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The Canon of Scripture



Church History - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides insights into the formation of the New Testament and the Canon of Scripture. He argues that none of the books of the Bible were lost and that the Catholic Church did not change the Bible but rather excised irrelevant stuff during the Middle Ages. Furthermore, the Canon was not a product of a decision-making body but had already been recognized and accepted by the early Church. Gregg emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical context of the writings in the New Testament and recognizing which ones were written by apostles and which ones were disputed.

Transcript

Tonight we are going to look at the subject of the Canon of Scripture. The word canon comes from the Greek word, which is spelled only a little differently using Greek characters, and it is the Greek word for a standard, and it is used in the ancient Greek literature as an ordinary word for a standard. It came to be used in Christian usage to speak of the standard of faith or for eventually what it boiled down to is just the list of books that are recognized as belonging to the Bible.

There are obviously many books that were written at the same time as the biblical books were written. Many of the books that were written were also written by Jewish people or Christian people, but they are not in our Bible. There have been many people who have asked, why is it that we don't have the Didache? Why don't we have the Epistle of Barnabas in our Bible? Why don't Protestants generally accept what's called the apocryphal books of the Old Testament? What about the lost books of the Bible? I saw a book, you might remember if you peruse bookstores, seen a book in the secular bookstores called the Lost Books of Eden or the Lost Books of the Bible.

These are usually anthologies or compilations of documents that are given a trendy title to sell a lot of copies to people who actually think there are lost books of the Bible. The title, which is sometimes attached to such anthologies, the Lost Books of the Bible, is a misnomer on all points. First of all, none of the books of the Bible were ever lost.

Even the books that are in these collections, generally speaking, were not lost.

Occasionally there's an inclusion of a book from the Nag Hammadi texts, which were discovered a few decades back, but most of the things that are included in these so-called Lost Books of the Bible have been known to the church from the earliest time, before there was a collection of writings called the New Testament. Most of these documents were known, and so they were never really lost.

Furthermore, to call them Lost Books of the Bible fails on another account. They're not books of the Bible. That's why they're not in the Bible.

If they were books of the Bible, they'd be in the Bible. And so they were neither lost nor are they books of the Bible, therefore they obviously can't be lost books of the Bible. The fact of the matter is, from the earliest times, it was known that there were forgeries that were written by persons claiming to be prophets or famous Old Testament characters or even claiming to be the apostles.

Forgeries that masqueraded as genuine books, which no doubt those who wrote them would like to have had them included in the canon of scripture. But it was the task of the church to discover what books were forgeries and which were genuine. That was only part of the task.

The other part was, among books that were not forgeries, in other words, books where the author didn't profess to be anybody other than who he really was, which ones really belonged in the Bible and which ones didn't? Those are two different decisions that had to be made with reference to how the New Testament would be put together. Now, the apostle Paul knew already in his lifetime of forged documents that had his name on. He says in 2 Thessalonians, he warns them.

And this is, by the way, a very early epistle. 1 and 2 Thessalonians are very possibly the earliest epistles Paul wrote. Very possibly Galatians was written earlier, but it's the only one that could possibly have been.

So very early in Paul's ministry, he knew already there were forged documents going around with his name on them. In 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2, Paul says in the opening verses, Now, Paul was not writing into a vacuum. He was writing to a situation he knew that was a real danger, that there were letters circulating as if from him.

He said, listen, if you get any of these letters, we didn't authorize this. If they're telling you the day of the Lord has come, I didn't write that letter. And so forgeries of the apostolic letters were already or forged letters that claimed to be from the apostles were around very early in the apostolic times.

Paul mentions at the end of some of his epistles, you know, notice I've signed this with my own hand. Which is the mark of genuineness of all of my letters, because he wanted to make sure that people didn't use his name and his reputation to get some doctrine

across or some pet thing across, some theory across and give it the status of an apostolic dictum. There were also books that were not forgeries at all, as near as we can tell.

I mean, the didache didn't claim to be anything but what it was. The didache, which means teaching in Greek, has a longer title, The Teaching of the Twelve of Apostles. But they never claimed, the book doesn't claim that the apostles wrote it.

It just professes to perpetuate the teachings that the apostles taught. And in fact, the book is anonymous and no one knows who wrote it, but it's not a forgery of any kind. And the early church had great respect for it, even wanted it to be canonized in some quarters.

Likewise, The Shepherd of Hermas and some of these other books that were around in those days. We studied some of those. We looked at some of those in an earlier lecture in this series.

But the thing was, not everyone agreed as to which books belonged in a collection of sacred books. Now you might say, why would anyone have to make a decision about such a thing? Well, there were several things that precipitated the need for a New Testament canon. And by New Testament canon, we mean an official list of books that are recognized as authoritative to the church, as sacred writings.

Because many books were around that some persons would like. I mean, if there was no canon of scripture today, I'd be inclined to recommend a few books that I wouldn't mind having added. I mean, books that I think everybody ought to read by certain authors that I like.

I'd certainly put A.W. Tozer in there and I'd probably put The Christian Secret of Happy Life by Hannah Whitehall Smith and a few other books in that collection. But they don't belong there. But there are a lot of Christian and Jewish writings that were around in the early days that some people really got blessed by.

And because they blessed them, they probably would have voted to put them in the canon. But how was the decision made? Some people actually have, I guess, a rather cynical view of how the Bible is canonized. I remember in Honolulu many years ago, I was teaching a series for youth with a mission on the authority of scripture.

And one of the students in the school I was teaching came up and said that he had been witnessing in Honolulu at the Alamora Shopping Center and had encountered a very hostile atheist who told him the Bible was full of contradictions and so forth. And the student tried his best shot and said, well, name one. You know, usually you can get away with that.

This guy happened to have done his homework and had about 30 different

contradictions he'd found in the Bible that he thought were contradictions and actually said, give me your address and I'll send them to you. He had them on his computer. So the student had this list.

He came up to me and said, here's 30 different contradictions in the Bible. And he said, I haven't been able to know what to do with these. And I said, well, would this man meet with you again? And he said, yeah, he would.

He had his address. And I said, well, let's meet with him. And so we went out and had lunch with this guy and his girlfriend that he was living with and talked for several hours and got nowhere with him except that in addition to answering all of the alleged contradictions, which his objections were based simply on the fact that he didn't understand the passages he was critical of, didn't know what they were saying and thought he did.

But he gave me a second document that he had written. And the document he had written that I took away, I haven't seen since then, he gave me a copy to take with me. It was another critique he had written, not of the Bible this time, but of Josh McDowell, who writes apologetic literature to defend the inspiration of Scripture.

And one of the things that Josh McDowell uses as an argument for the inspiration of Scripture is the fact that all the biblical writers agreed among themselves so thoroughly on so many controversial subjects. And Josh McDowell commonly says this kind of thing. I think he might say it in his book, *More Than a Carpenter*, but I know he says it in his book, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*.

He says, if you would take any ten people living at the same time, even going to the same church, with the same level of education, from the same political party and everything, similar life circumstances of the same culture, and have these ten people write, each of them an essay on one assigned controversial subject, and you got back their ten essays, you wouldn't find as much agreement among these ten contemporary people from the same culture as one another on one controversial subject as you would find in the same culture. As you find among the forty authors of Scripture on scores of controversial subjects. And that is one of Josh McDowell's arguments he commonly gives.

Well, this atheist, someone had given him Josh McDowell's book and he read it and he wanted to critique that argument. And in his paper he said, well, Josh McDowell's argument is flawed because the analogy that he sets up is a flawed one. He says, if you wanted to have a proper analogy to how the Scriptures came to be, he said you wouldn't just take ten people and give them an assignment to write on a subject and then gather their essays and put them together and see how they match.

He says what you would do is you'd get the people, you'd take them all from one religion, and you would have a priestly craft that would edit these essays. Well, that's not

only a rather cynical view of the subject, it's absolutely not a correct view of the subject. And people who haven't studied it often think, well, some committee of priests or some committee of high churchmen decided what they wanted the views of the church to be and they sorted through the various documents that were available and the ones they liked the sound of, they kept those in and maybe they had to alter a little here or there, but eventually they gave us the Bible as it is.

