexandria, Egypt, was located in that region. In addition, the early Bishops of Alexandria, Egypt, (Patriarchs), were very prominent in the early Christian Church. So, to reiterate, the surviving leaves of Papyrus 75 contained portions of The Gospel According to Luke (3:18 to 24:53), and a portion of The Gospel According to John (Chapters 1 to 15).

In the ancient Greco-Roman world, the Gospels and other formal texts were circulated on Papyrus Scrolls and Codexes. By contrast, informal texts were merely transcribed onto wax tablets or pottery labels. In 2 Timothy 4:13, the Apostle Paul reminds Timothy to “not forget the parchments”.

Papyrus 75 contains the Gospel according to Luke, chapter/verse 3:18 to 24:53, and the Gospel according to John, chapter/verse 1:1 to 15:27. What makes this interesting to scholars, is that all four Gospels were being grouped together in a single Codex or Papyrus Scroll for distribution to the various Christian Churches. The Papyrus Scrolls and Codexes of that time were often made of animal skins (Parchment) which enabled large portions of these Papyrus Scrolls and Codexes to survive, intact, eighteen hundred, nineteen hundred years later. Papyrus 75 was originally 144 pages of which 102 of the pages survived to our present time. As noted earlier, the ending of The Gospel According to Luke chapter/verse 24:53, is on the same page, as the beginning of The Gospel According to John chapter/verse 1:1. The copied Greek text of Papyrus 75 is almost identical to the Greek text of Codex Vaticanus, (300 A.D. to 325 A.D.), which will be discussed in the following sub-section.

There have been other Papyrus Scrolls found, from that period, in and around the greater Alexandria, Egypt region. Papyrus 4, written in Greek, contained the first 6 chapters of The Gospel According to Luke which were dated to the late Second Century/early Third Century. Papyrus 67 contains fragments of The Gospel According to Matthew. Papyrus 66 (which was dated to approximately 200 A.D.), contained a complete Codex of The Gospel According to John. Papyrus 66 which was written in Greek, is almost identical to The Gospel According to John found in Codex Sinaiticus, discussed later. Papyrus 52 (fragments dated to approximately 125 A.D. to 175 A.D.), also contained fragments of The Gospel According to John, written in

Greek.

iii. The Codex Vaticanus:

Codex Vaticanus (dated to approximately 300 A.D. to 325 A.D.), was scribed from the original Books and Epistles of the Apostles, and the Apostolic fathers. It is considered to be of Alexandrian origin. The Codex Vaticanus is one of the most important witnesses to the text of the four Gospels: The Gospel According to Matthew, The Gospel According to Mark, The Gospel According to Luke, and The Gospel According to John. The Codex Vaticanus also contains: the Book of Acts, written by Luke; The Books and Epistles written by the Apostle Paul: (The Book of Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, and the Book of Hebrews, from Hebrews 1:1 to Hebrews 9:14). The Codex Vaticanus also contains the Catholic Epistles: (James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude). The only Epistles and Books that are missing from the Codex Vaticanus are: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon and the Book of Revelation. The missing Epistles and Books, are considered to be missing due to the age and condition of the Codex Vaticanus (roughly 1,700 years old). 71 of the Codex parchment leaves out of an estimated 830 Codex parchment leaves, have been lost due to the ravages of time.

The Codex Vaticanus is similar to the Codex Sinaiticus, which was also scribed from the original Books and Epistles of the Apostles and the Apostolic Fathers, shortly after the Codex Vaticanus was scribed. Codex Vaticanus is the oldest extant copy of the New Testament Canon. For purposes of the Old Testament Canon, The oldest extant copy of the Old Testament Canon is considered to be the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Codex Vaticanus was written in Greek, on folios (leaves) of fine parchment bound in the Codex. It is considered to have been written by one to two scribes copying from the original Books and Epistles written by the Apostles and Apostolic Fathers. It is believed by subsequent biblical scholars, that an additional two scribes translated the Old Testament Canon: "The Septuagint". The Septuagint, except for The books of Maccabees, and Prayer of Manasseh, are contained in the Codex Vaticanus as the Old Testament Canon, copied from the books of earlier Rabbinical Scholars. The first 20 original folios (leaves), are missing. There are estimated to have been a total of 830 parchment folios (leaves), of which 71 parchment folios (leaves), have been due to age and deterioration, (leaving 759 parchment folios (leaves), in the Codex, which have survived). These have been preserved in the Vatican Library. The Codex Vaticanus is very similar to the Athanasius Canon (A.D. 367), which was written in Alexandria, Egypt, further raising the possibility that the Codex Vaticanus was also of Alexandrian origin. The Codex Vaticanus was written in Greek, with 3 columns per leaf. The leaves were thin and delicate vellum leaves, parchment. It was written in the Alexandrian text type. The Gospel According to Luke, and The Gospel According to John, in the Codex Vaticanus, are almost an exact copy of Papyrus 75, (dated to 175 A.D. to 225 A.D.).

