

# The New Testament Canon

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- Canon (Greek) = straight rod (reed), ruler
- Usage by early Church – Galatians 6:16, “..those who live by this *rule*...”
- Usage by church fathers – “*rule of faith*”, *rule of life*”.
- Modern significance – what books should be in the New Testament, i.e. worthy to have the *authority of the word of God* - to rule the life of the believer.

# Questions regarding the Canon

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1. What books should be included?
2. What standards of judgment do we use to determine which books belong?
3. Are there unifying or central themes in the collection of writings (books)?
4. How reliably were these books passed on to us?

# **Standards of Judgment**

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1. Apostolic Authorship (chosen by Christ, eyewitnesses to events)
2. Theological consistency
3. Broad use by early church as shown by church fathers/apostolic fathers.

## **General Book Groupings – total 27 books**

- Gospels (4)
- Acts (1)
- Pauline Epistles to churches (9)
- Paul's Epistles to individuals (4)
- General Epistles (8)
- Revelation (1)

# Dates Books Written

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Matthew	70	Romans	57	Hebrews	70
Mark	60	Corinthians	54-56	Peter	65-67
Luke	60-70	Galatians	48	John	90-110
John	90-100	Ephesians	60	James	45-60
Acts	63	Philippians	54	Jude	67
		Colossians/ Philemon	61	Revelation	96
		Thessalonians	50		
		Timothy	63-64		
		Titus	63-64		

# Qualification of Apostles and Teaching

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1. Witness of Christ's ministry and especially the resurrection - Acts 1:21-26.
2. Personal sacrifice, persecution, concern for all the churches, miracles. (All of the apostles were killed for the faith except John) – 2 Corinthians 11:23-29, 12:11-12.
3. Paul's apostleship somewhat different  
1 Corinthians 15:3-9, Acts 9:1-16.
4. Confirmation of God's grace in their lives by other apostles – James (Acts 15:13-21), Paul (Galatians 2:1-9; 2 Peter 3:14-16).

# Theological Consistency

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The 4 gospels together with the apostolic letters give consistent teaching regarding:

1. The person of Jesus Christ, God's Son.
2. Man's need for salvation and the significance of the cross.
3. The resurrection of Christ.
4. Man's need for sanctification and the work of the Holy Spirit.
5. The nature, calling and working of the church
6. The last days, the second coming of Christ, and the judgment of God.

Furthermore, the teaching of the canonical works are consistent with that of the Old Testament Canon with many teachings derived from it.

# Usage by the Early Church (Fathers)

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- Clement (95 A.D.) – leading elder of church at Rome. Wrote letter to Corinthians with reference to gospel message including the resurrection, the role of the apostles and elders.
- Ignatius (110-115 A.D.) – bishop of Antioch. Executed in Rome. Wrote 6 letters to churches and one to Polycarp.
- Polycarp (A.D. 115) – disciple of John
- Papius (A.D. 125-140) – wrote “Expositions of Oracles of the Lord” based on Mathew, Mark and John.
- Irenaeus (A.D. 180) – disciple of Polycarp
- Athanasius (A.D. 367) – gives the earliest list of canonical books exactly like our present N.T.

## Irenaeus (A.D. 180)

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“Bought up in Asia Minor at the feet of Polycarp, the disciple of John, he (*Irenaeus*) became the bishop of Lyons in Gaul, A.D. 180. His writings attest the canonical recognition of the four-fold Gospel and Acts, of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, ..1 Peter, 1 John and Revelation.” --- F.F. Bruce

# Evidence of Acceptance of Books by Church Fathers

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<b>Book</b>	<b>Ignatius, Antioch</b>	<b>Polycarp of Smyrna</b>	<b>Irenaeus, Asia Minor</b>	<b>Codex Sinaiticus</b>	<b>Athanasius of Alexandria</b>
	<b>110-115</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>367</b>
<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Mark</b>		<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Luke</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>John</b>			<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Acts</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

Note: Where there is no evidence of acceptance may be due to time required for circulation rather than rejection of the books.

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<b>Pauline Epistles to churches</b>	<b>Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Pauline Epistles to Individuals</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>General Epistles</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Revelation</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Exceptions</b>		<b>Colossians, Titus, Philemon, James, 2 Peter, 2 John, Jude</b>	<b>Philemon, Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 3 John, Jude</b>		

## Books not accepted by any of the church fathers

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- Gospel of Thomas
- Gospel of the Twelve
- Gospel of Peter
- Gospel of the Basilides
- Gospel of Mathias
- Acts of Andrew
- Acts of Paul
- Acts of John
- Epistle to the Laodiceans

## Books Used but not as Scripture

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- Didache
- Epistle of Barnabas
- Shepherd of Hermas

# How reliably were these texts passed on to us?

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1. Closeness of dates of existing fragments or copies to date of writing
  - N.T. was essentially complete around A.D. 100
  - Oldest and best existing manuscripts go back to A.D. 350.
2. Number of copy fragments or whole manuscripts.
  - 5000 Greek manuscripts of the N.T. in whole or in part, the best and oldest go back to A.D. 350
  - Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus

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### 3. Other literature for comparison

- Caesar's Gallic Wars (50 B.C.), oldest copy is 900 years after the writing – only 10 good copies exist.
- Roman History of Livy (58 B.C. to A.D. 17) only 35 of the 142 volumes survive, only 20 manuscripts are significantly large, only one manuscript is as old as A.D. 300.
- Histories of Tacitus and Annals (A.D. 100) – only two manuscripts exist one from A.D. 800 and one from A.D. 1000. Of Histories, 4 ½ of 14 volumes survive, of Annals, 10 of 16 survive in full, 2 survive in part.

# Conclusions

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1. The authors of the New Testament were either apostles chosen by Christ or those closely associated with the apostles (Mark and Luke).
2. The authority of these writings were recognized by the church fathers; the writings were accepted into the canon through common use.
3. The writings are theologically consistent. They are also consistent with O.T. writings.
4. Large numbers of copies of these writings exist from times significantly less distant from the original than other historically accepted writings.

For these reasons and the witness of the Holy Spirit, we accept the authority of the N.T. for our faith and life.

# References

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- Evidence that Demands a Verdict – Josh McDowell. Here's Life Publishers, 1979.
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