The Doctrine of Canonicity

Definition and Description

The term canon or canonicity in Christianity refers to a collection of many books acknowledged by the early church as the rule of faith and practice and is derived from the Greek word *kanon* which originally meant a rod or a ruler, hence, a measuring stick or norm of faith and eventually a catalogue or list. This is exactly what the Bible is—a norm or standard—the divine and absolute standard.

The term *kanon* was employed 6 times in the NT (2 Cor. 10:13, 15-16; Gal. 6:16; Phlp. 3:16), but it is first employed of the books of Scripture in the technical sense of a standard collection or body of sacred writings by the church fathers of the 4th century A.D. such as in the 59th canon of the Council of Laodicea (A.D. 363), in the Festal Epistle of Athanasius 367), and by Amphilochius, archbishop of Iconium (395).

The object of this study is to demonstrate how the church acquired the Scriptures from its very origin to the printed page, and to present its relationship to history and its effects upon mankind.

Some Christians are unnerved by the fact that nowhere does God itemize the sixty-six books that are to be included in the Bible. Many believers have at best a vague notion of how the church arrived at what we call the Canon of Scripture. Even after becoming more aware, some believers are uncomfortable with the process by which the New Testament Canon was determined.

For many, it was what appears to be a haphazard process that took far too long. Furthermore, whether talking with a Jehovah's Witness, a liberal theologian, or a New Ager, Christians are very likely to run into questions concerning the extent, adequacy, and accuracy of the Bible as God's revealed Word. In this essay, therefore, we will consider the development of the doctrine of the Scriptures in the Church Age. Just how did the church decide on the books for inclusion in the New Testament? This discussion will include both how the Canon was established and the various ways theologians have viewed the Bible since the Canon was established. The period immediately following the passing of the Apostles is known as the period of the Church Fathers. Many of these men walked with the Apostles and were taught directly by them. Polycarp and Papias, for instance, are considered to have been disciples of the Apostle John.

Doctrinal authority during this period rested on two sources, the Old Testament (O.T.) and the notion of Apostolic succession, being able to trace a direct association to one of the Apostles and thus to Christ. Although the New Testament (N.T.) Canon was written, it was not yet seen as a separate body of books.
equivalent to the O.T. Six church leaders are commonly referred to: Barnabas, Hermas, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Papias, and Ignatius (Berkhof, The History of Christian Doctrines, 37). Although these men lacked the technical sophistication of today's theologians, their correspondence confirmed the teachings of the Apostles and provides a doctrinal link to the N.T.

Christianity was as yet a fairly small movement. These Church Fathers, in the early Church, were consumed by the practical aspects of Christian life among the new converts. Therefore, when Jehovah's Witnesses argue that the early church did not have a technical theology of the Trinity, they are basically right. There had been neither time nor necessity to focus on the issue. On the other hand these men clearly believed that Jesus was God as was the Holy Spirit, but they had yet to clarify in writing the problems that might occur when attempting to explain this truth. The early Church Fathers had no doubt about the authority of the O.T., often prefacing their quotes with "For thus saith God" and other notations. As a result they tended to be rather moralistic and even legalistic on some issues. Because the N.T. Canon was not yet settled, they respected and quoted from works that have generally passed out of the Christian tradition. The books of Hermas, Barnabas, Didache, and 1 and 2 Clement were all regarded highly (Hannah, Lecture Notes for the History of Doctrine, 2.2). As Berkhof writes concerning these early Church leaders, "For them Christianity was not in the first place a knowledge to be acquired, but the principle of a new obedience to God" (Berkhof, History of the Christian Church, 39). Although these early Church Fathers may seem rather ill-prepared to hand down all the subtle implications of the Christian faith to the coming generations, they form a doctrinal link to the Apostles (and thus to our Lord Jesus Christ), as well as a witness to the growing commitment to the Canon of Scripture that would become the N.T. As Clement of Rome said in first century, "Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit" (Geisler, Decide For Yourself, 11).

The Apologists

After the early Church Fathers comes the era of the Apologists and Theologians, roughly including the second, third, and fourth centuries. It is during this period that the Church takes the initial steps toward establishing a "rule of faith" or Canon. During this period both internal and external forces caused the church to begin to systematize both its doctrines and its view of revelation. Much of the systematization came about as a defense against the heresies that challenged the faith of the Apostles.
Ebionitism humanized Jesus and rejected the writings of Paul, resulting in a more Jewish than Christian faith. Gnosticism attempted to blend oriental theosophy, Hellenistic philosophy, and Christianity into a new religion that saw the physical creation as evil and Christ as a celestial being with secret knowledge to teach us. It often portrayed the God of the O.T. as inferior to the God of the N.T. Marcion and his movement also separated the God of the Old and New Testaments, accepting Paul and Luke as the only writers who really understood the Gospel of Christ (Berkhof, History of Christian Doctrine, 54). Montanus, responding to the gnostics, ended up claiming that he and two others were new prophets offering the highest and most accurate revelation from God.

Although they were basically orthodox, they exalted martyrdom and a legalistic asceticism that led to their rejection by the Church. Although Athanasius did not use the term canon in reference to the N.T. texts until the fourth century, there were earlier attempts to list the acceptable books.

The Muratorian Canon listed all the books of the Bible except for 1 John, 1 and 2 Peter, Hebrews, and James around A.D. 180 (Hannah, Notes, 2.5). Irenaeus, as bishop of Lyon, mentions all of the books except Jude, 2Peter, James, Philemon, 2 and 3 John, and Revelation. The Syriac Version of the Canon, from the third century, leaves out Revelation. It should be noted that although these early Church leaders differed on which books should be included in the Canon, they were quite sure that the books were inspired by God. Irenaeus, in his work Against Heresies, argues that, "The Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God [Christ] and His Spirit" (Geisler, Decide For Yourself, 12). By the fourth century many books previously held in high regard began to disappear from use and the apocryphal writings were seen as less than inspired.

It was during the fourth century that concentrated attempts were made both in the East and the West to establish the authoritative collection of the Canon. In 365, Athanasius of Alexandria listed the complete twenty-seven books of the New Testament, which he regarded as the "only source of salvation and of the authentic teaching of the religion of the Gospel" (Hannah, Notes, 2.6). While Athanasius stands out in the Eastern Church, Jerome is his counterpart in the West. Jerome wrote a letter to Paulinus, bishop of Nola in 394 listing just 39 O.T. books and our current 27 N.T. ones. It was in 382 that Bishop Damascus had Jerome work on a Latin text to standardize the Scripture. The resulting Vulgate was used throughout the Christian world. The Synods of Carthage in 397 and 418 both confirmed our current twenty-seven books of the NT. The criteria used for determining the canonicity of the books included the internal witness of the Holy Spirit in general, and specifically Apostolic origin or sanction, usage by the Church, intrinsic content, spiritual and moral effect, and the attitude of the early church. In the
fourth century Augustine voiced his belief in the verbal, plenary inspiration of the N.T. text, as did Justin Martyr in the second. This meant that every part of the Scriptures, down to the individual word, was chosen by God to be written by the human writers. But still, the issue of what should be included in the Canon was not entirely settled.

Augustine included the Book of Wisdom as part of the Canon and held that the Septuagint or Greek text of the O.T. was inspired, not the Hebrew original. The Church Fathers were sure that the Scriptures were inspired, but they were still not in agreement as to which texts should be included. As late as the seventh and eighth centuries there were church leaders who added to or subtracted from the list of texts. Gregory the Great added Tobias and Wisdom and mentioned 15 Pauline epistles, not 14. John of Damascus, the first Christian theologian who attempted a complete systematic theology, rejected the O.T. apocrypha, but added the Apostolic Constitution and 1 and 2 Clement to the N.T.

One historian notes that "things were no further advanced at the end of the fourteenth century than they had been at the end of the fourth" (Hannah, Notes, 3.3). This same historian notes that although we would be horrified at such a state today, the Catholicism of the day rested far more on ecclesiastical authority and tradition than on an authoritative Canon. Thus Roman Catholicism did not find the issue to be a critical one.

The issue of canonical authority finally is addressed within the bigger battle between Roman Catholicism and the Protestant Reformation. In 1545 the Council of Trent was called as a response to the Protestant heresy by the Catholic Church. As usual, the Catholic position rested upon the authority of the Church hierarchy itself. It proposed that all the books found in Jerome’s Vulgate were of equal canonical value (even though Jerome himself separated the Apocrypha from the rest) and that the Vulgate would become the official text of the Church. The council then established the Scriptures as equivalent to the authority of tradition. The reformers were also forced to face the Canon issue. Instead of the authority of the Church, Luther and the reformers focused on the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. Luther was troubled by four books, Jude, James, Hebrews, and Revelation, and though he placed them in a secondary position relative to the rest, he did not exclude them.