One thing I thought really amazing about this man's critique, in addition to the flaws in his logic, was that he apparently was illogical enough not to realize that in writing this critique and saying what he said, he was contradicting his other complaints about the Bible because he had issued a document that says there were 30 contradictions in the Bible. Now, you can't have it both ways. You can't have some group of editors who take everything that's been submitted for inclusion in the Bible and eliminate everything they don't agree with and the things that they keep in there, they sort it out and clean it up.

You can't have that kind of a process and still have 30 contradictions in the Bible because if you had that scenario, those seeming contradictions would have been eliminated in the process of the editing. Actually, the New Age people have an official view of the Bible. If you ask them, if you quote the Bible to them, especially the Gospels, not what Jesus said, and especially if you quote things that they don't agree with that Jesus said, they'll commonly say, well, the Bible was changed, the Bible was edited, the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages, they excised all of the stuff.

They say Jesus really was a New Ager. Jesus taught reincarnation and karma and all that stuff. But that wasn't politically correct in the church in the Middle Ages.

So the Catholic Church excised all that and fabricated some things and put them in Jesus' mouth and so forth. Well, those kinds of claims also are not true to history. And the people who make them apparently are not aware that we have manuscripts of the New Testament that predate the rise of the Roman Catholic Church, the papacy at least, by at least a couple centuries.

And it hasn't been changed since then. But it always occurred to me when I'm talking to the New Age people and they make these kinds of claims about how the Bible came to be in its present form and so forth. They don't realize.

They just don't have a sense of church history at all. If the Catholic Church indeed had imposed such a procedure on the scriptures so as to bring them into conformity with Catholic preferred doctrine, there would never have been a Reformation. The Reformation occurred because a Catholic monk was reading his Bible and he found a great number of things in the Bible that went right against the grain of everything the Catholic Church was teaching.

The Catholic Church didn't change the Bible. They discouraged the reading of the Bible

for a very long time because they knew there was stuff in there that didn't agree with their traditions and they knew that would confuse the faithful. But they didn't go so far as to change anything in it.

If they had, there could never have been a Reformation. Now, the Bible has, in fact, been brought down to us as near as we can tell from people who are at least sincere in trying to preserve the Word of God. We will not make any claims for infallibility for these people, but we will.

There is no reason to be cynical about their motivations or about their integrity. Now, I realize there are people who are shysters, there are people who are con artists, and there are religious people who are entirely dishonest. But as soon as we meet a religious person, we don't make that judgment about them without evidence against them.

It is not normal when you hear of some historical character or read the writings of some author that you immediately, without evidence against them, assume the worst about their motives. And yet that is exactly what many people do about the process and those who are involved in the process of giving us the present canon of Scripture. You mentioned that there's all this cynicism comes out about, oh yeah, those guys, they just left out the books they didn't like and so on and so on.

That process, there's no evidence that such a process occurred, and all the evidence actually is in favor of the notion that the men who were the most committed to respect for the Scriptures are the ones who did the investigations and made an attempt to discover which books of the Bible were genuine. Now, by the time Jesus came, or at least by the end of the first century, the Old Testament canon was well established. The church didn't have to do anything about that.

Josephus, who was born in 33 or 35 A.D. in Jerusalem and wrote the history of the Jews near the end of the first century, Josephus tells us how many books were in the canon of the Old Testament. Of course, he was a Jew, he wasn't a Christian, so he didn't tell us anything about the New Testament. There was no canon of the New Testament yet anyway.

But Josephus confirms that, just as an outside source, that the canon of the Old Testament was established even in his day, which of course he wrote before the end of the first century. And there's a good reason to believe that the Old Testament canon was established long before the first century. After all, the youngest book in the Old Testament was written 400 years before Christ, and it would appear that with the formation of the synagogue and the teaching of the Scriptures, week by week, the Jews had already come up with firm decisions as to what books belonged in their Scriptures before even Jesus was born.

But there was a new challenge to the church about the time when those people who had

known Jesus were all dying off and there weren't many of them left. And those who had written the epistles and the gospels were no longer around. And there were new books appearing, some of them claimed to be written by such people, but were strongly suspected to be forgeries, some of them were known to be forgeries.

And there are a couple of important things that precipitated the need to establish an official list of New Testament books. One of them was there were false canons, particularly that of Marcion. Now, last week, I believe it was, we talked about some of the early heresies that arose in the first three centuries of the church.

And Marcion was one of them, to a large extent, a Gnostic in his theology, and he did not believe any of the Old Testament had any validity. He did not accept any of the gospels except a greatly edited version of Luke, which he edited himself. The Marcionite canon was basically comprised of ten letters of Paul, I believe he did not accept the pastoral epistles, which are 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus, and an edited down, scaled down version of Luke where he removed everything that Jesus had ever said that might give some kind of respect to the Old Testament writings.

And Marcion was recognized as a heretic early on. Whatever we may think about the church pronouncing people to be heretics, we do have to say that Marcion's beliefs were not the same as those in the Bible. They were not the same as Jesus or Paul or the apostles.

Therefore, in fact, he was so far off that we would have to agree that heretic is a term that belongs to anyone, it belongs to him. And his canon of scripture is obviously, now there you have reason to be cynical about someone's canon. There we have a guy who very clearly, he even changed the books that he accepted, and he left out many books that had just as good a pedigree as the ones he included, but he left out what he left out because of his theological prejudices.

Now, if there ever was a doctored canon of scripture, it was that one. But the Orthodox church recognized right from the beginning, when I say Orthodox, I mean the mainstream Christian community all over the world, recognized that Marcion was a heretic and that his canon was not authoritative. And if he had never done that, if he had never come up with the Marcionite canon, as we call it, there might not have ever, or might not have as quickly at least, been a legitimate canon come up with.

But as soon as this cult began to spread throughout the Roman world, and Marcion began to say, well, here are the authoritative scripture documents, and he accepted no more, it fell to those who were more right on to counter that. And people would say, no, there are more books than that, that are legitimate. But the next logical question would be, well, which ones? And no one had really decided that yet.

And so the very appearance of false canons like that of Marcion made it necessary for a

genuine canon of scripture to be arrived at. Another thing that made it necessary to come up with the canon of scripture, as I mentioned earlier, there were apocryphal gospels and acts and epistles that were coming along. Now, these were generally not written in the first century.

Books like the Epistle of Barnabas, the Gospel according to Thomas, these books are well known to have come up in the second century, much too late to really be the works of either Barnabas or Thomas. And there were quite a number. There were the Acts of Peter, there was the Apocalypse of Peter, there was the Gospel according to the Hebrews, and a whole bunch of other apocryphal works that had been written usually in the second century, but many of them professing to have been written by first century personalities.

And so, of course, it was necessary for the church to sort it out and say, well, what did Peter write? Did Peter write this book called First Peter? Did he write this book called Second Peter? Did he write this book called the Apocalypse of Peter? Did he write this book called the Gospel of Peter? I mean, which books did Peter write? Did he write any of them or none of the above or what? And it was really necessary to know these kinds of things because some of these books would be genuine and some would be forgeries and it would be a shame for the church to not know the difference between the true and the false. Another circumstance that precipitated the need for a canon was that the Montanist movement had arisen and the Montanists were an early charismatic movement that laid heavy emphasis on charismatic prophecy. And Montanist himself, who was the founder of the movement, claimed to be the Holy Spirit.

He claimed to be the paraclete that Jesus had promised and that he was there to herald a new day of prophecy just before the coming of the millennium and the new Jerusalem was at hand. And those who followed his movement, and that included Tertullian late in his life, and he was converted to Montanism late in life after being a more orthodox church father, they believed that special revelations were happening on the same par as those of the Old Testament. Now there are people today who believe in similar things and there are people today who in reaction to those who believe such things have gone so far as to say that there is no gift of prophecy today.

