

# “How We Received the Books of the New Testament”

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Plantersville Baptist Church  
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**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

*2 Timothy 3:16-17 – NKJV*

**Introduction** “Who determined what books would be included in the Bible?” “After almost 2000 years of church history how can Christians be sure they have the right Bible?” “Can we indeed be absolutely certain that we have exactly the right books in the Bible – no more and no less?” “Why were some books chosen to be in the NT and others rejected? Is the canon closed, or can additional books be added?”

“**Kanon**” (comes from the Hebrew word for reed or stalk), meaning “reed” or “measuring rod” and later comes to be understood as the “norm” or “rule.”

Today we spell the word with a “c” (canon). By the fourth century the church began to refer to the Scriptures as “the canon.” They understood the word to mean “a catalogue of sacred writings.”



**What is the Canon?** *Robert Plummer:* “. . . the canon is not an authorized collection of writings (in that the church conferred its authority or approval upon a list of books). Rather, the canon is a collection of authoritative writings. The biblical writings have an inherent authority as works uniquely inspired by God. Canonization is the process of recognizing that inherent authority, not bestowing it from an outside source.” [Robert L. Plummer, 40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible, p. 57-58.](#)

**While a fascinating subject on it’s own, we are not here to discuss how the Old Testament canon came to be.** By the time Jesus began his earthly ministry affirmed the 39 books of the OT and accepted them as inspired by God. We know He affirmed them because He quotes extensively from them (see Luke 24:25-27, 44-45). The ancient Jewish historian Josephus (37-100 AD) claimed the OT books as we know them now was settled by the time of the Persian King Artaxerxes (465-423 BC). The objections or arguments about what books ought to be in the Bible mostly centers around the NT.



Josephus

**So the question remains, how do we define the canon with its 27 books? Who gets the right to say what is or what should not be included as authoritative books in the NT?** Jesus placed His seal of approval on the OT as we have it, but made no similar claims as to the NT. Of course that’s obvious, He was raised from the dead and returned to Heaven – He’s not around in His glorified body to give us the same kind of authentication given to the OT in Luke 24 – even though He inspired the NT writers to give us the NT.

# The Contemporary Argument

“Liberal scholars often reject limiting the New Testament to its twenty-seven books, because they believe there was other inspirational Christian literature from the early years of Christianity equally worthy of inclusion.” [Craig Blomert, The New Testament Canon, at https://www.namb.net/apologetics/the-new-testament-canon?pageid=8589952773](https://www.namb.net/apologetics/the-new-testament-canon?pageid=8589952773)

**Note:** Two disputed books not included in our New Testament were: (1) the gospel of Thomas, (2) the gospel of Peter. Liberals argue that the church stomped out any opposition to these and other books, a claim that is untrue. Serious early theologians never viewed these books to be on par with the 27 books included in our canon because they knew them to be written by people who lied about their authorship. The reason for a late date council (397 AD) to declare what books were authoritative is due for several reasons: (1) the early church knew which books were canonical and it was widely known which books were considered inspired Scripture, (2) the early church saw the need to officially declare the authorized book due to the fakes and forgeries that were floating around in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. [www.gotquestions.org/Constantine-Bible.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/Constantine-Bible.html)

In the Movie “**The DaVinci Code**” claims are made that the 4 gospels were not chosen until the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and that they were picked to advance a political agenda. There is ample evidence in this paper that towards the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the canon was already in place.

## The Formation of the NT Canon

**This whole subject of “What books should be in the NT?” must begin with divine INSPIRATION.** The Bible was inspired by God. God-breathed into the life of the NT writers. God worked through human personality and experiences to give us all the books of the Bible. God worked infallibly through fallible human vessels who had yielded themselves to Him. The early church understood that a book that was inspired by God could be canonical but something not inspired would never be canonical.

**THE SCRIPTURE PRINCIPLE** **2 Peter 3:16** provides internal evidence for the inclusion of Paul’s letters in the New Testament. Peter is implying that the letters of Paul were being collected during his lifetime in the first century.