John Calvin also argued for the witness of the Spirit (Hannah, Notes, 3.7). In other words, it is God Himself, via the Holy Spirit who assures the transmission of the text down through the ages, not the human efforts of the Catholic Church or any other group. Calvin rests the authority of the Scripture on the witness of the Spirit and the conscience of the godly. He wrote in his Institutes, “Let it therefore be held as fixed, that those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce
implicitly in Scripture; that Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit. Enlightened by him, we no longer believe, either on our own judgment or that of others, that the Scriptures are from God; but, in a way superior to human judgment, feel perfectly assured as much so as if we beheld the divine image visibly impressed on it that it came to us, by the instrumentality of men, from the very mouth of God.”

Modern theory states that the canon of the Old Testament was determined by the council of Jamnia (90 AD) and was therefore determined by a group of unbelieving Jewish rabbis. Our evidence will show, on the contrary, that the canon was known and immediately recognized as scripture as it developed in each generation.

The Manual of Discipline & Zadokite Fragments quote from Isaiah, Deut., Numbers, Leviticus, and Proverbs with the formula "It is written." Zadokite uses the formula "God said" for Isaiah, Malachi, Amos, Zechariah, Hosea, Deut., Numbers and Micah. The Commentary on Habakkuk indicates that it was considered to be inspired. The apocryphal books are quoted also, but never with one of the above formulae. Conclusion: This evidence disproves the liberal theory that the canon was solidified in a series of three steps: the Pentateuch accepted as scripture by 400 BC, the Prophets by 200 BC, and the Writings not accepted until the Council of Jamnia, in 90 AD. The Dead Sea Scrolls quote from all three divisions as scripture and refer to all three as "the Law and the Prophets" or "Moses and the Prophets."

Josephus wrote twenty years before Jamnia and over 300 years before the Talmud's Tractate Baba Bathra, which is used to support the theory of the three-part development. He had the actual Temple scrolls in his possession as a gift from Titus. We would conclude from these facts that Josephus should be considered more authoritative than the Talmud regarding the first century view of the canon. Josephus had the same canon we do. He says there were 22 books in the canon of the Old Testament (see "Against Apion" 1:8, where he mentions 5 books of Moses, 13 Prophets, and 4 Writings). - This corresponds to our 39 books. He recognized Jer. and Lam. as one book, as he also did Judges & Ruth, I Sam. & II Sam., I Kings & II Kings, I Chron. & II Chron., and Ezra and Esther. The 12 Minor Prophets were also recognized as one book, called "The Book of the Twelve." He included Daniel in the Prophets instead of in the Writings, which refutes an important part of the proof used to support the three-part theory.
Josephus also indicates that there was an unbroken succession of prophets from Moses to Malachi, and that the histories written since Malachi were not inspired, because there had been no succession of prophets since the time of Malachi.

**Actual Criteria for Inclusion in the Canon**

The test used to determine whether a book was part of the canon of the Old Testament was inspired authorship. An inspired prophet could be identified using the tests for prophets in Deut. 13:1-5; 18:14-22. Moses wrote the Pentateuch (Ex. 17:14; 24:4-7; 34:27; Deut. 31:9,22,24; Ezra 7:6; Ps. 103:7; Josh. 8:31, 23:6; I Kings 2:3). Some prophets clearly state that they were ordered to write (Jer. 30:2; Ezek. 43:11; Is. 8:1). Each of the 12 Minor Prophets call themselves prophets. The historical books were written by prophets (I Chron. 29:29; II Chron. 9:29; 12:15; 13:22; 20:34; 32:32; 33:19). Daniel accepted the book of Jeremiah as scripture (Dan. 9:2). Joshua received Moses' writing as scripture (Josh. 1:26). Isaiah and Micah accepted each other's writings as scripture contemporaneously (Is. 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-4).

Solomon, Samuel, Daniel, Isaiah and Ezekiel all had dreams and visions, which squares with God's description of a prophet (Deut. 13:1; Num. 12:6-8). The New Testament quotes the Old Testament over 600 times (all of the Old Testament books are quoted except Ezra, Neh., Esther, Eccles., and Song of Solomon). Acts 2:30 and Mt. 24:15 identify David and Daniel as prophets. Therefore, only Ezra, Neh., and Esther are unproven if Eccles. and Song of Solomon were written by Solomon. Melito, Origen and Jerome agreed with the Jewish canon. Only Augustine and his councils accepted apocryphal books.

**The New Testament**

Authorship is again the determining factor. Apostolic authorship in the New Testament corresponds to prophetic authorship in the Old Testament. This is based on the "pre-authentication" passages where Christ authorized the apostles to write scripture in advance (Mt. 10:40; Lk. 10:16; Jn. 14:26; 15:26, 27; 16:13).

The 13 letters of Paul all indicate that he is the author, although this is challenged by some modern scholars. The gospel of John indicates that John is the author (Jn. 21:23, 24). The 3 epistles of John are identical to the gospel in style. I John also claims to be written by an eye-witness (I Jn. 1:1). Revelation claims to have been written by John (Rev. 1:4, 9). Both I Pet. & II Pet. claim Petrine authorship (I Pet. 1:1; II Pet. 1:1; 3:1). This leaves only Luke, Acts, Hebrews,
Matthew, Mark, James, and Jude without direct internal claims to apostolic authorship.

Early church history connects Luke-Acts with Paul, saying that it was written by Luke under Paul's supervision and approval (Papias quoted in Eusebius). Papias and others also said that Mark wrote the memoirs of Peter. Hebrews is of uncertain authorship, although it is theologically and conceptually connected with Paul. At the same time, the grammar and vocabulary are quite different from Paul's other books. Two options are possible: (1) Paul wrote it in Hebrew or Aramaic (and it was later translated). (2) This would account for the obvious difference in vocabulary and style. Clement of Alexandria states that this was the case according to his earlier sources. One of Paul's companions wrote it under his supervision (see ch.13:23). James and Jude -- two options are possible: The book may have been written by Christ's half-brothers (Mk. 6:3) who were evidently designated as apostles after the resurrection (I Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19). Early Church sources indicate that this theory is the correct one. It may have been written by James and Jude the Alpheus brothers, two of Jesus' original disciples (Lk. 6:16; Acts 1:13). This possibility comes about from a comparison of the crucifixion accounts, which seem to establish that James the Less (James Alpheus) and Jesus were first cousins on their mothers' side. Therefore, James the Less might have called himself "the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19) within the common usage of the day. In either event, both books are of apostolic origin.

Vocabulary

Greek term: *kanon*, “rod, ruler, measuring stick or norm, standard.
Hebrew term: *qaneh*, “measuring rod.”

Origin of the Scriptures

2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is God-breathed (*theopneustos*) and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” 2 Peter 1:20-21, “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made an act of human will, but men moved (*phero*) by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

The doctrine of inspiration contends that, God the Holy Spirit so supernaturally directed the human authors of Scripture, that without destroying their
individuality, their literary style, their personal interests, their vocabulary, God’s complete and connected thought towards man was recorded with perfect accuracy in the original languages of Scripture. The original languages of Scripture contain the very words of God, and therefore, bear the “authority” of divine authorship. The Bible originates from God in eternity past (Prov. 8:22-31). The Bible is the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). God the Holy Spirit is the Divine Author of the Bible (Acts 28:25; Heb. 3:7)

2 Tim. 3:16-17 reveals that there are 4 categories of benefits from the Scriptures: (1) Doctrine: The Bible is the Mind of Christ, and therefore, divine viewpoint. (2) Reproof: The Bible tells us where we fail when we hear it. (3) Correction: The Bible tells us how to correct and solve our problems. (4) Instruction in righteousness: Involves the entire scope of the Gospel and demonstrates how God can take a sinner and make him righteous through the work of Christ.

Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines the word inspiration as “a divine influence or action on a person believed to qualify him to receive and communicate sacred revelation. The action or power of moving the intellect or emotions.” They define the word inspire, “to influence, move, or guide by divine or supernatural inspiration,” which brings us to our definition of the Doctrine of Inspiration.

Inspiration guarantees: (1) The accuracy of Satan’s lies and the way that they were phrased. (2) The way people committed their sins. (3) Anything that is not related to the Plan of God and outside the Plan of God is recorded for a purpose and for a reason.

The Greek noun theopneustos, “God-breathed,” which is found in 2 Tim. 3:16 entails the principle of inspiration and involves both the inhale and exhale. God the Holy Spirit provided the inhale of the contents of the Bible, and the human authors exhaled it in writing. In the inhale, God the Holy Spirit communicated to human authors, like Paul, God’s complete and coherent message (2 Sam. 23:2, 3; Isa. 59:21; Jer. 1:9; Matt. 22:42-44; Mark 12:36; Acts 4:24-25; 28:25). In the exhale, the human writers of the Bible so wrote that without waiving their human intelligence, their vocabulary, their personal feelings, their literary style, their personality or individuality, God’s complete message to man was permanently recorded with perfect accuracy in the original languages of Scripture. The original languages of Scripture contain the very words of God, and therefore, bear the authority of divine authorship. The Bible in its original languages is the exact record, the mind and will of God.