iv. The Codex Sinaiticus:

The next New Testament Canon from antiquity, is Codex Sinaiticus (dated to approximately 330 A.D. to 350 A.D.). It was hand written in Greek. It is considered one of the oldest complete copies of the New Testament Canon. The Codex Sinaiticus used an advanced binding structure

and a high quality of parchment, for the text. It is believed that the original Codex Sinaiticus contained 1,460 pages, (730 double sided parchment leaves), of which approximately 408 leaves of double sided parchment, or 816 pages, survived out of the original 1,460 pages. What survives is one half of the Septuagint, (The Old Testament Canon), and the complete New Testament Canon. The Codex Sinaiticus means “Sinai Book”. The parchment leaves were folded and bound together, in a process (by hand), which is similar to today’s binding process. Many sections of the Old Testament books of the The Codex Sinaiticus are missing (Genesis to First Chronicles). Scholars believe that Codex Sinaiticus was transcribed by three, possibly four scribes, one of whom may have been a senior copyist, copying from the original Books and Epistles of the Apostles and the Apostolic Fathers. The Codex Sinaiticus is one of the earliest bound books which included the entire New Testament Canon in one volume. Sections of the Codex Sinaiticus are housed in four locations: Leipzig University (43 leaves), Leipzig, Germany; The British Library (347 Leaves), London, St. Pancras District, U.K.; The National Library in St. Petersburg, Russia, (18 leaves); and St. Catherine’s Monastery in the Sinai peninsula.

The Codex Sinaiticus is one of the most valuable Codexes, since it contains the complete original text of the Greek New Testament Canon, as well as part of “The Septuagint”. The Codex Sinaiticus is considered a very accurate copy of the original Books and Epistles of the Apostolic Fathers. The Book of Acts by Luke is considered to be a word for word mirror image of the Codex Vaticanus text of The Book of Acts by Luke. However, Codex Alexandrinus, and Papyrus 47 are considered to be superior copies of The Apocalypse of John, (The Book of Revelation). Codex Sinaiticus is very close to an exact copy of Papyrus 66, which contains The Gospel According to John (Papyrus 66 dated to 150 A.D. to 200 A.D.).

The New Testament Books and Epistles in the Codex Sinaiticus are as follows: (The Gospel According to Matthew, The Gospel According to Mark, The Gospel According to Luke, The Gospel According to John, The Book of Acts by Saint Luke, The Book of Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Philippians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, and the The Book of Revelation). The Codex Sinaiticus was written in Greek, and was initially housed not far from where it was originally scribed, in Alexandria, Egypt. The Codex Sinaiticus was originally housed at St. Catherine’s Monastery in the Sinai Peninsula. In terms of the Old Testament, most of the Book of Genesis to 1 Chronicles, have not survived, but the following books are contained in the Codex Sinaiticus: fragments of Genesis (23:19 to 24:46), fragments of Leviticus (20:27 to 22:30), fragments of Numbers (5:26 to 7:20), fragments of 1 Chronicles (9:27 to 19:17), Nehemiah, Ezra, Psalms, Esther, Tobit, Judith, Joel (Malachi), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Daniel, Baruch Prayer of Manasseh, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees. It is assumed that the Codex Sinaiticus originally contained the complete Septuagint.