But I had a debate in Santa Cruz a couple years ago with a Presbyterian minister who was arguing for the cessation of the gifts. The doctrine is called cessationism. He believes that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not for today, that they disappeared in the days of the apostles.

Well that was actually a decision that was made by church council I think in the late 2nd or 3rd century, that the gifts had ceased in the days of the apostles. That decision, however, was rather arbitrary. It certainly isn't biblical.

The Bible nowhere says that the gifts of the Spirit would come to an end any time sooner

than the second coming of Christ. And history proves there have been prophetic gifts. Some of them have every reason to be judged genuine.

But many have every reason to be suspected as being not genuine. The problem is that there are some who do give modern prophetic utterances the same level of authority as the scriptures themselves. And I have actually known people who have followed guidance that they got in a dream that they considered to be a prophetic dream from God, or in professed visions, or in words from the Lord that they thought they'd receive, which guided them to do things that were entirely anti-biblical.

I know of at least one guy who was heading up a small community in Oregon at one time who ended up sleeping with all the wives and all the women in the community because he had dreams about this. He felt he was a prophet and felt that all of his dreams were prophetic and he started having dreams about doing this with these women and he began to preach that that's what God wanted him to do. Well, all he would have to do is read the scripture and know that that wasn't true.

In fact, I remember confronting him once because he wanted me to join his group and become a prophet like him. And I said, I don't think so. I said, I don't think you have a high enough regard for scripture.

Now, I didn't know what he was involved in. This was back before I knew the actual activities he was involved in, the immoral activities. I was given the benefit of the doubt.

He seemed kind of suspicious to me, but I didn't know of any sin in his life. I said, well, I said, brother, what would you do if you felt that God showed you to sleep with brother so-and-so's wife? I was trying to give him an illustration of how he couldn't trust his dreams all the time because I heard some of his dreams, not those particular ones. I learned those later.

But I said, what if you thought God was showing you prophetically to sleep with so-and-so's wife? And he stroked his beard and says, well, I'd really struggle with that. I said, well, I wouldn't. I wouldn't struggle with that for a minute.

I wouldn't have to. I would know instantly that that dream was not from God because the scriptures carry more authority than my dreams. Now, he didn't apparently know that and he got into big trouble.

I've known people who've divorced their wives against scriptural without scriptural grounds because they felt like God told them that they were supposed to be with another man or another woman or whatever in a prophetic utterance. So, I mean, you just got to be careful. I mean, there is such a thing as the gift of prophecy.

There's no reason biblically to exclude it from functioning today. But at the same time, it does not hold the same authority or normativeness as the scriptures do. But the

mountainous movement was beginning to have this revival of prophetic utterance.

Frankly, I don't know, but some of it might have been genuine, although Montanus himself was a kook. But, I mean, some of the genuine Christians who got into the movement might well have been spirit-filled people who may have had to get the prophecy for all I know. But the problem is the things they were saying, they were putting on the same level with the things the apostles said or Jesus said.

And so this is another reason that the canon of scripture was hammered out was because it had to be decided what things had been given were really from God. And so there might be a standard or canon by which other things that claim to be from God could be measured. And so these are some of the reasons.

There were false canons. There were apocryphal gospels and acts and epistles. There were prophetic new revelations from the Montanus movement.

These things all were circumstances beginning to arise in the second century that made it necessary for the church to speak up and identify which books belonged in the sacred scriptures. There are a couple other reasons I want to let you know about, and that is that from the earliest times, the church services featured readings from the memoirs of the apostles. We have an actual passage in Justin Martyr's writings, early guy in the early second century, who describes what went on in the average church service in his day.

And one of the things he mentions in addition to the sacred meal and so forth that they took was that a portion of the service was given to a reading of the memoirs of the apostles. Well, with apocryphal writings coming out that claimed to be from the apostles that were not, it became increasingly necessary to know whether what they're reading in the churches is what they should be reading in the churches or not. They wanted to make sure that the apostolic teaching was preserved, but they had to know what it was that they should be reading in the churches.

And secondly, there were times of persecution when it was a death sentence for anyone who possessed sacred writings. Diocletian, for example, the last persecuting emperor in the beginning of the fourth century, Diocletian destroyed church buildings, he made it illegal to be a Christian, and he made it illegal to possess sacred books, and people could be put to death for possessing sacred scriptures. Well, most people didn't want to die for possessing scriptures that they thought were sacred but were forgeries, and they wanted to know what books were worth dying for and what books were not.

And that was not at all clear until some official pronouncements could be made. Now, I'm not one who gives as much weight to official pronouncements of clerics as some do, but I certainly see the legitimacy of some of the spiritual leaders of the church coming out and saying, well, we'd better sort this out, we'd better look at the evidence, we'd better come to some intelligent decision as to which books are authentic and belong in what we will

call our scriptures, our sacred writings. And so they took the available writings and they applied certain tests to them.

Even applying these tests, things were very uncertain for a fair bit of time. Now, most of the books in our New Testament, and there are 27 of them there now, most of them were recognized right from the beginning, but there were some books that were suspected as maybe not belonging in the canon for a very long time. It wasn't until as late as 397 A.D. in the Third Council of Carthage that the final list of 27 books that we now recognize came to be officially recognized by the church.

Until that time, there were people in some parts of the world that accepted each of them, but there was not a consensus throughout the church that all 27 of them were genuine. The tests that needed to be applied to decide whether a particular writing belonged in the New Testament canon were, first of all, the earliest fathers wanted to know whether the book was inspired. They wanted only to have inspired books in the New Testament.

Now, inspired means not that they were written by an inspiring person or that you got inspired by reading it. Inspired meant to them that God had inspired the writer with supernatural ability to write the exact words of God, just like the prophets of the Old Testament. Now, one of the difficulties with that is most of the New Testament books make no claim to inspiration.

None of the gospels claim that they're inspired. The book of Acts doesn't claim that it's inspired. Only rarely does Paul in his epistles suggest that something he's saying is from God directly.

Other times he says, what I have, I don't have a command from the Lord, I'll just give my judgment on this. Really, the only book of the New Testament that actually claims inspiration for itself is the book of Revelation. Ironically, that is the one book that was the last to be universally recognized by the church as inspired.

But the early fathers, I think, probably tended to apply a rather subjective test. Do you feel that's inspired? Yeah, I feel that too. Okay, we'll call that inspired.

You know, I mean, it's rather subjective to say, okay, I'm reading a document, I'm going to judge, is this inspired or not? Well, I've read a lot of books that aren't in the Bible that if there was no established canon, someone wanted me to judge whether they were inspired or not, I'd be inclined to vote in their favor. But they probably don't belong in the canon. There had to be a different test than that that was not so subjective.

And so a secondary test, and possibly the most important, was whether a book carried apostolic authority, meaning the authority of an apostle. Now, you may notice as you look at the list of books that are in our New Testament today that most of them are

written by people who are apostles. Matthew was an apostle, John was an apostle, Peter was an apostle, Paul was an apostle.

And so we've got Matthew, we've got John, we've got Peter and Paul. Just thinking now, I don't think there were any other apostles that wrote, but those men wrote most of the books. But there were other men, like Luke, for example, who was never known to be an apostle, but he was never known to be separated from an apostle either.

He traveled extensively with the apostle Paul in travels which brought him into frequent contact with other apostles. Sometimes Paul got together with all the apostles in Jerusalem and so forth, and Luke was with him. And that meant that Luke could hardly have written anything without Paul knowing of it.

I mean, here Luke's Paul's physician traveling with him, and Paul's writing some of these letters, Luke is right there with him. It would be hard, and Luke's writing his stuff, no doubt, while Paul's with him. There's certainly internal evidence that both Luke and Acts were written before Paul died, and during the very period of time that Luke was attending to Paul in prison, in Paul's final years.

So it's unthinkable that Luke would have written a life of Christ and a life of Paul, and he's here living in the same room with Paul, and Paul never sees it. You know, I mean, it was assumed by reasonable men that Paul approved of what Luke wrote, and therefore, though Luke was not an apostle, his writings had the imprimatur, as it were, of an apostle. It had apostolic authority.