**By the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, all four Gospels were making their way through the established churches.** As early as AD 180 a harmony of the four Gospels was circulating among the churches. So early on in history, the Church was aware “that it had a body of writings equal in authority to the OT and equally revelatory in character.” By 200 AD, the words “Old Testament” and “New Testament” were being used by the church. While recognition of the 27 books was not immediate but a gradual process of recognition within the church, all the way up to the fourth century. [Stephen Voorwinde, The Formation of the NT Canon, at http://www.bible-researcher.com/voorwinde1.html](http://www.bible-researcher.com/voorwinde1.html)

*. . . and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation — as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, (16) as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.*

*2 Peter 3:15-16 – NKJV*

**All the NT documents were written between 45–100 AD.** In fact, Paul’s Epistles may predate the writing of the Gospels. *Do not let this possibility throw your spiritual equilibrium off!* **Oral tradition** was important and given great weight in transmitting the Gospels. Since the gospels were not written until between 12 to 30 years after the death of Jesus, they had to have been written before 70 AD (Jesus foretold the fall of Jerusalem that would take place in the future in 70 AD under the Roman General Titus). The later writing of the gospels do not take away from their inspiration, authority, and accuracy. Again, the passing of oral traditions was commonplace in those days. **Memorization was highly coveted and utilized with unerring accuracy by many ancient writers.** Eusebius, the father of church history states that Matthew wrote his Gospel 12 years after Christ’s death (between 40– 55 AD) just before leaving Palestine to preach in other lands ([www.gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org)). If time-lapse and “oral tradition” causes you to think the NT books are not accurate, remember Jesus promised “**another helper**” to the Apostles and disciples. The Holy Spirit would infallibly override a fallible memory:

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.*  
**John 14:26 – NKJV**

## The Natural Delivery Process Of The New Testament Books

- The NT canon (list of books) were not dropped from Heaven or delivered by angels!
- The NT canon was not dug up in a farmer’s field like the golden plates of Mormonism.
- The NT canon was not discovered in a clay jar with 27 books intact like the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Nag Hammadi texts that were discovered in Upper Egypt, December 1945.
- The NT canon developed over the course of the first 250-300 years of Christian history.  
**Positive Point:** The NT canon is validated by the fact that it’s development can be traced over this long period of time. The books were there early on, they simply had to be gathered into a canon or collection called “The Bible.”

## What Led to the Canonization of the NT?

- The Heresy of Gnosticism
  - We are not sure of its origins, but by the middle 2<sup>nd</sup> century it’s in full bloom.
  - Definition: Special knowledge is cultivated, even beyond the Bible. The Gnostics prided themselves as having true **gnosis** (knowledge even beyond Scripture). The **Nag Hammadi of 1945** gives us a good view of the teachings. The Gospel of Thomas comes from these 2<sup>nd</sup> century writings. It contains 114 sayings of Jesus, and some are really freaky and way out – you will read some of them later.
- The Heresy of Marcionism
  - **Marcion of Asia Minor** (144 AD), a wealthy man visited the Rome who came under the influence of Cerdo, a Gnostic Christian. He presented his teachings to the church at Rome, but was expelled from the church (144 AD) for his radical Gnostic views. He rejected the OT Hebrew Bible (God was an inferior being). Jesus came to liberate people from the wrathful God of the OT. The Gospels were filled with Judaistic corruptions, only Paul and Luke’s writings were pure. Marcion sets up his own canon, a group of just 11 books he considered authoritative. He includes 10 of Paul’s epistles (no pastorals), and Luke’s gospel. He also edited these books purging them of what was not in accordance with his thinking.

- **Polycarp** considered Marcion and his followers the most dangerous of all the Gnostics. He met Marcion in Rome and was said to have called him “the firstborn of Satan.” See [www.britannica.com/topic/Marcionites](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Marcionites) for a thorough treatment of Marcionism.
- **Montanism** began in 156 AD in Phrygia in Asia Minor by its leader Montanus. Montanus believed he was the mouthpiece of the “Paraclete” or the Holy Spirit. He stressed the prophetic gifts and often prophesied in an “ecstatic state. Eusebius, the church historian born around 260-270 AD stated Montanus would fall into “frenzy and convulsions.”. Montanus and his two daughters Maximillia and Pricillia claimed divine authority to voice prophetic messages. Montanists believed in the spontaneity of the Holy Spirit. He incorrectly prophesied that Jesus would return in his day to set up the New Jerusalem in the town of Pepuzza in Phrygia, Asia Minor. The event never happened (see Deuteronomy 18:20-22). <https://www.gotquestions.org/montanism.html>
- The Response of the Church to these heresies:
  - Copies of false writings (mostly Gnostic) claiming to be on par with Scriptures began to circulate in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century (like the gospel of Thomas).
  - Some were attempting to come up with an alternative canon. From the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century the church interacts with these heretics and works diligently to nail down what books were authentic Scripture. This forces the church into a clearer understanding of what it had.
  - So the church is creating a canon in response to Marcion and other heretics.