The Bible is plenary meaning the entire text is equally from God but not necessarily equally important. Inspiration is God revealing Himself through Bible
Doctrine, which is His mind. Revelation is God using a vehicle. The word of God in its original languages is the vehicle by which God reveals Himself to mankind.

God reveals Himself to man in 3 ways: (1) By nature or creation (Psalm 19:1-6; Rom. 1:19-20). (2) The Living Word, i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:18; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Cor. 1:24; Heb. 1:1-3). (3) The Written Word, the Bible in its original languages, i.e., Bible Doctrine.

There are 4 categories of Old Testament revelation in addition to Scripture: (1) The spoken Word (Isa. 6:8-10). (2) Dreams (Gen. 15:12; 31:10-13, 24; Num. 12:6; Dan. 10:9). (3) Visions (1 Kings 22:19; Isa. 1:1; 6:1). (4) Angelic teaching (Deut. 33:2; Psa. 68:17; Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19).

The extent of inspiration falls under 6 categories: (1) unknown past (2) ancient history (3) objective-type law (4) dictation and prophecy (5) devotional literature (6) recording falsehoods. Unknown Past: The Bible portrays historical statements and details unknown to man and unconfirmed by human records (Gen. 1:11). Inspiration guarantees the accuracy of these events (Isa. 14; Ezek. 28). In Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, there are 2 accounts of Satan’s fall. Satan existed long before man, yet we have in writing, with perfect accuracy, all that God wants us to know about Satan’s fall. There are several accounts of the creation of the universe and these are found in the Scriptures from Genesis to Isaiah, and Colossians 1 We would have no way of knowing these events were it not for the fact that God Himself provided the information through inspiration so that we might know about eternity past.

The Bible is not a history book but it does contain many historical accounts. All of these are necessary and are accurate. They form the basis and background for the communication of doctrine, which we call isagogics. There have been many archeological discoveries, which demonstrate the perfect accuracy of the Scriptures.

There are certain portions of the Word of God, which contain laws governing various phases of individual and national life. There are 4 Divine Institutions: (1) Volition (2) Marriage (3) Family (4) National Entity. There are many more laws in addition to these.

Inspiration guarantees that these are divine laws. It is to man’s benefit that they be followed and executed. These laws perfectly express the essence of God and His will for the people to whom they were given. The repetition of these laws in Scripture demonstrates their application to every generation.

Some places in the Bible have direct quotations from God. Sometimes, God would make known future events which man had no way of foreseeing or understanding at the time of their revelation. Examples of prophecy: (1) Destruction of the powerful Edomites (Ezek. 25:12-14). (2) Fall of Tyre (3) Person
and Work of Christ (Psa. 22; Isa. 53). These prophecies were fulfilled perfectly. Future prophecies for the Tribulation, 2nd Advent of Christ and the Millennium will be perfectly fulfilled also.

Devotional Literature: This includes the Psalms, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes and Job. God uses the problems, pressures, prosperity and successes as well as failures of certain believers to reveal His plan and principles of grace.

The record of human or Satanic lies in the Bible does mean that falsehood is truth. Inspiration guarantees the accuracy of these lies such as the devil’s lies in Genesis 3:1-5. The book of Ecclesiastes reveals human viewpoint. God did not approve of Solomon’s human viewpoint but it was recorded to reveal the thinking of one who is out of fellowship with God.

Men were used by God to communicate Truth. God uses men to communicate Divine Truth to men. God the Holy Spirit moved men to produce the Scriptures in writing. Men were the willing agents used by God to produce the Scriptures. The Bible is not a result of the thoughts of men. The Bible is not a result of men’s imagination or ideas or philosophies. The human writers of Scripture wrote about the things of God and not man. The Scriptures are Divine Viewpoint and not human viewpoint. The Bible uses human agencies and human language.

Art of Writing

There are many avenues of approach to the study of canonicity but there is absolutely one that is essential for man to record and thus preserve God’s thoughts and words for all future generations and that is the subject of writing. There are 3 major factors involved in the history of writing: (1) The symbol of the alphabet: represents sounds. (2) The word: represents an idea. (3) The sentence: represents a thought. There are 3 stages in the history of writing: (1) The pictograph: pictures were used to depict objects. (2) The idiograph: picture of an idea. (3) The phonograms: a symbol represents a sound. There are 3 types of phonograms: (1) word phonogram: a symbol stands for an entire word. (2) Syllable phonogram: a symbol stands for a syllable. (3) Letter phonogram: The Bible is constructed on an alphabet.

Syllable phonogram was used in cuneiform writing. Cuneiform is the wedge-shaped inscription of the ancient Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians. Discoveries to date indicate that the earliest writing materials were stone and chisels. Archaeologists have located and excavated pillars and stones of various types and among the most famous is the Behistun Rock from western Persia, which gave us the key to cuneiform writing.
In 1868, the Moabite Stone was discovered east of the River Jordan by a German missionary named Klein. Near Dibon he came across what looked like a black basalt tombstone, half-buried in the sand. He dismounted and curiously examined the engraved inscriptions. They appeared to be older than anything he had ever seen so he hurriedly scratched away the sand. When he looked up, he was surrounded by a group of local Bedouins. They insisted that this was their stone and that they would not part with it. Klein offered to buy the stone from them, but they named a ridiculous sum far beyond his means. So Klein left for Germany to try to raise the money he needed. In the meantime, a French scholar, Clermont-Ganneau, heard of the stone. He rushed to the site and copied the writings and it turned out to be the oldest piece of Hebrew literature ever to be found, and it told the story of 2 Kings, Chapter 3. The French government immediately provided the money, and Clermont-Ganneau rushed back to the site but only to find the stone was gone! The Bedouins in their greed for an even higher price had smashed the stone into small pieces. The French scholar now had to locate the rock fragments and try to piece them together with the help of the copy he had made on his 1st trip. Today, the reconstructed stone is in the Louvre.

The Rosetta Stone is a basalt tablet that was discovered by Napoleon’s archaeologists in 1799 near Rosetta, Egypt. This tablet held the key to Egyptian hieroglyphics and is now located in the British Museum. Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt produce no territorial gains for France but it certainly was a boost for archaeology.

The 2nd medium for writing was clay. There were several forms of clay tablets that were employed: (1) cylinders (2) octagonal cylinders (3) small flat tablets. These clay tablets were smoothed out perfectly and written on while still wet. A sharpened stick or an ivory stylus was used to make an impression on the clay, and then the clay was baked in the sun. Many of these writings have lasted for over 4500 years and have been beautifully preserved for us.

Another writing material, which is even mentioned in the Bible, is lead (Jb. 19:24). Other metals used, primarily in the times of the Graeco-Roman world, were gold, silver and bronze. Several of these are in existence today, as are some ivory tablets that came to us from Africa and Arabia. The Romans, Egyptians and the Etruscans all did some writing on linen and some of these documents are preserved to this day.

The Old and New Testament documents were written on papyrus, vellum or parchment. Papyrus, from which we get the word paper, was the most expensive of the 3. It was handmade from an Egyptian papyrus reed. The pith of the plant was made into strips, which formed a very durable type of writing material. At the time
of writing of the New Testament, papyrus was widely used. Paul, Peter, James and John used papyrus for the autograph of the New Testament.

Vellum is a very fine type of skin, which was used by the writers of antiquity. It was primarily made from the skins of calves and antelopes. Parchment was a less expensive substitute for vellum and originated in the Greek town of Pergamon from which it got its Latin name pergamentum. It was made from goat or sheepskins that had been prepared and then polished with a pumice stone. Like papyrus, both vellum and parchment were written on with pen and ink. These skins were so durable that the writing could be erased and the skins used over and over again. Were it not for a relatively recent discovery of science that permits us to trace the original writings, many an irreplaceable document would have been completely lost to us.

The inks of the ancient world were manufactured from soot, lampblack, and gum, which had to be diluted with water. They were permanent, and came in 5 colors: (1) black (most common) (2) red (3) green (4) blue (5) yellow. Some of our ink records are over 3,000 years old, yet the ink is as good now as it was at the time of writing.

The greatest pen of antiquity was the calamus. It took its name from a hollow reed, which was ingeniously designed. This reed was cut long-stemmed and apparently had a little vacuum system through which the ink could be sucked up. It might well have been the forerunner of our fountain pens. On one end of the reed was sharpened to a fine point and was kept sharp for writing by means of a small knife which every scholar carried with him for that purpose. Incidentally, that is where we got the English word penknife.