Likewise, according to Papias, an early father we talked about in an earlier session, who lived in the turning of the century, first, second century, Papias said that Mark wrote the gospel according to Peter's dictation. Actually, that Peter preached, Mark accompanied him, and Mark served as Peter's interpreter. It's not known whether Peter preached in Aramaic or Greek, but Mark wrote in Greek, and he may well have simply translated Peter's sermons from Aramaic into Greek, and therefore, we have in Mark, as everyone knows, the gospel according to Peter.

And so we have apostolic authority there, too, although the actual writer was Mark. To say that a book is apostolic in its contents does not necessitate that it came from the actual pen of an apostle. Even the book of Romans did not come from the pen of an apostle.

Paul dictated it. He didn't write it with his own pen. How do we know that? Well, because the guy who wrote it sticks his name in there.

In Romans chapter 16, he says, I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you. Where did he say that? That's verse 22. Romans 16, 22.

As Paul is dictating all these greetings, greet so-and-so, greet so-and-so, greet so-and-so,

greet so-and-so, apparently Paul took a breath and was trying to think if he knew anyone else to greet. And while he took a breath, Tertius inserted this word, I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, also greet you. And so we know that Romans wasn't even written from the pen of an apostle.

It was written at the dictation of an apostle. Likewise, Peter wrote 1 Peter by the dictation to Silvanus, as it would appear. So, no, not Silvanus, excuse me.

That wasn't Silvanus. I don't think. Silvanus is usually with Paul.

Let me go back there and refresh my own memory. In Peter chapter, 1 Peter chapter 5. Let's see here. By Silvanus, I was right.

Silvanus must have been with Peter at that time. 1 Peter 5, 12. By Silvanus, our faithful brother, as I consider him, I have written to you.

So that Mark wrote Peter's things doesn't make any less Peter's document than if Peter had written it himself. Just like we all accept Romans as a letter from Paul, but Paul didn't write it. Tertius did, but Paul dictated it.

So the question became, which books that were out there really did come from at least the mind of an apostle? Which one of them did the apostles, were they intimately acquainted with the writings and either wrote them themselves or at least fully approved of them? And that was the litmus test, really, of what belongs in the scripture. Another test seemed to have been whether a book's content measured up to the high standards of morality and ethics and so forth that the apostles were known to have taught and so forth. So these are some of the tests that were applied, but even then it wasn't that easy and the decisions were not unanimous right off.

Now, before anyone even began to talk about establishing a canon of the New Testament, most of the books that we now accept as New Testament canonical literature were already accepted and were quoted in the early church fathers writings as if scripture. Now, no one had gotten together and said, okay, now these 27 books are, we're going to call those scripture now, but they were already recognized. Irenaeus, Tertullian, Justin, all these early church fathers, they quoted extensively from most of the books of our New Testament.

In fact, if you take all the church fathers from the first three centuries, it has been said, if all New Testaments in the world would be shredded today, if someone managed to finally destroy all the files for all the CD-ROM, all the, everything, every semblance, every, every, in every form that the scriptures exist could just destroy them all. But if you still had the writings of the church fathers, you could reproduce the whole New Testament just from quotations from the church fathers. That's how extensively these 27 books were used as authoritative among the church fathers before anyone taught about

whether there should be a canon of the New Testament or not.

So when the canon actually was formulated, it wasn't deciding something new that no one had decided on before. It just made official what was instinctively recognized by the church leaders in the earliest days. Clement of Rome, who was a contemporary with Paul, Paul might even send greetings to him in first Corinthians 16, where he says, greet Clement.

Clement of Rome was the first or third bishop, according to Catholic tradition of Rome. But he, his writing is the earliest surviving writing that has come down to us from the church, except for the New Testament writings themselves. And he's known to have written in the, the late first century.

That was when he lived. And he quoted from quite a few New Testament books. And from him on, all the church fathers did.

So by the time someone sat down and started writing down a list of canonical books, that was centuries after they were all fairly recognized by, by Christians, you know, earlier on, less officially. The gospels we know were, the four gospels that we have now were recognized extremely early. In the year 150 AD, Tatian, who we've talked about in a previous lecture, he put together the first, what we would now call a harmony of the gospels.

You can buy today harmonies of the gospels. You can have the four gospels in four columns next to each other. Well, Tatian wrote the first harmony of the gospels.

His book was called the Diatessaron. And he took all four of the gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and put them parallel and harmonized them in the year 150 AD. Now, the fact that he did that makes it very clear that at least he recognized Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as authentic gospels.

This is, you know, mid second century, this recognition. We have no reason to doubt that the recognition was earlier than that. But there we have a document that proves that those four gospels were recognized and no others.

Irenaeus also said that there were four gospels and could be no more and no less. Irenaeus was, again, in the second century. So, very early on, the church knew which of the gospels were authoritative and left some record of it in the quotes and in the writings of these older guys.

Another thing that is well known is that while Paul's letters were originally just preserved by the churches that he wrote to, eventually, it was decided that things that he said to one church might be of benefit for other churches. So, copies were made and circulated to other churches. And eventually, it is established by quotes from the church fathers that a collection of Paul's letters was in circulation as a collection by the end of the

second century.

That would be before the year 300. Excuse me, before the year 200. The end of the second century is before the year 200.

So, in the 100 A.D. range, 100 to 200, that period of time, Paul's letters had already been collected, all 13 epistles, including the pastorals, and were in circulation recognized as from Paul. And this was before anyone decided to formulate a canon. So, we have the four gospels and Paul's 13 epistles all recognized, basically, by the church unofficially, but without any question in anyone's mind that they were genuine.

Now, there's four orthodox, we could say, canons of scripture that we know of from different time periods. From the time of about 200 A.D. until the final canon of the Council of Carthage in almost 400 A.D., over a period of about 200 years, from the end of the second century on, there was an attempt made to actually canonize certain books of the New Testament, to establish a list. The first of these that is known to us, that has survived, is called the Muratorian Canon.

Now, it's called that because the scholar who translated it was named Muratori. He was an Italian scholar in the 18th century, and the canon is named after the translator, Muratori. But the canon itself is a writing from about the year 200 A.D. And it was somewhat different from our present canon, but you can see similarities.

I've included in the notes I've given you what was omitted in the Muratorian Canon. This canon was an orthodox canon produced in Rome, in all likelihood, and therefore it was probably put together to refute the Marcionite canon, which was a heretical canon. And this canon included in it all four of our present Gospels, no others.

The Book of Acts, all 13 of Paul's epistles, including the pastoral epistles, the Book of Revelation, and two, and possibly three, of the epistles of John. Now, there is some question as to whether the Muratorian Canon included all three of the three epistles of John, but it did. It is known to have included two of them, at least.

And then the Book of James and Jude were included. Of the books that are in our present canon that were not included in the Muratorian Canon would be the two epistles of Peter, the Book of Hebrews, and possibly one of John's epistles. We're not sure whether he accepted all three of them or not.

I'll tell you a little later what the arguments were against some of these books, but let's just see what was accepted at what time. Now, the Muratorian Canon also accepted the apocryphal books, the Wisdom of Solomon and, with some reservations, the Apocalypse of Peter. These books, of course, are not currently recognized as belonging to the New Testament canon.

They were written in the wrong period of time to really belong there, but that was

apparently not fully understood or known when the Muratorian Canon was put together. Also, the Shepherd of Hermas, which we've talked about in a previous session, was accepted for private but not for public worship. In other words, they were kind of ambivalent about that.

Many people at the end of the second century wanted the Shepherd of Hermas to be included in the canon and thought it should be. Others had reservations. And the final decision was, well, the book is good and edifying for private worship, but it's not known to be really an inspired document belonging in the canon, so they wouldn't use it in public worship in the church.

And that is how the church stood in the year 200. As you can see, there are some differences from the way we look at the canon today, but the main body of the New Testament is still there. You've got the four Gospels, the book of Acts and thirteen of Paul's epistles, as well as the book of Revelation.