## The Process of Canonization

### THE SCRIPTURE PRINCIPLE (Covered on Page 2)

**THE CANONICAL PRINCIPLE** The NT canon process defined what books were considered sacred scripture – and what books were not! It was clear that the numbering of writings recognized as authentic Scriptures were limited.

#### Some books had a harder time making it into our canon such as:

- By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, it’s accepted everywhere that there are 4 gospels, Acts, 13 letters of Paul.
- Books that were slower to be accepted were:
  - **Revelation**, only accepted in the Western church or Latin speaking areas. Why? It’s content was apocalyptic in nature which concerned some people.
  - **Hebrews** was accepted in the East but not in the West.  
Why? People were not sure it was apostolic.  
The Eastern church believed Paul wrote it.
- Eusebius of Caesarea, a church historian’s writings reflect books that were considered to be Scripture. James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John are slow to be accepted ([see chart, page 10](#)).
- A 2<sup>nd</sup> generation of Christian writings existed:
  - They were not necessarily heretical, but were not included in canon.  
Acts of Paul, Shepherd of Hermas, Apocalypse of Peter, The Epistle of Barnabas.

- A 3<sup>rd</sup> generation of writings to be avoided altogether. They were books which did not come from who they claimed to come from:
  - The Gospel of Peter, The Gospel of Thomas.
  - The Gospel of Matthias (supposedly from Matthias, the apostle chosen to replace Judas Iscariot in Acts 1:15-26), a 3d century work.
  - Acts of Andrew (supposedly the miracles performed by the Apostle Andrew).
  - Acts of John, rejected for its docetic overtones. Docetism taught that the human body of Jesus was an illusion and in so doing denied Jesus' humanity. Docetism is rejected at the Council of Nicaea 325 AD.
- By 367 AD, **Athanasius'** Festal Letter 39 corresponds exactly to our list of twenty-seven NT books.
- Recognition of a “closed” canon.
  - That there is a limit to the books in the canon.
  - Scripture is no longer being written.
  - There is general agreement in the Roman Empire that the canon is closed.
  - Jerome (347-420 AD), a pastor, theologian and historian assumes the 27 book canon.
  - The Councils of Hippo (393 and 397 AD), at Carthage recognize the same books.
  - So over time the church comes to a consensus about which books are valid.

## CRITERION FOR INCLUDING THE 27 BOOKS IN OUR NEW TESTAMENT CANON

The early church insisted that all recognized books be:

- 1. Inspired**                      The concept that this book is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Some Christians felt the shepherd of Hermas was inspired but not on the same level as the 27 books.
- 2. Apostolic**                      This is the most important criteria, that the book came from the hand of an apostle or closely tied to an apostle. There was something special about the Apostles who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit chose to work in a special way through them. People were being healed in the book of Acts just by Peter's shadow falling on them.
- 3. Antiquity**                      The accepted books had to be ancient from 45 to 100 AD. They were carefully examined and compared with spurious writings (200-300 AD). There is complete agreement on these 27 books between 300-400 AD.
- 4. Catholic**                      Not the idea of Roman Catholic, but universal. Was the book widely, if not universally recognized by the churches?
- 5. Public Reading**              Was it read publically in the churches, alongside the OT?
- 6. Orthodox**                      Was the book in contradiction to any recognized apostolic book or doctrine? Does it agree with the apostolic tradition of preaching, the rule of faith, a faithful summary of who Jesus Christ was and what He came to accomplish.