In terms of the four Gospels, Codex Sinaiticus is the second most important witness of the four Gospels, after the Codex Vaticanus. For purposes of the Book of Acts, Codex Sinaiticus is equal to Codex Vaticanus. For purposes of Paul’s Books and Epistles, Codex Sinaiticus is the most important Codex.

v. The Tanakh and The Septuagint:

With respect to the Old Testament Canon, Rabbinical Scholars were assembled in 450 B.C. to produce **The Tanakh** (first assembled and scribed by a distinguished Council of Rabbis in 450 B.C.), in the Hebrew language. The Tanakh (The Masoretic (Rabbinic) Text), consists of the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Job, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

The Tanakh (The Masoretic (Rabbinic) Text) consists of:

The Torah (The Law-Instruction, The Pentateuch, the five books of Moses):

Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

The Nevi'im (The Prophets):

Joshua

Judges (1 & 2)

Samuel (1 & 2)

Kings (1 & 2)

Isaiah

Jeremiah

Ezekiel

Hosea

Joel

Amos

Obadiah

Jonah

Micah

Nahum

Habakkuk

Zephaniah

Haggai

Zechariah

Malachi

The Ketuvim (the Poetic Books and the Five Scrolls):

Psalms

Proverbs

Job

Song of Songs

Ruth

Lamentations

Ecclesiastes

Esther
Daniel
Ezra
Nehemiah
Chronicles (1 & 2)

In 285 B.C. to 247 B.C. a distinguished council of 72 Jewish Scholars were assembled to scribe **“The Septuagint”**. The Roman Catholic Old Testament Canon, (The Septuagint): consists of the books of: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Esdras 1, (Ezra), Nehemiah, The Psalms of David, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Job, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Esther, Judith, Tobit, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Baruch, Epistles of Jeremiah, Ezekial, Daniel, 1 Maccabees, and II Maccabees.

The Old Testament Canon; (The Septuagint): of The Eastern Orthodox Church, The Coptic Church, The Syriac Orthodox Church have additional books in their Old Testament Canons. The Apocryphal Books: (1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Prayer of Manasseh and Psalm 152), may or may not be included.

Further research in this area can be found in the following recommended books: “The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church”, Roger T. Beckwith, (1985), Wipf and Stock Publishers; “Discovering the Septuagint: A Guided Reader”, Karen H. Jobes (2016) Kregel; “Invitation to the Septuagint” Karen H. Jobes, Silva Moises (2015) Baker Academic

In general, The Septuagint has been rejected by mainstream Rabbinic Judaism. Mainstream Rabbinic Judaism has always embraced and used The Tanakh (The Masoretic Text). The Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Churches use their versions of The Septuagint Canon as their Old Testament Canon. The Protestant Bible uses the books of The Tanakh (The Masoretic Text), as their Old Testament Canon.

vi. Athanasius (Bishop of Alexandria, Egypt):

Athanasius was the Bishop (Patriarch), of Alexandria, Egypt, (296 A.D. to 373 A.D.). Athanasius was the 20th Bishop of Alexandria, Egypt, and one of the longest serving Bishops of Alexandria. Athanasius followed in the line of Alexandria’s first Bishop, the Apostolic Father, John Mark. Athanasius, in a letter dated 367 A.D., (The 39th Festal Letter), listed the 27 canonical books and epistles of the New Testament Canon, as well as the books of the Old Testament Canon (The Septuagint).

The Books and Epistles of the New Testament Canon which were listed and accepted as the canonical Books and Epistles, by Bishop Athanasius, are as follows: The Gospel According to Matthew; The Gospel According to Mark; The Gospel According to Luke; The Gospel According to John, The Book of Acts by Luke; Romans; 1 Corinthians; 2 Corinthians; Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians; Colossians; 1 Thessalonians; 2 Thessalonians; 1 Timothy; 2 Timothy;

Titus; Philemon; Hebrews; James; 1 Peter; 2 Peter; 1 John; 2 John; 3 John; Jude; and The Book of Revelation. (Please see: “Saint Athanasius of Alexandria” (Selection Four Books), (2016), Aeterna Press, Pages 545 - 546, The Festal Letters of Saint Athanasius, The 39th Festal Letter).

In 382 A.D., Pope Damasus the 1st, named the identical list of 27 canonical Books and Epistles, that Bishop Athanasius listed, (in Athanasius’s 39th Festal Letter), as the only canonical Books and Epistles, that would be included in the New Testament Canon.

Bishop Athanasius was a prominent Patriarch in the early Christian Church. Bishop Athanasius embraced and affirmed The Doctrine of the Trinity, The Doctrine of The Incarnation, (the virgin birth), and the Nicene Creed. This placed Bishop Athanasius at odds with four Roman Emperors over his tenure. However, Athanasius’s resolute stand, on these issues and doctrines, also earned him the un-wavering support of the three Popes, who were his contemporaries; Pope Julius, Pope Liberius, and Pope Damasus 1st.