Now, later, about fifty years later, Origen, and we'll talk about Origen when we talk about the ancient churches, the theologians, which will be next time, I think. Very important man, an Alexandrian theologian in the middle of the third century. He also was the head of the Alexandrian school, one of the very first theological schools in the early church in Alexandria, Egypt.

And he made up, by the way, his writings were incredibly prolific. Some rich donor allowed him to hire at the donor's expense seven scribes who could take shorthand. And they wrote down Origen's many, many lectures, and he lectured all the time at this school in Alexandria.

It's sort of like if someone would take all my 800 tapes and transcribe them, you know, that the world itself perhaps could not contain the books that would be written. But I think it was, who was I think it was, Jerome said, who could possibly read everything that Origen ever wrote? Because the man just had these scribes taking down everything he ever taught. So Origen wrote exhaustively, and he's considered to be the earliest and greatest of the early theologians.

But he also has, something has come down from us of his statement about what belonged in the New Testament canon, what was recognized in his day. He didn't make the decisions. He just says what the church generally recognized in his time.

There were books that he called undisputed books, and other books he called disputed books. The undisputed books were the four Gospels, the Book of Acts, the 13 Pauline Epistles, the Book of Revelation, 1 John, and 1 Peter. Now you can see that that resembles in some points the Muratorian canon.

The difference is that he did not include James and Jude as undisputed books, as the

Muratorian canon seemed to. And he did include 1 Peter as an undisputed book, and that differed from the Muratorian canon before. 1 Peter by this time was elevated to be recognized as genuine and not spurious, although 2 Peter was still not accepted.

Among the disputed books, and these were not books that were declared to be forgeries, it's just that they weren't sure. They were not sure yet whether these books belonged in the canon or not. There were some who said yea, and some who said nay.

The Book of Hebrews was in that list, as it was also omitted from the Muratorian canon. The Book of James and 2 Peter, and the 2 and 3 John, the two epistles, and the Book of Jude, those were disputed in Origen's day. He seemed to accept them himself, but he mentioned that they were under dispute as far as the global church was concerned in its consideration.

He said also there was dispute in his day about the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle of Barnabas, and the Didache, and a book called the Gospel according to the Hebrews. So the Didache, Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Gospel of Hebrews, some churches were accepting those in 250 AD as canonical, others were not. Those, of course, did not make it into our canon ultimately.

Now, about 50 years later, about the year 300, Eusebius wrote. Now, Eusebius is the father of church history. His work called Ecclesiastical History is the earliest church history that was written to our knowledge other than the Book of Acts itself.

And it's very valuable. I have a copy of it in my car. It's a really interesting, interesting book.

I'm surprised Christians don't read it more often because it's an early history by an early Christian living in around 300 AD. But in his book, Ecclesiastical History, he also identifies what were the accepted New Testament books in his day. Now, again, there was no official counsel that had said any of these books were canonical.

Eusebius is just listing the books that he and the Christians of his time recognized, although there had not been any official declaration about them. It was just sort of consensus. And he included in his canon the four Gospels, the Book of Acts, the 13 Pauline Epistles, 1 John, 1 Peter, and Revelation, though he doubted the authorship of Revelation.

He did not doubt that Revelation was an inspired book, but they were not sure from the time of an earlier writer named Dionysius, who basically said the writer of the Gospel of John could not possibly have written the Book of Revelation because of the Greek style differences. Dionysius had a large following, especially in Alexandria, Eusebius being one of them, who doubted that the John who wrote the Revelation was the Apostle John. The actual author of the Revelation doesn't say he's the Apostle John.

He just calls himself John. And Dionysius believed that it was a different John. And, of course, that's not a sacrilegious theory to hold.

I don't hold it. I believe it was the Apostle John, and I think the evidence is very strong for it and the evidence against it very weak. But Eusebius was not convinced that John the Apostle had written Revelation, but he did consider it to be an undisputed inspired book.

In Eusebius' day, again we're talking about 300 AD, James, 2 Peter, 2 John, and Jude were still disputed books, as they had been in the days of Origen. Now, I'm not sure where Hebrews stood with Eusebius. Hebrews was a disputed book in Origen's day, and I don't recall being able to find out what Eusebius said about Hebrews.

And maybe I just was not reading carefully when I made this handout. He might have put it in the disputed books, too. I will say this.

I know this much, that Hebrews was accepted early as a Pauline epistle in the Eastern Church, but rejected in the Western Church for a very long time. And it might not have been accepted in Eusebius' day. And then all the apocryphal works were excluded from Eusebius' canon.

He didn't recognize Shepherd of Hermas, Barnabas, Didache, Gospel according to Hebrews or any of those. So by the time of Eusebius, none of the apocryphal works were recognized by the Church as being inspired or belonging in the canon. And there were still a handful of books that we now include that they were not sure about.

It was not until the Third Council of Carthage, which was about 50 years later. These increments are almost exactly 50 years. Meritorian Canon in the year 200, Origen's in 250, Eusebius the year 300.

Now, actually, this is more like 100 years later, the Third Council of Carthage in 397. At this council, all the 27 books that we now accept and no others were recognized as authoritative. Now, I want to talk to you briefly about why some of the books were not immediately accepted that later came to be accepted.

And it's really quite simple. They always had good reasons. It wasn't because someone didn't like what they said.

This is, of course, a cynical idea. Someone didn't like the content, so they wanted to keep it out. Now, the evidence, I mean, when you consider why these books were omitted and why they were eventually included, I mean, the evidence you get of the people who are doing making these decisions.

And by the way, no one sat there and made official decisions until 397 A.D. Before that, it was all just consensus, you know, unofficially agreed upon, almost instinctively, as far as whatever the canons were. But the reason that they took so long is because they

wanted to make sure they got the authentic books. There was nothing, for example, in the book of Hebrews that Orthodox churchmen objected to in terms of its contents.

The only problem with it was it was anonymous. The author does not identify himself. And the Eastern Church from earliest times thought Hebrews was a book of Paul's epistles, and they recognized 14 Paulian epistles, Hebrews being the 14th.

But the Western Church had serious doubts as to whether Paul had written it. And if it was not written by Paul, it was not at all certain that it was written by an apostle at all. Now, you might wonder why the Western Church was unconvinced about Hebrews.

I mean, if the Eastern Church accepted it right off and even the King James translators and the King James, I think I think it says the epistle of Paul to the Hebrews. So apparently the translators of the King James thought it was Pauline. But there were very good reasons to question whether Paul had written it.

One was the style of the book in Greek. Paul's writings, his 13 epistles, have a particular style of writing. It's not particularly refined Greek.

It's not even grammatical sometimes. I mean, he'll have a sentence that runs on for 13 verses, a very long and burdensome sentence. Paul was not too concerned about writing, you know, polished literary Greek.

But the three books in the New Testament that have the most literary literary grammatically refined Greek are the books of Luke, Acts and Hebrews. And for that reason, one early suggestion that was made by Clement of Alexandria was that Paul wrote the book of Hebrews in Aramaic for the Hebrews. That was their language and that Luke translated it into Greek.

That would account for a great deal because the thoughts in Hebrews are very Pauline thoughts. I mean, some people say they are, but I can't understand where they're coming from. There are so many expressions in the book of Hebrews and concepts that are found in Hebrews that are found nowhere else except in Paul's writings.

Paul seems to be the one who originated some of these thoughts. I mean, ideas are at least the language of these ideas. And the book of Hebrews includes them.

It has a very Pauline ring to its thought. Furthermore, whoever wrote Hebrews traveled with Timothy because in the closing chapter, the writer says, Our brother Timothy is at liberty and I'll be coming with him to meet you, to visit you soon. So someone wrote the book of Hebrews who fought a great deal like Paul and who traveled with Timothy.

Well, since Paul traveled with Timothy all the time, whoever traveled with Timothy would have to have a close association with Paul if it wasn't Paul himself. And therefore, Luke is a very good candidate. Luke could have written Hebrews.