Writing on wood and bark became very common in the British Isles. The Anglo-Saxon word for bark is boc. Although Anglo-Saxon and English are the same language, it is from the Anglo-Saxon word boc that we got our English wordbook. As the art of writing developed, wax tablets were eventually used, especially for the purpose of recording various types of legal transactions.

Paper was invented by the Chinese around the 2nd century A.D. It was introduced in Arabia about the 8th century. It was not used in the Western world until the 10th century. At first, paper was not used in connection with the Bible. By the 13th century a paper mill had been built in Germany and when Guttenberg invented movable type printing in 1450, paper came into its own. It was discovered that by means of the printing press and paper, books could be produced cheaply and in quantity, therefore paper was here to stay.

**Four Types of Ancient Manuscripts**
There are more than 24,000 partial and complete manuscript copies of the New Testament. These manuscript copies are very ancient and they are available for inspection now. There are also some 86,000 quotations from the early church fathers and several thousand Lectionaries (church-service books containing Scripture quotations used in the early centuries of Christianity). Bottom line: the New Testament has an overwhelming amount of evidence supporting its reliability.

In the many thousands of manuscript copies we possess of the New Testament, scholars have discovered that there are some 150,000 "variants." This may seem like a staggering figure to the uninformed mind. But to those who study the issue, the numbers are not so damning as it may initially appear. Indeed, a look at the hard evidence shows that the New Testament manuscripts are amazingly accurate and trustworthy.

To begin, we must emphasize that out of these 150,000 variants, 99 percent hold virtually no significance whatsoever. Many of these variants simply involve a missing letter in a word; some involve reversing the order of two words (such as "Christ Jesus" instead of "Jesus Christ"); some may involve the absence of one or more insignificant words. Really, when all the facts are put on the table, only about 50 of the variants have any real significance - and even then, no doctrine of the Christian faith or any moral commandment is effected by them. For more than ninety-nine percent of the cases the original text can be reconstructed to a practical certainty. Even in the few cases where some perplexity remains, this does not impinge on the meaning of Scripture to the point of clouding a tenet of the faith or a mandate of life. Thus, in the Bible as we have it (and as it is conveyed to us through faithful translations) we do have for practical purposes the very Word of God, inasmuch as the manuscripts do convey to us the complete vital truth of the originals.

By practicing the science of textual criticism - comparing all the available manuscripts with each other - we can come to an assurance regarding what the original document must have said. Let us suppose we have five manuscript copies of an original document that no longer exists. Each of the manuscript copies are different. Our goal is to compare the manuscript copies and ascertain what the original must have said. Here are the five copies: Manuscript #1: Jesus Christ is the Savior of the whole world. Manuscript #2: Christ Jesus is the Savior of the whole world. Manuscript #3: Jesus Christ is the Savior of the whole world. Manuscript #4: Jesus Christ is the Savior of the whole world. Manuscript #5: Jesus Christ is the Savior of the whole world.

Could you, by comparing the manuscript copies, ascertain what the original document said with a high degree of certainty that you are correct? Of course you
could.
This illustration may be extremely simplistic, but a great majority of the 150,000 variants are solved by the above methodology. By comparing the various manuscripts, all of which contain very minor differences like the above, it becomes fairly clear what the original must have said. Most of the manuscript variations concern matters of spelling, word order, tenses, and the like; no single doctrine is affected by them in any way. We must also emphasize that the sheer volume of manuscripts we possess greatly narrows the margin of doubt regarding what the original biblical document said. If the number of manuscripts increases the number of scribal errors, it increases proportionately the means of correcting such errors, so that the margin of doubt left in the process of recovering the exact original wording is not so large as might be feared; it is in truth remarkably small.

By comparing the manuscript support for the Bible with manuscript support for other ancient documents and books, it becomes overwhelmingly clear that no other ancient piece of literature can stand up to the Bible. Manuscript support for the Bible is unparalleled! There are more [New Testament] manuscripts copied with greater accuracy and earlier dating than for any secular classic from antiquity. Rene Pache adds, "The historical books of antiquity have documentation infinitely less solid." Dr. Benjamin Warfield concludes, "If we compare the present state of the text of the New Testament with that of no matter what other ancient work, we must...declare it marvelously exact." Norman Geisler makes several key observations for our consideration: "No other book is even a close second to the Bible on either the number or early dating of the copies. The average secular work from antiquity survives on only a handful of manuscripts; the New Testament boasts thousands.” The average gap between the original composition and the earliest copy is over 1,000 years for other books.

The New Testament, however, has a fragment within one generation from its original composition, whole books within about 100 years from the time of the autograph [original manuscript], most of the New Testament in less than 200 years, and the entire New Testament within 250 years from the date of its completion. The degree of accuracy of the copies is greater for the New Testament than for other books that can be compared. Most books do not survive with enough manuscripts that make comparison possible. From this documentary evidence, then, it is clear that the New Testament writings are superior to comparable ancient writings. "The records for the New Testament are vastly more abundant, clearly more ancient, and considerably more accurate in their text."

In addition to the many thousands of New Testament manuscripts, there are over 86,000 quotations of the New Testament in the early church fathers. There are also New Testament quotations in thousands of early church Lectionaries
(worship books). There are enough quotations from the early church fathers that even if we did not have a single copy of the Bible, scholars could still reconstruct all but 11 verses of the entire New Testament from material written within 150 to 200 years from the time of Christ.

The Dead Sea Scrolls prove the accuracy of the transmission of the Bible. In fact, in these scrolls discovered at Qumran in 1947, we have Old Testament manuscripts that date about a thousand years earlier (150 B.C.) than the other Old Testament manuscripts then in our possession (which dated to A.D. 900). The significant thing is that when one compares the two sets of manuscripts, it is clear that they are essentially the same, with very few changes. The fact that manuscripts separated by a thousand years are essentially the same indicates the incredible accuracy of the Old Testament's manuscript transmission. A full copy of the Book of Isaiah was discovered at Qumran. Even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known (A.D. 980), they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling." From manuscript discoveries like the Dead Sea Scrolls, Christians have undeniable evidence that today's Old Testament Scripture, for all practical purposes, is exactly the same as it was when originally inspired by God and recorded in the Bible. Combine this with the massive amount of manuscript evidence we have for the New Testament, and it is clear that the Christian Bible is a trustworthy and reliable book. The Dead Sea Scrolls prove that the copyists of biblical manuscripts took great care in going about their work. These copyists knew they were duplicating God's Word, so they went to incredible lengths to prevent error from creeping into their work. The scribes carefully counted every line, word, syllable, and letter to ensure accuracy.

The Westminster Confession declares: "The Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek, being immediately inspired by God and, by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them." The Westminster Confession makes a very important point here. The fact is, the God who had the power and sovereign control to inspire the Scriptures in the first place is surely going to continue to exercise His power and sovereign control in the preservation of Scripture. Actually, God's preservational work is illustrated in the text of the Bible. By examining how Christ viewed the Old Testament, we see that He had full confidence that the Scriptures He used had been faithfully preserved through the centuries. Because Christ raised no doubts about the adequacy of the Scripture, as His contemporaries knew them, we can safely assume that the first-
century text of the Old Testament was a wholly adequate representation of the divine word originally given. Jesus regarded the extant copies of His day as so approximate to the originals in their message that He appealed to those copies as authoritative. The respect that Jesus and His apostles held for the extant Old Testament text is, at base, an expression of the confidence in God's providential preservation of the copies and translations as substantially identical with the inspired originals. Hence, the Bible itself indicates that copies can faithfully reflect the original text and therefore function authoritatively. The manuscript evidence for the text of the NT is vastly more abundant than that for any other ancient document.

The oldest known manuscripts of the works of some of the Greek classical authors are copies made 1000 years or more after the author’s death. The number of the manuscripts of the ancient classic is also limited about 50 manuscripts of the works of Aeschylus, a hundred of Sophocles, and only 1 each of the Greek Anthology and the Annals of Tacitus. Of the NT, however, there are almost 5000 manuscripts of part or all of the Greek text, 2000 Greek lectionaries, 8000 manuscripts in Latin, and 1000 additional manuscripts in other ancient versions. These manuscripts include extensive parts of the NT copied hardly more than a century after the original, and 50 or more manuscripts, including 2 virtually complete NT codices, copied within 3 centuries after the NT books were originally written. In addition, the writings of the ancient church fathers in Greek, Latin and Syriac contain thousands of quotations from the NT. Indeed, the available materials for the text of the NT are so extensive that their adequate study is a complicated task, but a task whose result is “to strengthen the proof of the authenticity of the Scriptures, and our conviction that we have in our hands in substantial integrity, the veritable Word of God (Kenyon, Story of the Bible, p. 144).