Pope Liberius stood up to Constantine’s son, Emperor Constantius, on Bishop Athanasius’s behalf. The result was that Pope Liberius was ordered into exile for two years by Emperor Constantius for supporting Bishop Athanasius as well as, supporting The Nicene Creed. In the end, Emperor Constantius finally relented and restored Pope Liberius to the Papacy in Rome.

Emperor Valens had Bishop Athanasius removed from his Bishopric, over Athanasius’s steadfast biblically orthodox theology (including endorsing the Nicene Creed). Emperor Valens later relented and allowed Bishop Athanasius to be returned to his position as Bishop of Alexandria, Egypt.

Ultimately, Pope Damasus 1st required that all Bishops follow and embrace the Nicene Creed. Pope Damasus 1st supported Bishop Athanasius’s theological positions. This reflected Pope Damasus’s own personal orthodox theological positions on general Christian theology and doctrines.

Bishop Athanasius faced two heresies during his tenure, the “Arians”, lead by a priest in his own diocese, Arian; and the additional heresy of Gnosticism. Generally, these heresies denied the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and denied the Incarnation, (including the virgin birth). The Arians, and to a degree the Gnostics believed that the Lord Jesus Christ was created and not eternal, not equal to God the Father. Bishop Athanasius subscribed to Trinitarian Theology, which is also a tenet of the Nicene Creed, that the Lord Jesus Christ is, and has always been eternal, not created; (that the Lord Jesus Christ is co-equal and consubstantial with God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit, the eternal and consubstantial union of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Trinitarianism is consistent with: Luke 10:22; Luke 22:29-30; Luke 24:25-27; Luke 24:36-49; John 1:1-5; John 1:9-14; John 1:18; John 6:47-51; John 8:57-58; John 10:28-30; John 14:6-7; **John 14:9-14**; **John 20:27-29**; and **Colossians 2:9-10**. (Mark 8:29-30 and Luke 9:18-20 affirm Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah).

The heresies of Arianism and Gnosticism contested the virgin birth. Isaiah 7:14 foretold the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 1:26-38 and Luke 2:4-20,

document the virgin birth. We see in Leviticus 17:11; Numbers 28:9-10; 2 Chronicles 35:6; and Hebrews 9:12-15, the need for a spotless sacrifice for sin, which was provided by the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul discusses this in detail in Colossians 2:13-15, and also Romans 3:25 and Romans 8:1-4.

There are several good books that address these issues: “Saint Athanasius of Alexandria” (Selection Four Books), (2016), Aeterna Press; “Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, On the Incarnation”; (several publishers and editions); “Against Heresies”, Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, (2017), Ex Fontibus Co.; “The Mystery of the Trinity”, Vern S. Poythress, (2020), P & R Publishing Company.

vii. Pope Damasus 1st of Rome and the Councils of Bishops:

In 382 A.D., Pope Damasus 1st of Rome, held a Council of Rome (a formal meeting of all Christian Bishops, who could attend). At the Council of Rome, Pope Damasus 1st and the attending Bishops formally endorsed the complete list of the 27 Canonical Books and Epistles that constitute the New Testament Canon: The Gospel According to Matthew; The Gospel According to Mark; The Gospel According to Luke; The Gospel According to John, The Book of Acts by Luke; Romans; 1 Corinthians; 2 Corinthians; Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians; Colossians; 1 Thessalonians; 2 Thessalonians; 1 Timothy; 2 Timothy; Titus; Philemon; Hebrews; James; 1 Peter; 2 Peter; 1 John; 2 John; 3 John; Jude; and the Book of Revelation. Pope Damasus 1st also provided a complete list of the Old Testament Canon which used the canonical books found in The Septuagint, which was previously discussed.