If he did, there'd be a good reason to accept it as canonical on that basis since we accept Luke in Acts, which Luke also wrote. And the writer of Hebrews had the same high Greek literary style as Luke did in his two other books. And Clement of Alexandria made this suggestion.

It is a very reasonable suggestion, though there's been many other suggestions. Martin Luther thought that the book of Hebrews was written by Priscilla. Priscilla and Aquila, the couple that Paul met in Corinth who had lately come from Rome because Claudius the emperor had driven all the Jews out of Rome.

And they'd left Rome, gone to Corinth. Paul came from Athens to Corinth and met them and teamed up with them because they were all tent makers and they worked together and ministered together. And Luther, I think, is the only... No, I'm not.

It's not Luther. Someone else, someone more modern said that. I forget who said it.

But the people who have said... I'll tell you who Luther thought wrote it in a moment. The people who say that Priscilla wrote it do so strictly for the reason that Priscilla was a woman. And therefore, they say she couldn't put her name on it because in those days a document by a woman wouldn't be recognized as authoritative.

And the very fact that it's anonymous proves it was written by a woman. Now, I don't know who came up with the idea first, but I would recommend you to put your money on it being a feminist who said that. I mean, that's the kind of logic that feminism uses.

It's anonymous. Therefore, it must be by a woman. I would say that that's got a 50-50 chance of being correct since it could be a man.

Anonymous works could be by men also or by women. But there seems to be no internal evidence or anything else to suggest that it was written by a woman or by Priscilla in particular. Luther, who I misrepresented as saying Priscilla wrote it, Luther was the one to suggest that Apollos wrote the book of Hebrews.

Now, Apollos was a man from Alexandria. And the writer of Hebrews quotes extensively and exclusively from the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was made in Alexandria. Now, the fact that Apollos was from Alexandria and the Septuagint came from Alexandria is really irrelevant to the argument because by the time of whoever wrote Hebrews, the Septuagint was used throughout the Roman Empire.

And that someone quoted from it wouldn't mean that they were from Alexandria. But Apollos is said in Acts chapter 18 to have been a man mighty in the scriptures and a tremendous debater convincing everyone. And the writer of Hebrews definitely knew the scriptures, used the scriptures extensively, and was a very logical debater.

I think he made his points with a seamless logic. And so Luther, and only Luther, I mean at least Luther was the first, and that was pretty late in church history to make this suggestion, thought that maybe Apollos had written Hebrews. So there's a big toss-up.

Actually, Origen in the middle of the third century said God only knows who wrote Hebrews. And that's really, when you read a commentary to Hebrews now, after the commentator surveys all the theories of who may have written Hebrews, they always quote Origen as the last word on it. God only knows who wrote Hebrews.

We still don't know who wrote Hebrews. But I would say this. I have no problem with its canonicity for the simple reason that its author traveled with Timothy.

And you can't travel with Timothy and not travel with Paul. And I think very, I mean, I'll give you my idea, but God only knows if it's true. I think probably Luke did write it.

I mean, the Greek style matches Luke's other writings, but that, I mean, there might be any number of people who could write in that Greek style. But among Paul's close companions who would travel with him and Timothy, Luke is the best candidate, in my opinion. There is some reason to doubt Clement of Alexandria's assessment that Paul wrote it in Hebrew or Aramaic and that Luke translated it into Greek, because there are certain features of the book of Hebrews that scholars have pointed out could not likely be there if it was a translation.

For example, the writer of Hebrews does a play on words, on the Greek word, which would not exist in the Hebrew language. And that's the use of the word covenant, the word or testament, actually. He's talking about the Old Testament and the New Testament.

And he says, you know, now a testament goes into force at the death of the testator. Now, he's there for using the term testament to mean a will. And yet he's applying it to his argument about the Old and New Testaments.

And he kind of makes a little play on words that a testament in the Greek language can also mean a will, a last will in testament. But in the Hebrew, the word testament or covenant could not also mean a will. So I know there's that play on words would never have originally been written in Hebrew because there would be no such play on words in the Hebrew language.

And therefore, something like that gives evidence that it was not translated. It was originally written in Greek, but I still think Clement may have hit it right in identifying who the Greek writer was. I think it might have been Luke, but who knows? It doesn't matter.

It seems clear it was written by someone close to Paul, someone whose ideas Paul would have had occasion to review and to approve of. James and Jude were held in abeyance

for a while, held at arm's length in the disputed category for a few centuries, because neither James nor Jude describes himself as an apostle in his letter. It never says James, an apostle of Jesus Christ, or Jude, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Both of them say, a servant of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ. James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Actually, I believe Jude says, Jude, a servant of God and brother of James.

And neither of these men really identify which James or which Jude they are. And to our chagrin, if we search the New Testament, we'll find that James and Jude are extremely common names. Jude is a form of the name Judah, a very favorite Old Testament name among the Jews.

And James is a form of the Hebrew name Jacob, another favorite Old Testament name. So there were there were, you know, James and Jude's coming up the wazoo in the early church. And it's really didn't it's hard to identify which James would call himself the servant of God.

And there are many men who might be. But very early tradition stemming back from the time practically that these books were written, assigned the book of James to James, the Lord's brother, and Jude to Jude, the Lord's brother. And we do know this.

I mean, at least there's correlating data that may not prove it, but it goes a long. And that is that in the Gospels, there are two lists of Jesus siblings and he had four brothers named. And one of them was named James.

The oldest was named James. And one of the other brothers was named Jude or Judas, which is a form of Judah. And so we know that Jesus had a brother named James.

He had a brother named Jude. And the early tradition of the church holds that James and Jude, who were brothers of Jesus, wrote those books. Now, we never read anywhere in Scripture that this Jude, the brother of Jesus, was known to be an apostle.

However, James, the brother of the Lord, is referred to as an apostle by Paul in Galatians chapters one and two. Paul gives an early history of his travels after his conversion. And he mentions a visit that he made for a fortnight to Jerusalem where he said he went to meet the apostles.

But he saw only Peter and he said other of the apostles I saw none except James, the Lord's brother. Obviously saying I didn't see any other apostles except James means James was considered an apostle, though he was not one of the twelve. So Paul recognized James as an apostle and probably Paul's use of that term for James just reflected the general consensus of the church at the time.

James was accepted as an apostle. There's much in the book of James that makes it very

credible that James, the Lord's brother, could have written it. There is a lot known about James, the Lord's brother.

Even Josephus, who knew very little about Jesus, records the death of James, the Lord's brother. And the Bible doesn't. Josephus couldn't have gotten it from the New Testament writers because the New Testament doesn't record James' death.

But Josephus does because there was a particular power vacuum when Pilate left office and the other procurator had not yet arrived from Rome and the Sanhedrin, deciding to get rid of James, took advantage of the absence of a Roman procurator and they just had sort of a gang stoning of James like they had earlier of Stephen. And Josephus records it and he says they stoned James, the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ. And Josephus didn't believe in Jesus, but he knew about this.

James was well-known. The early church fathers write a lot about him. He's called James the Just.

Camel knees, they called him, because he prayed so much his knees were calloused, looked like a camel's knees. He was a Nazarite. He pleased the Jews well, for the most part, except for the Jewish leaders.

Most of the Jews and Christians recognized James as a holy man. He was zealous for the law. In that respect, he was very different than Paul.

But even Paul deferred to James. When Paul came to Jerusalem on his final visit there, James suggested to Paul, well, you know, there's some people here who say you're teaching things against the law. We want to quell that rumor.

And why don't you just help these guys pay their vows for a Nazarite vow? They're going there to the temple tomorrow. You can go and pay their vows and show everyone you're not an enemy of the law. Amazingly, Paul deferred and did that.

When you consider Paul's strenuous arguments against being under the law elsewhere, I mean, it just shows how respected James was that even Paul deferred to him. But the writer of James also speaks about the law a fair bit. In fact, enough to make Luther very unhappy with him.

Luther, of course, I think, underplayed the role of works and law. Luther, you know, pendulum swinger. You know, I mean, people pendulum swing.