Ancient manuscripts are classified into 4 groups: (1) uncial (2) minuscule (3) lectionaries (4) papyri. The oldest of these types of manuscripts are the uncial manuscripts on vellum or parchment. They are written in all capital letters with no punctuation or spaces between words and sentences, or even paragraphs. The syntax (sentence structure) alone is the basis of all punctuation. An Anglicized version of a unical manuscript would look like this: FORGODSOLOVEDTHEWORLDTHATHEGAVE, etc.

The miniscule dates back to the 10th century A.D. You can tell a minuscule manuscript by its semi-uncial script. This script was developed by monks during the 7th, 8th and 9th centuries and consisted of lower case cursive letters, which now form the basis of our modern small Roman, or Greek letters.
Lectionaries are so named because of the Bible passages they contain and the purpose they served. If a pastor in one of the early churches wanted to read Ephesians 2:8-9, he would copy that portion from either the original text, or from a Latin copy or some other ancient language. He would then insert the passage in his order of service. Any verse that he wanted to insert into his message, he would copy from the original text or a Greek or Latin copy.

The 4th type of manuscript was simply called the papyri. This very delicate paper was too brittle to be folded but could be rolled into scrolls. Fortunately, little deterioration occurred when this material was stored in very hot and dry climates. Well-preserved papyri has been found dating prior to 200 A.D.

**Codex Sinaiticus**

There are 6 Major Codices: (1) Sinaiticus (Aleph 01) (2) Aleandrinus (02 A) (3) Vaticanus (03 B) (4) Ephraemi Rescriptus (04 C) (5) Bezae Cantabrigiensis (05 D) (6) Claromontanus (06 E). A codice is what we think of today as a book. We owe much of our knowledge of the Scriptures to a brilliant 19th century German scholar, who spent his life piecing together the original New Testament. At the age of 19, young Count Konstantin von Tischendorf amazed his professors with his fluent knowledge of the classical languages and dialects of antiquity. Seven years later, he was appointed lecturer at the University of Leipzig. The following year he published a new edition of the Greek New Testament. In the spring of 1844, Tischendorf took a trip to the Near East. In the course of his travels, he journeyed to the Sinaitic Peninsula in search of an old monastery that had been hewn from the rock on the side of Mount Sinai. Since there were no hotels in those days, travelers often spent the night in monasteries. When Tischendorf arrived at the Greek Orthodox monastery of St. Catherine’s he was welcomed warmly by the Russian monks. After dinner and a visit with the Prior, Tischendorf presented his letter of introduction. He was then given a grand tour of the ground and the buildings and was taken to the library. Tischendorf was unimpressed but he kept digging through piles of dusty parchments and then in a small room near the library he saw a large waste basket filled to the rim with what looked like ancient vellum. The contents of the waster basket had been relegated to the fireplace, Tischendorf was aghast for he saw some of enormous value. He quickly went through the papers and this is how Tischendorf discovered 129 pages of what is today known as the Codex Sinaiticus, or the Codex Aleph.

Tischendorf did not play poker well and the monks would not let him take the manuscripts with him. He was permitted to stay and take some notes. In fact, he did more than that he copied the manuscript. In the end, after prolonged
negotiations, he was allowed to take 43 of the 129 pages he had found. Fourteen years later the negotiations for the transfer of this and other priceless documents including the Epistle to Barnabas were concluded. The monks would not sell the manuscripts to the hated English but chose to give them to Russia.

Tischendorf with the approval of the Russian government carried off his prize for further study and he published his findings in 1862. Codex Sinaiticus is still one of the finest and most accurate texts available to us today and it became the basis of many versions and corrections of earlier editions of the Bible. In 1933 the communist regime in Russia sold Codex Sinaiticus to Great Britain for 100,000 pounds sterling. The crumpled pages were restored and bound in 2 volumes and placed in the British Museum. Later they were photostatically reproduced and the copies sent to libraries throughout the world.

**Codex Vaticanus**

After Tischendorf’s discovery, a new interest in ancient manuscripts was kindled. A friend of Tischendorf had remembered Napoleon’s scholars had discovered some old manuscripts in the Vatican library when the Pope had been captured. Codex Vaticanus also known as Codex B, was known to be some 15 years older than Codex Sinaiticus (Codex Aleph). Vaticanus dated back to 325 or 350 A.D. and had probably been brought from the East by Pope Nicholas in 1448. Until the Napoleonic Wars, the manuscript had been hidden from the outside world. In 1809, when Napoleon exiled the Pope to Avignon (later Savona), it took about 50 wagons to transport the Pope’s library. With the fall of Napoleon in 1815, the papers were returned to the Vatican before anyone had a chance to examine them carefully. Once more in the Vatican library, they were jealously guarded by the Roman Catholics.

Tragelles, another great scholar and friend of Tischendorf, decided to investigate the Codex Vaticanus in the Vatican library. In the year 1843, he applied to the Pope for permission to examine the manuscript and was promptly refused. When he explained that he was a professor of New Testament Literature at Leipzig University, the Pope gave permission for Tragelles and Tischendorf to study the manuscript for 6 hours only. Two years later, Tragelles was again permitted to examine the manuscript for some days, 6 hours as a time, but he had to submit to stringent security measures such as being searched on his way in and out. He was not allowed to bring writing materials and could take no notes. The manuscript was laid out on a large table and he could read it for no longer than the time specified and the guards would be watching him as he was reading. Tragelles agreed to the Pope’s ground rules and he was searched and no scrap of paper or
writing tool was found on him. He proceeded to memorize a portion of the text each day, not only in the Greek but also in Hebrew and Aramaic and since he was a genius in all 3 languages, this presented no problem. When he returned home he would sit down and write out that part of Scripture, which he had memorized. This went on for the summer holidays and in 3 months Tragelles had memorized the entire text of Codex Vaticanus.

Upon his return to Leipzig, Tragelles published the results of his finding. So close was his text to the original, that Pope Pius IX ordered the manuscript photographed in 1859. In that way it became public property for the world at large. Codex Vaticanus is still one of our most valuable manuscripts of the Word of God.

**Codex Alexandrinus**

The third manuscript, which very few people knew about, is the Codex Alexandrinus. This Greek language manuscript had been written about 450 A.D. in Alexandria, Egypt. Apparently no one paid any attention to it in the years that followed. In 1621, when Cryril Lucar became the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church, he transferred the manuscript to Constantinople. He had succumbed to the influence of Calvinistic teaching and was corresponding with leading churchmen in the western world. That is how he learned of England’s keen interest in ancient Biblical manuscripts. So, when the British ambassador, Thomas Roe, was scheduled to return home, Lucar sent with him the manuscript as a gift to King Charles I.

The beautiful document, Codex Alexandrinus, was presented at court in 1627, just 15 years after the King James Version of the Bible had been completed. What a pity that it had come so late, because this very ancient manuscript would have helped immensely in the correct translation of the English text.

**Ephraemi Rescriptus**

The Ephraemi Rescriptus manuscript or Codex C was thought to be lost but was recovered in the 16th century. This recovery involved Catherine de Medici who was an ambitious as she was clever. Catherine was a member of the colorful Italian family that had risen from obscurity to immense wealth and fame. Over a period of nearly 300 years the Medicis had made a name for themselves, which ran the gamut from popes to poisoners, to patrons of the arts. They had affiliated themselves with the great houses of Europe through marriage, and Catherine had become the wife of King Henry II, of France. She bore him 4 sons who eventually, through her constant manipulations, became kings. Catherine de Medici was an
avid, if somewhat superficial reader, who treasured her books and took them wherever she went. Among her favorites were the sermons of a Syrian theologian, Father Ephraem. When Catherine died, her books went to the French National Library in Paris. They were stacked away and ignored for a long time-245 years to be exact.

In 1834, a student of theology decided to write a thesis on the sermons of Father Ephraem. He went to the French National Library and asked permission to check out some of the Medici books. He was told that they could not be removed from the premises, since the collection had great historic value; however, he was permitted to examine the books. While he was reading, the light fell on the page in such a way that indentations in the vellum were visible. What appeared to the student as so many indentations were, in fact, inscriptions made prior to those of Father Ephraem. What actually had happened was that in 1553, when Father Ephraem wanted to record his sermons, paper was very scarce and hard to obtain. He found some used vellum in an ancient Syrian monastery and simply erased the writing. True, the indentations were still there, but his own sermons could be written over them. Without realizing it, Father Ephraem had erased one of the finest of all Bible manuscripts in order to write his own sermons!

Immediately, the alert student became far more interested in what Father Ephraem had erased than in what he had written. Through the use of chemicals, the original manuscript was restored. We call this type of manuscript a palimpsest, which means erased and written over. This particular one became known as Ephraemi Rescriptus; in other words, Ephraem wrote over it! Since its discovery, the manuscript has been removed from the Medici stacks of literature and placed where it belongs-in the Bible stacks at the library in Paris.