**Did the Church Originate the Canon?"** Special Note: In the 4<sup>th</sup> century councils of Carthage and Hippo, the church never decreed that certain books would be canonical. **IMPORTANT:** They did not confer canonicity. They did not give the canon authority – but simply recognized it's INTERNAL authority AS HAVING COME FROM GOD. Here's what they basically said through an official church council decree: **"This council declares that these are the books which have always been held to be canonical."**

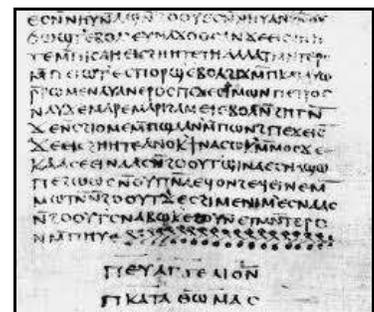
- Canonicity was something inherent in the books themselves. Here's a super-important point: Canonicity is something that God has given to it, not a favored status that the Church confers upon it.
- A Christian apologist needs to explain to NT doubters that no council created a NT collection of books, they simply recognized and made official the collection of books that had always been upheld in the churches from the earliest times. The church RECOGNIZED the books and collected them into what is called the New Testament.
- Ultimately, God is the One who decided which books should be placed in the Bible!

**What about the Apocrypha, a Collection of Books Considered Inspired by the Roman Catholic Church?**

- Apocrypha (Gk. meaning hidden or secret) is a specific term used to refer to the particular books that are considered Scripture by the Roman Catholic Church.
- 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Prayer of Azariah, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, Prayer of Manasseh, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees.
- Written between 300-100 BC. Approved by Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent between 1545-1563 AD.
- **Rejected by the Protestant Reformers For the following reasons:**
  1. No claim to inspiration are found within the books.
  2. They are never cited as Scripture in the OT.  
The NT cites the Apocrypha in Jude 14 and Hebrews 11:35 much the same way Paul cited heathen poets in Acts 17:28. The NT writers were familiar with the Apocrypha, but did not consider it to be on the same level as OT scripture.
  3. Was rejected by the Jews.
  4. It was not on any early lists of canonical books.
  5. It was rejected by many Catholic scholars.
  6. It has many demonstrable errors.

**An Example of a 2<sup>nd</sup> Century Gnostic Writing – Example, the Gospel of Thomas**

- **Contains New Testament-like passages.** Those who quote the Gospel of Thomas like to criticize early Christianity.



- **Sayings:** *“Jesus said, ‘Blessed is the lion which the man shall eat, and the lion become man; and cursed is the man whom the lion shall eat, and the lion become man.’” (Thomas 7)*

"Jesus said to them, 'When you make the two one, and when you make the inside as the outside, and the outside as the inside, and the upper side as the lower; and when you make the male and the female into a single one, that the male be not male and the female female; when you make eyes in the place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, an image in place of an image, then shall you enter [the kingdom].'" (Thomas 22)

"Simon Peter said to them: 'Let Mary go forth from among us, for women are not worthy of the life.' Jesus said: 'Behold, I shall lead her, that I may make her male, in order that she also may become a living spirit like you males. For every woman who makes herself male shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.'" (Thomas 114)

- All Gnostic writings contain bizarre passages, many which are way more “complex” than the 66 books of our Bible.

## Time line For The Formation of the New Testament Canon

(dates may be approximate)

- 140 AD** Polycarp (69-155), a disciple of the Apostle John cites a letter of Paul calling it “Scripture” between (140-155).
- 160 AD** Justin Martyr, (100-165) an early Christian apologist. Only two of his “Apologies” and a Dialogue with Trypho” survive. He writes a letter of defense to the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius asking him to stop persecuting the early Christian church. Justin quotes from the Gospel of Luke around 160 A.D.
- 180 AD** Irenaeus (125-202) Bishop of Lyons, France. **IMPORTANT!!!**
- A disciple of Polycarp (70-156 AD), who was a disciple of the Apostle John! Irenaeus is closely linked to the original Apostles. Polycarp writes the “Epistle to the Philippians” (not canonical), to warn the Philippians against the teachings of Marcion.
  - Irenaeus writes a 5-volume work “Against Heresies” around 180. His book quotes 20 of the 27 books that make up our NT. The only books he does not quote from are: James, Hebrews, Jude, Philemon, 3<sup>rd</sup> John, 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, and Titus. This does not mean he did not have them in his collection of books, he simply did not refer to them. Irenaeus tells us that the NT canon had been collected and was well known by the final quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.
  - He refers to a “New Testament” and refers to four Gospels, comparing them to four directions (north, south, East, and west) and thus suggesting their completeness. See ‘Against Heresies (cir.175)
  - He uses the NT books as a rule (canon) to judge Gnostic teachings. He also referred to these books as “Scripture.”
  - His appeal to the NT books in “Against Heresies” tells us these works were collected and recognized in the Christian world by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.
  - ***Irenaeus: recognition of the NT canon was so universal that even the heretics knew it because they had copies of it. Some of them accepted all of the NT canon, but were simply interpreting it falsely. Other heretics such as Marcion sought to remove some books from the canon in order to make way for their false teachings.***