If there's a heresy here and you discover it, the human tendency is to swing way too far the other way. And Luther didn't like the epistle of James. He called it an epistle of straw.

He would have excluded it from the canon if he had the choice. But Luther came too late in history to exclude it. It was already well accepted, so he had to keep it in the Bible.

He put it last. When Luther translated the Bible into German, he put James at the end, hoping maybe people wouldn't read that far. But Luther didn't like it because Luther's emphasis was on justification by faith, the law and grace, no works, etc.

And James has those troubling passages about faith without works is dead. And that just didn't jive with Luther's emphasis, so he didn't like James. But he included it.

That's another example. The people, you know, they don't include something in the canon because they like it or don't like it. They include it because they recognize it's authentic.

And there is sufficient emphasis on works and the law in the epistle of James to have troubled Luther and many others since him. Especially Lutherans and Calvinists, I guess. But that would fit well with James, Laurel's brother.

So the arguments go way back, and the tradition goes way back, that James, Laurel's brother wrote the book of James. And if Jude was his brother, and James was called an apostle, I guess it is assumed Jude could have been recognized as an apostle. Now, I'll give you my own private opinion here.

I would say that if there's any book of the New Testament whose canonicity would be still in dispute in my mind, it's the book of Jude. Now, I don't have any problems with the book of Jude in the sense that it doesn't teach anything I don't like. I like everything it says.

I just don't understand how it ever made the final cut because Jude is nowhere called an apostle in the Bible. He doesn't call himself an apostle. Now, the fact that he's the brother of James in close proximity to him might have made him in a status maybe like Luke, and we accept Luke's writings.

The problems I have with Jude are a couple. One is he quotes some apocryphal writings as if they're authoritative, some of which were known to be forgeries. Jude quotes the book of Enoch as if it makes it sound like he considered it genuine.

He also tells a story out of an apocryphal book called The Assumption of Moses that is not a genuine document either, and he quotes that as if it's true. Now, that has troubled me for a long time about Jude, and I thought, well, why in the world did they include his book? They certainly don't have to. And another thing about it, Jude doesn't teach anything that isn't already found somewhere else, mostly in 2 Peter 2. 2 Peter 2 almost corresponds point by point with the book of Jude.

And so if we didn't include Jude, we'd still have all the same information from Jude in other books of the New Testament. Why do we need the book of Jude? I don't know. But I like what's in Jude.

I like its contents. I'll quote a description, and I'll accept it. I mean, I figure they may have had reasons that I don't know about.

And what I would be inclined to look at Jude as, Jude appears to be an expository sermon preached by an early Christian leader, probably the brother of Jesus. But his text, which he was expounding, was 2 Peter 2. Because it's interesting, 2 Peter 2 says, There were false prophets among the people, and there shall be false teachers among you. Jude says, There are false teachers.

They've crept in as the apostles said they would. And Jude says, Remember what the apostles said. And he quotes, seemingly quotes, 2 Peter 2, which gives me the impression that Peter wrote 2 Peter, and Jude used 2 Peter 2 as a text for a sermon, and expounded it, and said, This applies to us.

These men have come that Peter said would come. A great sermon. Powerful sermon.

But I'm not sure that it's more than that. I don't have a problem with it. If you say, Well, Steve, you make me nervous to talk about one of these books not being canonical.

I accept it as canonical. I'm just saying that if I were on one of those councils trying to make the final cut, I don't know that my vote would have been for the inclusion of Jude. And that's not that I have anything against it.

I don't have anything against the Shepherd of Hermas either, or against the Didache. I think it's a wonderful book. I like reading it.

I think everyone should read it. But I don't think it belongs in the Bible, and I'm not sure why those books were omitted, and Jude was included. But I suspect it is probably for the same reasons that Luke and Mark were included, that Jude was assumed, I mean, not assumed, but known to be a close associate of the other apostles, a brother of James, brother of Jesus, no less.

And that being the case, they figured that he had something of value to say, and probably the apostles would agree with what he said. So anyway, Jude was, and James were, disputed for a while because of the question of whether they were apostles. Second Peter was one of the books that had the hardest time making it into the final canon.

Second Peter, there were two objections to it, maybe more, but one of them, and probably the principal one, was that the Greek style of Second Peter was so different from the Greek style of First Peter. And both of them, of course, professed to be from the pen of the same man, and apparently incredibly different. I don't read Greek, and I'm not, even if I did, I probably, you know, couldn't read it well enough to tell the nuances and different styles and so forth.

But Greek scholars recognized from very early on, the second century even, that the style of Greek in Second Peter was so different than the style of Greek in First Peter that it seemed almost like it had to be from another man. And that being the case, it made Second Peter to be open dispute because First Peter was usually accepted without question. First Peter has almost never been held in dispute.

There was, of course, a question about it in the Muratorian canon, but from that time on, all Christians recognized it. But the difference between First and Second Peter made many people wonder about Second Peter. It was disputed even by Eusebius, and not accepted until the final canonization of Carthage.

But another reason, and this seems silly to me, but another reason that some have disputed whether Peter wrote Second Peter is because they say, they assume that Jude wrote earlier, and therefore the similarities between Peter and Jude, Second Peter, Chaptou, and Jude, they say, well, a man of Peter's stature would certainly not plagiarize or depend as heavily on a lesser man, lesser known man like Jude, as whoever wrote Second Peter did. But I mean, this is begging several questions. I mean, first of all, there is no way of knowing that Jude wrote earlier, and all the internal evidence, as I suggested earlier, sounds like Peter wrote earlier, and Jude wrote after, and expounded on it.

I think all the evidence points that direction. So I mean, that argument is silly, and it's silly in the extreme, because even if the presuppositions that underlie that argument were true, why wouldn't Peter borrow from a well-written church document if he wanted to expound on it and use it as part of his epistle? We don't have to assume that Peter's as proud as our modern-day scholars who wouldn't dare be caught saying something unoriginal. I personally think that the arguments against Second Peter are not very good.

Now, the difference in Greek style is fairly easily dispensed with, and that is that we know from Peter, we read it a moment ago in 1 Peter 5.12, that Peter wrote First Peter through an amanuensis, or an amanuensis was like a secretary who would take down in dictation what somebody hired him or assigned him to write. And Peter says he wrote First Peter through Silvanus. Silvanus apparently was, most scholars believe, the amanuensis.

And an amanuensis wouldn't just necessarily write down word for word. They would write sort of a running paraphrase, in some cases, of what was being said, or they would put it in their own words. I mean, a person dictating might use incomplete sentences.

We discovered how much this is true when we decided several years ago that it might be nice to have some of my tapes transcribed. And we had someone on our staff who could type 90 words a minute. So we got a transcribing machine and thought, Good, man, it will take no time at all.

We'll get all these tapes transcribed, man. It would be a simple matter to just turn these

into publishable works. And then we got about a dozen of them transcribed.

And I looked at it and said, now, these will probably need a little smoothing out. So I looked at the file and thought, it would be easier for me to write from scratch than to turn this transcript into a publishable work. There are just too many grammatical liberties.

There are too many incomplete sentences. I mean, too much repetition and so forth. And no doubt that is why an amanuensis was often accustomed to putting something in his own grammatical style.

Because someone who is dictating or speaking often wouldn't dictate word for word things that you would write down and then publish. Now, 2 Peter may have been written with a different amanuensis. We just don't know who.

It is not at all a far-fetched suggestion. You see, people in those days didn't generally carry around parchment and stuff in their briefcase or in the trunk of their car and have several pens in their shirt pocket. They didn't have that.

Those are modern technological wonders. Even paper is a fairly modern technological wonder. The papyrus and the parchments that they used were hard to come by, hard to preserve, expensive.

Most people didn't have a tablet of typing paper in their drawer to write a letter if they wanted to. They didn't have a pack of computer paper to just run it through the printer. They didn't usually carry pens.

A pen in those days was usually a feather that had to be cut and nibbed every time they wanted to use it. And the kind of equipment that was used for writing just wasn't common equipment that everyone had. And therefore, the Roman Empire was full of these professional secretaries, Emanuensis.