Oxyrhynchos Papyri

Archeological findings have provided us with additional priceless manuscripts of the past. About 1900, Oxford University professors, Drs. Grenfell and Hunt went to Oxyrhynchos in Upper Egypt, west of the Nile. They were searching for ancient treasures and trinkets of silver and gold that lay buried in the tombs. During the course of the excavations of the one-time provincial capital, they came upon a tremendous hall filled with stuffed, mumified crocodiles. They were baffled and disappointed; they had expected to find priceless art treasures and jewels in the great chamber, not 2,000 stuffed crocodiles. Possibly on the other side of the chamber they would find what they were looking for-and indeed they did. They recovered many valuable artifacts, which are still in British museums today, estimated to be worth millions of dollars. This find can scarcely be
compared, however, to their discovery of far greater riches—a discovery, which came about, quite by accident. To reach the other side of the great chamber, the crocodiles had to be removed out of the way. It was a tedious job, but it paid off handsomely.

When one of the native workers stumbled and fell, the crocodile he was carrying hit a sharp rock and broke open. Dr. Grenfell’s eyes widened in amazement at what he saw: inside that crocodile were papyri. Upon investigation, they found inside the crocodile mummies an entire library of the ancient world—not just one, but many different kinds of manuscripts. These included some Biblical manuscripts from the 2nd century—practically the same time of the autograph of the New Testament Scriptures. Here also were grammar and etymology books, which led to further discoveries of principles involved in the syntax and grammar of the Koine Greek, which we still use today.

The Oxyrhynchos Papyri can be seen in museums in both Egypt and Britain. However, all the studies concerned with those papyri have never really been completed.

**Chester Beatty Papyri**

There was increasing excitement over these discoveries, and everyone began searching for papyri. Countless small mills and sand dunes were dug up, and many turned out to be only rubbish heaps of the past, which contained bits of slates, vases, broken pottery—reminders of a life long ago. The Arabs, not to be outdone, began their own treasure hunt. They carried off many valuable treasures and peddled these to any and all buyers. So, here and there, fragments of Biblical writings turned up. Among these was an ancient Jewish temple library of the 7th century B.C. discovered at Elephantine, Egypt, during the years 1906 and 1908.

Another great discovery came on November 19, 1931, when the Chester Beatty Papyri were found. Chester Beatty was a millionaire from Philadelphia, who made a tour of Palestine and Egypt. He had heard that some Old Testament papyri in Greek were being offered for sale. Even though the price was exorbitant, Beatty paid it immediately. He then turned the entire collection of documents over to 2 scholars, F.G. Kenyon and H.A. Sanders.

A detailed study of these 2nd and 3rd century papyri revealed some of the missing papers of the Codex Sinaiticus, portions of Paul’s Epistles and the four Gospels. The haul was well worth the price he had paid for it after all. This collection is now housed at the University of Pennsylvania.

**Deissman**
The ever increasing supply of newly recovered papyri furnished abundant material for research and evaluation by knowledgeable philologists. We owe much to a group of very famous German scholars who, under the leadership of Adolph Deissman, shed new light on the language of the New Testament. His studies clarified the vocabulary, grammar and syntax of the Koine Greek. Light from the Ancient East, translated from the German, is a fascinating book on this subject and contains some of Deissman findings.

**Dead Sea Scrolls**

In 1947, a 15-year old Bedouin boy followed a goat, which had strayed. When he casually threw a pebble into the cleft of a rock, he was startled at the sound of breaking pottery. Later he returned with a friend to explore the cave. Here they stumbled upon several earthenware jars that contained dirty, musty-smelling parchment. What seemed like an accidental find turned out to be Biblical manuscripts antedating the oldest known Old Testament manuscripts by 1000 years. This included the complete book of Isaiah. It would take many years and a small fortune to acquire these scrolls from the Arab black market, and even more patience to piece them together and to decipher. There could be no doubt; however, the scrolls were genuine.

In the following years, many additional caches were located, including the main library of the Essenes, a Jewish sect. The Dead Sea Scrolls were named after the area in which they had been found. Their discovery proves that God provided for the preservation and the recovery of His written message, the Canon of Scripture.

**Need for the Canon**

There are 4 reasons why there was a very definite need for the Canon: (1) So that believers in every generation might have complete revelation from God. (2) A Canon was necessary so that people might have God’s Word in writing. (3) There was a need for the preservation and circulation of the sacred writings. (4) That people might know which writings were canonical.

**Criteria of Old Testament Canonicity**

The accuracy of the present-day Hebrew version of the Old Testament is a result of the fastidious care with which the Sopherim and the Masoretes
transmitted it. The Sopherim copied manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures from about 300 B.C. until A.D. 500. According to the Talmud, they came to be called "Sopherim" because, in their endeavor to preserve the text from alteration or addition, they counted the number of words in each section of Scripture, as well as the number of verses and paragraphs. During this time, there were two general classes of manuscript copies, the synagogue rolls and private copies. Even the private copies, or "common copies" of the Old Testament text, which were not used in public meetings, were preserved with great care. For the synagogue rolls, however, there was a very elaborate set of rules for the copyists.

The manuscript had to be prepared by a Jew, written on the skins of clean animals and fastened together with strings taken from clean animals. Every skin was to contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the codex. The length of each column was to be no less than 48 and no more than 60 lines. The breadth was to be 30 letters. The ink was to be prepared according to a definite special recipe. An authentic copy was to be used from which to copy, and the transcriber was not to deviate from it in the least. No word or letter, not even a yod, was to be written from memory. The scribe was to examine carefully the codex to be copied. Between all of the consonants of the new copy, a space of at least the thickness of a hair or thread had to intervene. Between every parashah, or section, there was to be a breadth of nine consonants. Between every book, there was to be three lines.

During the period A.D. 500-900, the text of the Hebrew Bible was standardized by the Masoretes, who were also very careful in the transmission of the text. They counted every letter and marked the middle letter and middle word of each book, of the Pentateuch and of the whole Hebrew Bible, and counted all parashas (sections), verses, and words for every book. These procedures were a manifestation of the great respect they had for the sacred Scriptures, and secured their minute attention to the precise transmission of the text.

The Masoretes also introduced a complete system of vowel pointings and punctuation for the text. Because of their high regard for faithfulness to the text in transmission, wherever they felt that corrections or improvements should be made, they placed them in the margin. They retained certain marks of the earlier scribes relating to doubtful words and offered various possibilities as to what they were. Among the many lists they drew up was one containing all the words that occur only twice in the Old Testament.

The Hebrew Scriptures were recognized as authoritative at their inception, and were immediately accepted as such by the Jewish people. The acceptance of the Pentateuch, for example, is recorded in Deuteronomy 32:46-47, and in Joshua 1:7, 8. As a matter of course, the Church of the first century regarded the Hebrew
Scriptures as inspired. Jesus, in Luke 24:44, refers to the Law, the prophets, and the psalms (or the writings) as divinely authoritative and canonical. The Jews accepted all of the 39 books of the Old Testament as inspired. A confirmation of public opinion along these lines was made at the synod at Jamnia. When the destruction of Jerusalem was imminent in A.D. 70, Yochanan ben Zakkai, a great Rabbi in the school of Hillel in the Pharisaic party, obtained permission from the Romans to reconvene the Sanhedrin on a purely spiritual basis at Jabneh or Jamnia.

Objections had been raised by some of the Jews to the canonical recognition of a few books (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Esther), and their canonicity was reaffirmed at this time. All of the books that they decided to acknowledge as canonical were already generally accepted, although questions had been raised about some of them. On the other hand, those that they refused to admit, such as Ecclesiasticus, had never been included.

Philo (20 B.C. - A.D. 50), the learned Jew in Alexandria, accepted the Hebrew canon. For him, the Law (the five books of Moses, or the first five books of the Bible) was pre-eminently inspired, but he also acknowledged the authority of the other books of the Hebrew canon. He did not regard the apocryphal books as authoritative. This suggests that, although the apocryphal books were included in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures); they were not really considered canonical by the Alexandrian Jews.

Josephus, the eminent Jewish historian who lived in the first century A.D., also echoed prevailing opinion about which books were canonical and which ones were not. Although he used the Septuagint freely, he, also, did not regard the Apocrypha as canonical.

The earliest extant Christian list of Old Testament books was recorded by Melito, bishop of Sardis in A.D. 170. This list does not mention Lamentations (which was usually understood to be part of the book of Jeremiah), or Nehemiah, which was normally appended to Ezra. The only other omission was the book of Esther.

The late fourth century writer Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, quoted another ancient list from the second century which included all the books corresponding to our thirty-nine, except Lamentations, which was probably considered an appendix to Jeremiah.