<b>AD 367</b>	<u>Athanasius' Festal Letter 39</u> corresponds exactly to our list of 27 NT books.
<b>AD 393</b>	<u>Council of Hippo</u> , there is recognition of the 27 NT books.
<b>AD 397</b>	<u>Council of Carthage</u> , there is recognition of the 27 NT books.
<b>AD 419</b>	<u>Council of Carthage</u> , there is recognition of the 27 NT books.

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## Group Questions

**Question 1:** Sometimes people are troubled to discover that we do not have a canonical list of NT books that exactly matches our own until Athanasius's letter of AD 367. If this troubles you consider these explanations from Robert L. Plummer:

1. All the NT documents were viewed as authoritative and were circulating among the churches by 90-100 AD (Col 4:16; 2 Peter 3:16).
2. From the earliest post-NT Christian writings (the apostolic fathers), it is clear that an implicit canon existed. By their frequency of citation, the apostolic fathers attribute unique authority to what came to be called the NT.
3. In the absence of a unified ecclesiastical hierarchy and in a situation where documents were copied by hand, it is not surprising that we find churches debating what writings were truly apostolic. Eusebius (260-340) mentions three categories of books in his day – the universally confessed, the debated, and the spurious (fictional).
4. One must keep in mind the large geographical distances between some early Christian communities, as well as the persecutions that made communication and gatherings of decision-making bodies virtually impossible until the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.
  - If a friend or teacher said to you, “The New Testament books took too long to be included in the canon of books we have now in our NT, so how can you trust those books are the right ones?”
  - Does the argument of time-lapse take away from the authenticity of the 27 books.
  - Does the longer period of time add to the legitimacy of the canon?

**Question 2:** Martin Luther (1483-1546 AD) rejected the book of James. Luther made an attempt to remove James from the canon because he perceived it to go against the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

- If you were sitting with Martin Luther right now, what would be your argument for including the book of James in the New Testament?
- Does James teach a different doctrine than Paul's epistles, or does it compliment them? Hint; you have to read the book of James carefully to answer this question! James is not arguing against faith as a basis for salvation – he's saying that true faith is demonstrated through right actions.

- Question 3:** It was pointed out that the canon or collection of 27 books is closed. That means no more books may be added to our NT.
- You are sitting in front of the TV, and a news flash comes on the screen that a lost book written by the Apostle Paul has been found. Testing shows the document to be from the time of the Apostle Paul, and the sentence structure in Greek shows it to come from Paul's hand. Should it be included in our New Testament now?
- Question 4:** Look closely at the sayings from the Gospel of Thomas on pages 6-7.
- From reading those statements, do you understand why the early church rejected it?
  - If so, list your reasons for rejecting it based on what I have shared with you tonight?
- Question 5:** The 4 Gospels were penned as little as 12 to 30 years after the death of Christ. Oral tradition helped keep the story alive until it could be put into writing.
- Does this lapse of time in the actual writing of the gospels cause you to see them in a less authentic or authoritative way?
  - Is **John 14:26** is a promise that Jesus would cause His disciples to **"remember all things"** was a promise to help the New Testament writers remember what to write down as Scripture?  
*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. John 14:26 – NKJV*
- Question 6:** Tonight's Bible study may seem to be overly technical, perhaps even boring!
- Do you think the topic of the formation of the New Testament canon is important for the church?
  - Does this study still leave unanswered questions in your mind?

## New Testament Books Treated As Traditional

## Scripture by Early Writers

*Italic red type* indicates that the writer either does not mention the book or expressed some doubt about the status of the book. The listed dates are date of births, but in their lifetimes they accepted the following books as authorized canon Scriptures.

