

The Reliability of the Bible

The original letters penned by the apostles have disappeared. But, copies of their letters were kept, recorded, and distributed among the churches during the latter half of the first century. Paul intended that his epistles be circulated among the churches (Col. 4:16). Church elders received the writings of the apostles and their closest companions, and the writings endorsed by them. Of course, the entire Old Testament was endorsed by the apostles (Paul—2 Tim. 3:15-16). Matthew, Mark, and John were written by apostles. Credit for the writing of Luke and Acts is given to Luke, a close companion of Paul. Thirteen letters were received from Paul. Many believe Paul wrote Hebrews. The epistle of James comes from the brother of the Lord. Peter was an apostle & wrote two epistles. Jude was another brother of the Lord. The three epistles of John and Revelation are ascribed to John.

By the end of the first century, early believers engaged in much writing that still exists. There are over 36,000 references and it is said the New Testament can be reproduced from these alone. By the second century, the New Testament began to be translated from Greek into the common languages of the people where it went. Robert Goodman has written *there are some 9000 manuscripts of the New Testament in other languages. The oldest include the old Latin and old Syriac made about 150-200 AD.* The oldest existing manuscript dates back to 125 AD. *John Ryland's Fragment* was found in Egypt in 1929 and contains a few verses from the gospel of John.

In the fourth century, the Roman Emperor Constantine commissioned Eusebius (AD 264-340) to prepare 50 bibles for the churches of Constantinople. Through extensive research, Eusebius included all 27 books that we know today as the New Testament. The 27 books of the New Testament would become known as the "canon." "Canon" is from a Greek word meaning *a straight reed, or rod of measurement.* Today the English word "Canon" has come to mean *the list of original and authoritative books that compose God's inspired word.*

Eusebius selected these books by turning to the writings of the early church fathers who lived and wrote during the time that the New Testament writers were still living. He selected only the books that they had proclaimed as sacred. Here are just a few of those writers:

- Ignatius. This man wrote seven letters in 110 AD on his way from Antioch to Rome—where he would ultimately become a martyr. He quoted from 12 of the 27 NT books.
- Irenaeus (AD 130-200). Quoted most of the NT books, referred to as "Scripture."
- Tertullian (AD 160-220). He lived while the original manuscripts of the epistles were still in existence. He made 1800 quotations from the NT books.
- Origen (AD 185-254). Accepted the 27 books of the NT as we have them today.

The [table below](#) presents the canon comprised by Eusebius around 300 AD. Another canon was released by consensus in 367 A.D. which names the 27 books we know today. Additional books, the *Didache*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, *I Clement*, and the *Letter of Barnabas* were considered suitable for study but not as scripture. The last list of books was finally accepted by the Council of Hippo in 393 A.D. and the Council of Carthage in 397 A.D..

The books not included in our New Testament today were left out because these historians questioned them as being uninspired and perhaps even forgeries. Loy Milam has said, *We as Christians should feel secure that the Lord built His church upon Scripture during his earthly life, and has surely had a hand after His resurrection in making sure that all that is needed to guide us today has been preserved.*

(To be continued...)

Matthew Allen
mhallen@sbcglobal.net