Origen (A.D. 185-254) also provided a list of the Old Testament books in use corresponding to what we now accept as the Old Testament. With the awareness of the need for a Canon, 5 criteria were agreed upon. On the basis, the inclusion or exclusion of certain books into the Canon was eventually determined.
The question of inspiration: Every extant book of an acknowledged messenger of God, commissioned by God to make known His will, was immediately accepted as the Word of God. The principle of internal evidence: There are certain passages of Scripture, which explain this principle of canonicity (Dt. 31:24-26; Jsh. 1:8; Jdg. 3:4; Jer. 36). Documentation by quotation: The New Testament contains quotations from the Old Testament made by Jesus Christ and others who declared it to be the Word of God (Mt. 22:29; Jn. 5:39; 10:35). The law of public official action: This is an historical law, which required that public action be taken immediately to solemnly declare a portion of Scripture to be the Word of God (Nh. 8:5). The law of cause and effect: The cause is the existence of the Canon, and the effect is the recognition of the Canon. The principle of external evidence: The year 586 B.C. saw God’s administration of the 5th cycle of discipline of Judah.

Jerusalem and the Temple had been destroyed and the Jews had gone into the Babylonian captivity (2 Ch. 36:11-21), and during their captivity (586-516 B.C.) the Jews realized why they had disintegrated as a nation. This led to the resurgence of the study of Bible doctrine. At last the Jews became aware of the importance of the written Word as a part of their spiritual heritage-so much so, that we have extra-Biblical evidence with regard to their consciousness of the Canon as it then existed.

There were men like Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, who kept reminding the people of the importance of the Scriptures. There were other outstanding leaders like Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel, who led the advance column out of captivity back to Jerusalem. They all recognized that they had the Canon. By the year 425 B.C. all the Old Testament books had been written, and the Old Testament Canon was collected and closed.

Organization of the Old Testament Canon

The Old Testament was divided into 3 sections: (1) The Torah (2) The Prophets (Nabhiim) (3) The Writings (Kethubim). The 1st section is called the Torah meaning “the Law” contained: (1) Genesis (2) Exodus (3) Leviticus (4) Numbers (5) Deuteronomy. The 2nd section was the Prophets which were divided into 2 sections: (1) The Former Prophets (2) The Latter Prophets. The Former Prophets: (1) Joshua (2) Judges (3) Samuel (4) Kings. The Latter Prophets were divided into 2 categories: (1) Major (2) Minor. Major Prophets: (1) Isaiah (2) Jeremiah (3) Ezekiel. The Minor Prophets were also called the Twelve because they were all contained in 1 Book: (1) Hosea (2) Joel (3) Amos (4) Obadiah (5) Jonah (6) Micah (7) Nahum (8) Habakkuk (9) Zephaniah (10) Haggai (11) Zechariah (12) Malachi. The 3rd and last section was called the Writings: (1) The Poetical Books:
Psalms, Proverbs and Job (2) The Five Rolls (*Megilloth*): Song of Solomon, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Esther and Lamentations (3) The Historical Books: Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah (1 book) and Chronicles!

**Testimony of Josephus**

The generally accepted date for the completion of the Old Testament Canon is the year 425 or 424 B.C. The fact of its existence was recognized by the Jews but blatantly denied by a bombastic character by the name of Apion. He flatly declared that there was no such thing as the sacred Scriptures. Flavius Josephus was an unbeliever. By race he was a Jew; by mannerism, adoption and citizenship he was Roman; and by profession he was an outstanding soldier and eminent historian. From the time that Josephus had been promoted to the rank of a Roman general, he was pro-Roman all the way. Yet for all this, he simply could not let this scurrilous accusation against the validity of the Canon go without a formal objection. He sat down and refuted Apion’s claim, point by point, in a book called *Contra Apion*. Because Josephus was an unbeliever; he was not emotionally involved and therefore could write clearly, objectively and concisely on this matter. His one passion in life was an accurate presentation of history! He once said that an historian should record the facts of history without interpreting the facts. He must report accurately what was said, what was done, what was expressed.

So, while Josephus had little or no love for his own people, the Jews, he could not let Apion get away with historical inaccuracy. In *Contra Apion*, Josephus describes the sacred books of the Jews. He states that the time during which these books were written extended from Moses to Artaxerxes I, who reigned from 465 to 424 B.C. Furthermore, he demonstrates that there never was a time that the Jews did not accept this text as the Word of God. Canonicity was a definite part of Jewish history. He further states that nothing was ever added to the Canon after the death of Artaxerxes in 424 B.C.; the line of prophets had ceased to exist, and no one dared make any addition, subtraction or alteration to the Canon of Scripture.

Josephus was not personally interested in defending the Canon, but only in proving historically the existence of the Canon. Therefore, unintentionally an unbeliever provided us with reliable extra-Biblical documentation of how the Canon was completed and recognized, hence, its existence.

**Septuagint**
In the centuries, which followed the Babylonian Captivity, many changes took place for the Jews. The Persian Empire, which had been favorably inclined toward the Jews, collapsed. Alexander the Great extended his conquests. He too, was pro-Semitic, and the Jews prospered during his reign and under his successors, the Ptolemies. At that time the largest group of Jews in the world had settled at Alexandria, Egypt. The city had been founded by Alexander the Great, and the Ptolemies had made it their capital. They loved books and collected them. They built one of the finest universities in the world, the Museion, which contained an immense library. Alexandria was the home of many brilliant Greek philosophers, scientists, mathematicians and writers. It was here that the finest translation of the Hebrew canon was made.

By the year 280 B.C. the large Jewish community at Alexandria had been influenced by Greek culture to such an extent that its citizens had adopted the Hellenistic Greek of Alexander the Great as their own language. They could no longer read the Scriptures in the original Hebrew. Hellenistic Greek was the transitional Greek between classical Attic Greek and the Koine of the New Testament. The Jews clamored for a translation of the Holy Scriptures into Greek. This required real experts and therefore 72 Alexandrian Hebrew scholars gathered together and produced an amazingly accurate translation from the manuscripts in their possession. It was named in their honor and memory The Septuagint. It was widely circulated among the Greek-speaking Jews and was employed in Palestine during the incarnation of Jesus and in the time of the Apostles. So the existence and acceptance of the Septuagint in the year 280 B.C. gives us yet another historical proof of canonicity.

Canonicity-Consciousness

The Talmud is the written opinion of the Rabbis recorded from 400 B.C. to 500 A.D. over a period of nearly 900 years. The word Talmud comes from another Hebrew word lamad meaning to teach. Throughout the Talmud there was always canonicity-consciousness. The Canon was recognized and its human authors and their books listed as follows: (1) Moses: Books: Torah and Job (2) Joshua: Deuteronomy 34:5-12 and Joshua (3) Samuel: Samuel, Judges and Ruth (4) David: Part of the Psalms (5) Jeremiah: Jeremiah, Kings and Lamentations (6) Hezekiah and School: Isaiah, Proverbs, Canticles and Ecclesiastes (7) Men of the Great Synagogue: Ezekiel, The Twelve, Daniel and Esther (8) Ezra: Ezra, Nehemiah, Genealogies of Chronicles as far as himself.

The Endorsement of the Canon by Jesus Christ (Luke 11:51; Mt. 23:36): This endorsement takes us from Genesis 4:10 to 2 Chronicles 24:20-21, Chronicles was
the last book in the Hebrew Canon. The Endorsement of Eusebius who was a famous historian of the Patristic era (4th century A.D.) and who stated that the entire Old Testament was recognized and accepted in his day. The Endorsement of Tertullian who was another famous historian of that same era and one of the Patristic writers concurred but included Esther in the Old Testament Canon whereas Eusebius did not.

**Classification of the Canon**

The Homologoumena: These were the books which in the 3rd, 4th and even 5th centuries had been accepted an undisputedly canonical by the Patristic writers. The Antilegomena: The following books in the 2nd section caused a good deal of argumentation among the Patristics Esther, Canticles, Ecclesiastes and Proverbs. The Pseudepigrapha (literally: “phony forgery): These were classified as spurious writings and were developed by the cautious Patristics to keep any and all forgeries of the Scriptures out of the Canon. (1) The Penitence of Jannes and Jambres (2) The Magic Book of Moses.