Pope Damasus 1st of Rome also encouraged and commissioned his friend and secretary, St. Jerome to translate the scriptures into Latin, the canon is known as Jerome’s Latin Vulgate. Saint Jerome was educated at the Catechetical School in Alexandria, Egypt. Jerome, like Bishop Athanasius was theologically a Trinitarian and a supporter of the Nicene Creed. Jerome’s Latin Vulgate was translated from the original Greek Manuscripts, Codexes, and papyri, (some of which were previously discussed). Jerome scribed the Latin Vulgate between 383 A.D. and 405 A.D.. Pope Damasus 1st died in 384 A.D. after an 18 year reign as Pope. Saint Jerome died in Bethlehem in 420 A.D. Many centuries later, the Gutenberg Bible, the Wycliffe Bible, and the Knox Bible, were all translated from Jerome’s Latin Vulgate.

The Council of Hippo (393 A.D.), was a gathering of North African Bishops, and Bishops from Asia Minor, and the Eastern Mediterranean region, who affirmed the same 27 Books and Epistles for the New Testament Canon, which Pope Damasus 1st and the Council of Rome (382 A.D.) affirmed as the sole 27 Books and Epistles that comprise the New Testament Canon. The Council of Carthage (397 A.D.), was also a gathering of North African Bishops who agreed on the same 27 Books and Epistles for the New Testament Canon as Pope Damasus 1st at the Council of Rome. Both the Council of Hippo and the Council of Carthage went on to admonish churches that nothing was to be considered as Canonical other than the approved 27 Books and Epistles of the New Testament Canon, and that the New Testament Canon was closed, and completed. These 27 Books and Epistles are considered and affirmed as the Sacred Scriptures of the New Testament Canon.

viii. The Rejected Books:

Eusebius (Bishop of Caesarea) (A.D. 260 to 339), provides in his book: Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, the list of rejected books and epistles, which were rejected by the early Christian Church Bishops; as well as, the teachers at The Catechetical School in Alexandria, Egypt and the teachers at The Catechetical School of Antioch. As Eusebius' states in his book "Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History": ". . . Among the rejected writings must be reckoned also the Acts of Paul, and the so-called Shepherd, and the Apocalypse of Peter, and in addition to these the extant epistle of Barnabas, and the so-called Teachings of the Apostles . . . ", (Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, Book III, Chapter 25, Paragraph 4). Further, Eusebius went on to state: ". . . we have felt compelled to **give this catalogue in order that we might be able to know both these works and those that are cited by the heretics under the name of the apostles**, including for instance such books as the Gospels of Peter, of Thomas, of Matthias, or of any others besides them, and the Acts of Andrew and John and the other apostles, which no one belonging to the succession of ecclesiastical writers deemed worthy of mention in his writings. **And further, the character of the style is at variance with apostolic usage, and both the thoughts and the purpose of the things that are related in them are so completely out of accord with true orthodoxy that they clearly show themselves to be the fictions of heretics.** Wherefore they are not to be placed even among the rejected writings, but are all of them to be cast aside as absurd and impious. . . ", (Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, Book III, Chapter 25, Paragraph 6).

Even in the early Christian Church, there were heretics and those who were trying to spread heretical teaching by writing books and letters that they claimed were written by the apostles. However, the locations in which these books and letters were written, the time periods in which these books and letters were written, and the languages in which these books and letters were written, were inconsistent with the location, and language, of the various Apostles. The Apostles, during this period, were on their respective missionary journeys. Generally, all the Apostles missionary journeys ended in martyrdom, except for the Apostle John. Two excluded books continued to have some following, The epistle of Barnabas, which the early Christian Bishops determined was not written by Barnabas, and The Shepherd of Hermas, which, while inspirational, was not written by an Apostolic Father, but by Hermas, the brother of Pope Pius 1 (Bishop of Rome), (A.D. 140 to 155).

One last note is The Gospel of Mary, which was written in the second century A.D.. That text is non-canonical and generally considered heretical. It appears to be an extension of the ideas of the Gnostics and their belief system. Gnosticism is not Christianity. The Gnostics do not believe in the definition of sin as outlined in the Tanakh; they do not believe in the necessity of the blood sacrifice for sin by our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross; they do not believe in Christ's resurrection from the dead; they do not believe in the concept of the Trinity; they do not believe in Satan and his demons as existent beings; and finally, they do not believe that the Lord Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Their religion, is essentially, a more Eastern, somewhat Hindu, mystical view of spirituality, that is more focused on self-realization.

ix. The Nicene Creed:

The First Council of Nicaea, (325 A.D.), was held in Nicaea, a city located in modern Turkey. The First Council of Nicaea, was held to resolve early theological conflicts and address heresies and false teachings, which were beginning to appear in the early church. The Bishops of the early church who attended and participated in the Council of Nicaea, adopted the Nicene Creed. Athanasius was present as a prebyter, and assistant to the prior Alexandrian Bishop, Bishop Alexander, who was then Bishop of Alexandria, Egypt. Athanasius succeeded Alexander as Bishop of Alexandria, Egypt.