[www.bible-researcher.com/canon3.html](http://www.bible-researcher.com/canon3.html)

Athanasius (b. 296)	Origen (b. 185)	Irenaeus (b. 130)	Marcion* (b. 85)
Matthew	Matthew	Matthew	
Mark	Mark	Mark	
Luke	Luke	Luke	Luke
John	John	John	
Acts	Acts	Acts	
Romans	Romans	Romans	Romans
1 Corinthians	1 Corinthians	1 Corinthians	1 Corinthians
2 Corinthians	2 Corinthians	2 Corinthians	2 Corinthians
Galatians	Galatians	Galatians	Galatians
Ephesians	Ephesians	Ephesians	Ephesians
Philippians	Philippians	Philippians	Philippians
Colossians	Colossians	Colossians	Colossians
1 Thessalonians	1 Thessalonians	1 Thessalonians	1 Thessalonians
2 Thessalonians	2 Thessalonians	2 Thessalonians	2 Thessalonians
1 Timothy	1 Timothy	1 Timothy	
2 Timothy	2 Timothy	2 Timothy	
Titus	Titus	Titus	
Philemon	Philemon	Philemon	Philemon
Hebrews	Hebrews	<i>Hebrews</i>	
James	<i>James</i>	<i>James</i>	
1 Peter	1 Peter	1 Peter	
2 Peter	<i>2 Peter</i>	<i>2 Peter</i>	
1 John	1 John	1 John	
2 John	<i>2 John</i>	<i>2 John</i>	
3 John	<i>3 John</i>	<i>3 John</i>	
Jude	<i>Jude</i>	<i>Jude</i>	
Revelation**	Revelation	Revelation	

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**Disclaimer:** There could be references I failed to list in the “Works Cited.” Also, much of the wording in this document is not mine but quotes from others. Not every quote is cited on the page it occurs, nor is it surrounded by quotation marks! This is not a “polished” paper, just practical information I wanted you to have and be aware of.

- The arguments for our present 27 books in the NT canon are overwhelming!
- The problem with the subject of canonization is that there is a lot of information on the internet about the subject. This information can be technical, tedious, and possibly confusing. There is further evidence for the NT that we have which could not be included in this handout – you can find this on the internet.

**Thanks for your time, participation, and faithfulness!**

In Christ,

*Brother Jack*

Covers the areas of canonization (how we received the books we have in the New Testament), transmission (how they came to us through the centuries), and translations (why are there so many and why they are different). Outline. The BiblicalTraining app gives you access to 2,100 hours of instruction (129 classes and seminars). Stream the classes, or download and listen to them offline. Share classes via social media, email, and more. No thank you. How can we know that the New Testament is divinely inspired? Can we prove that the New Testament books were faithfully preserved through the ages? The accuracy of the books that constitute the Holy Bible has been constantly challenged. This overview will focus on the New Testament books, showing that they are genuine and authoritative. There is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the books that constitute the present-day New Testament were inspired by God and have been divinely preserved over the centuries. Evidence from the Old and New Testaments. There is evidence in the Old Testament that points to the formation of the New Testament. Notice a few significant examples. I often receive questions about how we got the canon of the New Testament. We have twenty-seven books in it. Who decided? On what grounds? Contrary to what Brown says (and claims is a historical fact, and NOT part of his fiction!), the canon of the New Testament was decidedly not, I emphasize, NOT, decided at the Council of Nicea in 325 CE. It was not even discussed there. We have records of what they discussed. This was not one of the topics. And, related, it was not decided by the Council. The rest of this post is for blog members only. If you want to know the answers join the blog! It's dead easy and the fee is extremely reasonable. For two millennia Christians have read the 20 New Testament epistles as Holy Scripture, as the word of God for us. At the same time, the epistles were personal writings produced for specific people or groups of people, often responding to their particular needs. So we cannot understand the epistles unless we take the effort to discover what lies behind the words. Get the whole book version of How to Understand the Bible here. Not yet signed up to receive "How to Understand the Bible" via email? You can follow along here at the blog, but we recommend signing up for email updates here. "How to Understand the Bible" is available as a print book at WordWay.org. Mel Lawrenz is Director of The Brook Network and creator of The Influence Project.