They did carry parchments. They did carry pens and ink. And so most writing, most literary documents that have come down from that period were done at the hand of an Emanuensis.

And it's not at all hard to imagine that 1 Peter was written with the aid of one Emanuensis named Silvanus, and 2 Peter used a different Emanuensis accounting for a different Greek style. A simple solution to the problem. At least simple to someone who's not holding out for a negative judgment against all reason.

Now, 2 and 3 John, the reason that they were disputed for so long is because the author of those books does not identify himself by name, nor does he call himself an apostle. The author of 2 and 3 John calls himself the elder. Now, the word elder, the Greek word is presbyteros, what we call a presbyter.

And presbyters were officers in a church of a reasonably low rank. I mean low in the sense that not like an apostle. They were just ordinary churchmen who taught and gave some guidance to the church.

They were not ordained in many cases, in all likelihood. And they didn't hold anything like political authority in the church as near as we can tell, but they were just sort of the older men who were mature Christians, who were trusted leaders and so forth, but they were nothing like apostles. And some argued that, well, John, an apostle, the disciple who Jesus loved, he wouldn't write a letter and just call himself the elder, the presbyteros.

That's not proud enough. I mean, that's too humble to use such a lowly term for himself. And so it was thought that John didn't write that.

Although, of course, if you look at 1 Peter, and most people believe Peter wrote that, and he was an apostle, in 1 Peter 5, 1, Peter says, The elders, presbyteroi, who are among you, I exhort, who am also a presbyter, an elder, he says. He calls himself an elder. We know he's an apostle.

So there's no reason why John, the apostle, couldn't address himself as the elder, especially if he wrote it when he was an old man, because the word presbyteros is the ordinary Greek word for an old man. It just happened to also do double duty as a term for a person who's a leader in the church, an elder. But it was before there were elders of the church, the word presbyteros is just the ordinary Greek word for an old man.

And it functions that way in the New Testament, too. It has two possible meanings. And so when Paul wrote to Philemon and called himself Paul the Aged, he didn't use the word presbyteros, but he could have, the older man.

Why couldn't John, if writing in his old age, just write 2nd and 3rd John and call himself the old man, the elder? And so there's no reason to... I'll tell you this. No one can seriously dispute that 2nd and 3rd John were written by the same man who wrote 1st John. I mean, after you've read 1st John, which is five chapters long, and then you come to those short books, I think they're 13 or 14 verses long each, 2nd and 3rd John, you almost feel like you're just reading the same material.

You just read in 1st John. You almost feel like, well, what's the point of having these books here that's just a repetition? It's not just a repetition, but it's very largely a repetition. And the language and the phraseology is identical.

Certainly, if 1st John is recognized as canonical, 2nd and 3rd John, by very good arguments and by common sense, would be recognized as belonging in the canon. Finally, Revelation. Now, even though Revelation was accepted in the Muratorian canon and in the other canons we mentioned, there were some portions of the church that

didn't accept it because there were serious disputes as to its authorship.

The main problem with accepting Revelation was the disputes over its authorship, and those disputes still exist. Again, some people think John the Apostle wrote it. Others believe a different John wrote it.

Get my book. I'll tell you why I think all the arguments are in favor of the Apostle John. But there are people who would argue another John wrote it.

And because that dispute was a strong one, even in the 3rd century, there were some who thought the book might not be fitting to be in our scriptures. And so they withheld their approval of it. There was also a problem in that the book of Revelation appeared to teach millennialism, and the early church was not in favor of millennialism.

Now, some people in the early church were. There was, of course, Justin and Irenaeus and Tertullian and Papius who were all millennialists. But by the 2nd century, there weren't many, or I assume by the 3rd century, the 200s A.D., there weren't many millennialists left.

By 325, when Eusebius wrote church history, he called millennialism a heresy. And apparently speaking for the church, he was hired by Constantine to write things or sponsored by Constantine. I shouldn't say hired.

That sounds too crass. But Eusebius, he considered the belief in the millennium to be a heresy, although he certainly believed in the book of Revelation. He included it in his canon.

It's just that after the 3rd century, almost all Christians and almost all Christian writers believed that the millennium in Revelation 20 was spiritual. In fact, they took that approach largely to the whole book of Revelation rather than taking it literally. And so during that century, Revelation was particularly held at arm's length because it appeared to support millennialism.

Although all the millennialists believed in the book of Revelation too. They just interpreted it differently. But for various reasons, Revelation did not receive early acceptance.

It was the last book to finally receive full acceptance of the whole church. Although, as I said, it appears in the list of the earlier canons. Those canons do not reflect a total unanimity of all parties in the church, just the majority.

So these are the books that were suspect for a while. I've told you now why each of them was suspect and why I don't personally think they need to be suspect. Therefore, in concluding our discussion of the canon of Scripture, I'd like to say that while we do not assume that those who arrived at the final decisions on this matter, we don't assume

that they're infallible.

At least we have no reason to assume it. If we're going to assume that, we might as well be Roman Catholic. Because they assumed that the councils were infallible like the Scriptures.

I mean, that is a Roman Catholic doctrine. But Protestants generally don't assume that. And therefore, we could assume that those who at the Council of Carthage who made the final list of 27 books, they could be mistaken.

They were not superhuman beings. And there's no reason to believe they operated under superhuman, supernatural inspiration any more than any other group of Christians gathered to decide any other issues did. But most Christians feel, Protestant and Catholic, that God superintended the whole process one way or the other and saw to it that the Church would not be left with open questions as to which books belong in the canon of Scripture.

And I certainly accept all the books of the canon without serious dispute. As I said, there's one book I wonder about why it's there, but I don't seriously want to eliminate it at all. I like the book.

I teach the book. But while we don't accept those guys as infallible, we should recognize that the people who made these early decisions were much closer to the time of the writing of these books. There are much more living witnesses, more ancient traditions were available to them to make their judgments from.

Unless we ascribe to them bad motives, we have to assume these men were in a much better position than we are today to answer questions about the authenticity of these early documents when they lived so close to the time and we live so far from the time. I also want to say that the books that were held in dispute for a while, they were not held in dispute because people didn't like what they said. But the fact that they were included late demonstrates two things.

I put this in the conclusion on your notes. The fact that books like Hebrews, James and Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John and Revelation were included late and not early in everybody's opinion of the canon. They prove two things.

One is that the church was being careful. The church was not making snap judgments. They did not want to include a book unless they were sure.

And these books they later included, although the theology of the church had not changed from the early days when they were not sure to the days later when they were sure, there was no significant change in the theology of the church to reflect prejudice about this. It simply shows that they weren't sure at first. They wanted to be sure before they included it.

It suggests honesty and integrity and a desire to get it right. So it speaks well, I think, of those who were involved in forming the canon officially, that they didn't jump to conclusions and that they were careful about these things. They didn't.

If they were suspicious of the book, they did hold it at arm's length. But the fact that these books were included late also tells something else, and that is that these books overcame all objections. The fact that they were disputed for so long suggests that there were certain arguments and objections that could be brought against them.

But the fact that they were later included means that the virtues of those books themselves were sufficient to ultimately overcome the objections. And for that reason, I do not hold them in dispute. I personally have no question at all about most of the books.

And the fact that the early Christians, some of them weren't sure, simply reflects the fact that I don't think that anyone in those early days had really gotten around to checking all the evidence and trying to make the decisions that eventually had to be made. But this is how the Bible came to, the New Testament canon came to be formed and why we have the books we do and we don't have others. I had thought that if I got through this quicker, I might get into another subject which I'm prepared to teach, but we'll have to save that for next time.

And that's where we're going to talk about the early theologians of the Alexandrian school, the Western and the Eastern churches. And there's some interesting things there because not only did they have to decide which books were Scripture, there was not always agreement as how Scripture was to be interpreted. There were those of the allegorical school, and there were those of the grammatical historical school.

And we'll talk about these next time. We'll talk about the earliest church theologians. But we'll stop there.