A. The Nicene Creed:

“We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father, through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”

(ECO, A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, ECO Confessional Standards, 2020, Page 7)

(The Nicene Creed: The Anglican Church of North America):

“We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father,

Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen
[The Anglican Church of North America]

Depending on which approximate count is used, the number of Bishops attending the First Council of Nicea was between 250 and 318 Bishops. Every region of the Roman Empire was represented, including Bishops from the Indian sub-continent, Bishops from Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Persia, as well as Bishops from North Africa, Europe, Asia Minor, and the Eastern Mediterranean region. In attendance was Bishop Nicholas of Myra (modern day Turkey). Bishop Nicholas of Myra, was the basis for the Santa Claus legends. Saint Nicholas would leave gifts for destitute children, and leave a dowry for poor daughters whose parents could not provide one.

x. Josephus:

Finally, as the great Jewish Historian Josephus (37 A.D. to 100 A.D.), stated in his renowned book: "Jewish Antiquities", Book 18, Chapter 3, Paragraph 3: ". . . Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. **He was the Christ.** And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day. . . "

Isaiah 9:6:

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (ESV)

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (NIV).

Books that you will want in your library:

“The Canon of the New Testament”, Bruce M. Metzger, (1987) Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press

“A textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament”, Bruce M. Metzger (2006) 2nd Edition, Hendrickson Publishers

“The Canon of Scripture”, F. F. Bruce, (1988), InterVarsity Press

“Canon Revisited”, Michael J. Kruger (2012), Crossway

“Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History”, **A.C. McGiffert, (1890), Pantianos Classics**

“Saint Athanasius of Alexandria” (Selection Four Books), (2016), Aeterna Press

“Saint Irenaeus of Lyons Against Heresies”, (2017), Ex Fontibus Company

“First and Second Apologies”, Justin Martyr,

“The ESV Study Bible”, ESV Bible, (2008) Crossway Publishers, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers

“The ESV Bible, Creeds and Confessions Edition, The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV), (2001) Crossway Publishers, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers

“The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church, Roger T. Beckwith, (1985), Wipf and Stock Publishers

“Discovering the Septuagint: A Guided Reader” Karen H. Jobes (2016) Kregel

“Invitation to the Septuagint” Karen H. Jobes, Silva Moises (2015) Baker Academic

“Letters to the Church: A Survey of Hebrews and the General Epistles” Karen H. Jobes, (2011), Zondervan Academic

One important note. Wikipedia has compiled a very large amount of research material including much of the early history of Christianity. Although Wikipedia, where an opinion is rendered, can sometimes side with liberal theologians, I encourage viewers of this website to support Wikipedia for all the Christian History that they have preserved online: www.Wikipedia.org, (Donate), or donate to: Wikimedia Foundation Inc. P.O. Box 98204, Washington D.C. 20090.

Other Books that you should consider:

“The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English versions” Bruce M. Metzger, (2001) Baker Academic, Baker Publishing Group

“The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, & Content” Bruce M. Metzger, (1965, 1983, 2003) 3rd Edition, Abingdon Press

“Letters to the Church: A Survey of Hebrews and the General Epistles” Karen H. Jobes, (2011), Zondervan Academic

“Apostolic Letters of Faith, Hope, and Love: Galatians, 1 Peter, and 1 John” Bruce M. Metzger (2006), Cascade Books, a division of Wipf & Stock Publishers

Books that document literacy in the First Century A.D. Roman Empire, specifically the Eastern Roman Empire:

“Ancient Literacy”, William V. Harris, (1989), Harvard University Press

“Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt” Raffaella Cribiore (1996), The American Society of Papyrologists

“The Literate Revolution in Greece and its Cultural Consequences” E.A. Havelock (1981) Princeton University Press

ESV = English Standard Version (2016) Crossway, Good News Publishers

NIV = New International Version (2011) Zondervan, Biblica, Inc.

-JWAlmq.-