**The Apocrypha**

The Apocryphal books are nowhere held to be of either prophetic or apostolic authorship. They were universally rejected as scripture in their own day by both Jew and Christian. Josephus rejected the canonicity of the apocryphal books, apparently reflecting current Jewish thought. Jamnia held the same view. The apocryphal books themselves admit that the prophetic succession ended with Zechariah and Malachi (I Macc. 4; 46; 9:27; 14:41). This view is also reflected in the Manual of Discipline in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Melito and Origen rejected the Apocrypha, as does the Muratorian Canon. The only relatively early acceptance of the Apocrypha was by Augustine and the council of Hippo (393 AD), although even he says of books like Judith, "They are not found in the canon which the people of God received, because it is one thing to be able to write as men with the diligence of historians, and another as prophets with divine inspiration..." (De Civitate Dei, xviii, 36). It was sometimes included at the end of a New Testament codex copy. Since the codex was cut and assembled before copying began, pages were left over. These were often filled with one or more apocryphal books. Jerome vigorously resisted including the Apocrypha in his Latin Vulgate Version, but was over-ruled. As a result, the standard Roman Catholic Bible throughout the medieval period contained it. Thus, it gradually
came to be revered by the average clergyman. Still, many medieval Catholic scholars realized that it was not inspired.

Pope Gregory the Great (ca 600 AD) when quoting 1 Maccabees says, "We address a testimony from books though not canonical, yet published for the edification of the Church." Not until the Council of Trent in the late 1500's was the Apocrypha declared to be scripture, and then only by the Catholic Church.

The Apocrypha (literally: “hidden, secret, spurious, fraudulent, forged”): Includes 14 books which are found in the LXX and Vulgate but never in the Hebrew Canon and were so named due to their doubtful authenticity.

Neither Jesus Christ nor any of the New Testament writers ever quoted from the Apocrypha. Josephus expressly excluded them from his list of sacred Scripture in his book. No mention of the Apocrypha was made in any catalogue of canonical books in the 1st 4 centuries A.D. These Apocryphal books were never asserted to be divinely inspired, or to possess divine authority in their contents. No prophets were connected with these writings. These books contained many historical, geographical and chronological errors. The Apocrypha teaches doctrines and upholds practices, which are contrary to the canon of Scripture. Documentation regarding the false doctrine found in the Apocrypha is as follows: (1) Prayers and Offerings for the Dead (2 Macc. 12:41-46 cf. Jn. 3:18, 36). (2) Suicide Justified (2 Macc. 14:41-46 cf. Ps. 31:15). (3) Atonement and Salvation by Almsgiving (Tob. 4:11; cf. 1 Jn. 1:9; Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5). (4) Cruelty to Slaves Justified (Ecc. 33:25-29; cf. Dt. 23:15-16). (5) The Doctrine of Emanations (Wis. 7:25). (6) The preexistence of souls.

**History of the New Testament Canon**

Accuracy was also a primary consideration in the transmission of the books of the New Testament. After Christianity became legal in A.D. 313, commercial book manufacturers, or scriptoria, were used to produce copies of the New Testament books. Bruce Metzger wrote: In order to ensure greater accuracy, books produced in scriptoria were commonly checked over by a corrector . . . specially trained to rectify mistakes in copying. His annotations in the manuscript can usually be detected today from differences in styles of handwriting or tints of ink . . .. When prose works were copied, a line called a stichos, having sixteen (or sometimes fifteen) syllables, was frequently used as a measure for determining the market price of a manuscript. The application of stichometric reckoning served also as a rough and ready check on the general accuracy of a manuscript, for obviously a document, which was short of the total number of stichoi, was a defective copy. In
order to secure a high degree of efficiency and accuracy, certain rules pertaining to the work of scribes were developed and enforced in monastic scriptoria.

The following are examples of such regulations prepared for the renowned monastery of the Studium at Constantinople. About A.D. 800 the abbot of this monastery, Theodore the Studite, who was himself highly skilled in writing an elegant Greek hand, included in his rules for the monastery severe punishments for monks who were not careful in copying manuscripts. A diet of bread and water was the penalty set for the scribe who became so much interested in the subject-matter of what he was copying that he neglected his task of copying. Monks had to keep their parchment leaves neat and clean, on penalty of 130 penances. If anyone should take without permission another's quaternion (that is, the ruled and folded sheets of parchment), fifty penances were prescribed. If anyone should make more glue than he could use at one time, and it should harden, he must do fifty penances. If a scribe broke his pen in a fit of temper (perhaps after having made some accidental blunder near the close of an otherwise perfectly copied sheet), he had to do thirty penances.

The accuracy of the present-day Greek version of the New Testament has resulted from the comparison of thousands of manuscripts by textual critics who have been able to separate them into families on the basis of certain variations that each manuscript family has in common. The principles of textual criticism enable scholars to determine which versions of the text are predecessors of the others, thereby coming close to the original reading. While there are many variant readings in the documents of the New Testament, the vast majority of them are of very minor significance, and, according to A. T. Robertson, affect a "thousandth part of the text."

This minuscule portion of the text does not affect any aspect of Christian doctrine. F. C. Grant wrote in his Introduction to the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament that, of the variant readings in the New Testament manuscripts, "none has turned up thus far that requires a revision of Christian doctrine." Philip Schaff wrote that not one of the variant readings affects "an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of Scripture teaching."

The history of the New Testament can be divided into 3 periods: (1) 70 A.D.-170 A.D.: This was the period of circulation of the separate New Testament writings among the churches and their gradual collection into 1 book called the New Testament Canon. (2) 170 A.D.-303 A.D.: This was the time of the early Church Fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and Origen and was the period where the New Testament Canon was definitely and clearly
established. (3) 303 A.D.-394 A.D.: This was the period of great debate over such books as 2 Peter, Hebrews, 2 and 3 John, Jude, James and Revelation.

Criteria for the New Testament Canonicity

The determination of the Canon of the New Testament was not the result of any pronouncement, either by an official of the Church or by an ecclesiastical body. Rather, the Canon was determined by the use of these books throughout all of the Churches during the first and second centuries. The establishment of the Canon was the process by which formal recognition was given to the writings of Scripture already recognized as authoritative. Most of the New Testament Scriptures were accepted immediately. For example, in II Peter 3:16, it is taken for granted that the Pauline epistles were Scriptures on a par with the Old Testament. The early heresies of the Church played an important part in influencing the Christians to make clear determinations as to which writings were authoritative as Scripture.

The heretic Marcion had excluded everything except ten Pauline epistles and certain selected portions of the Gospel according to Luke. Moreover, the Gnostics were introducing secret "Gospels," attempting to advance them as authoritative Scripture. One of the earliest writers to respond to the Gnostics was Irenaeus. His writings assume the authority of the books of the New Testament in common use during the second century, although his citations are from only 23 of the 27 New Testament books.

Earlier Christian writers cited three of the four books that he does not cite as Scriptures, and the fourth (III John) was probably not cited simply because of its brevity; Irenaeus probably simply did not have occasion to use it during the course of his arguments. An early list of the books of the New Testament (A.D. 170) appears in the Muratorian fragment, found by L. A. Muratori in manuscript form and published in 1740. Although the fragment is mutilated, it attests to the widespread use as Scripture of all books of the New Testament except Hebrews, James, I and II Peter. However, the Apostolic Fathers had already cited all of these four books as Scripture.

The Muratorian fragment also mentions The Shepherd of Hermas as worthy to be read in church, but not to be included with the apostolic writings. Curiously, the Wisdom of Solomon, an Old Testament Apocryphal book, is also included as canonical. Another early list appeared in the Codex Barococcio (A.D. 206), which included 64 of the 66 books of the present-day Bible. Esther and Revelation were omitted, but Revelation had formerly been regarded as Scripture by Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and the Muratorian Canon.
In A.D. 230, Origen (A.D. 185-254) stated that all Christians acknowledged as Scripture the four Gospels, Acts, and the thirteen epistles of Paul, I Peter, I John, and Revelation. He added that the following were disputed by some people: Hebrews, II Peter, II John, III John, James, Jude, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Didache, and the Gospel according to the Hebrews. In other words, all the churches by this time were in agreement about most of the books, but a few doubted some of the epistles that were not as well known. Others were inclined to include a few books that eventually did not secure a permanent place among the canonical books.

By A.D. 300, all the New Testament books we presently use were generally accepted in the churches, although in a few places, James, II Peter, II and III John, Jude, Hebrews, and Revelation were not in use. Doubts about these books faded during the next fifty years, so that by A.D. 367, Athanasius listed all the 27 books as canonical in his Easter Letter, which also recommended certain other books for private reading only, such as the Shepherd of Hermas and the Didache.

The Synod of Hippo (A.D. 393) and the third synod of Carthage (A.D. 397) also recognized these 27 books as canonical, as did the highly influential church Fathers Jerome (A.D. 340-420) and Augustine (A.D. 354-430). They did not confer upon these any authority that they did not already possess; they merely recognized their previously established canonicity.

Apostolicity: Every book of the New Testament must either be written by an apostle or someone closely associated with an apostle. Reception by the Churches: The books must be universally received by the local churches as authentic at the time of their writing. Consistency: They must be consistent with the doctrine that the Church already possessed, namely, the Old Testament and Apostolic teaching. Inspiration: Each book must give evidence, internally and externally, of being divinely inspired and the spiritual gift of discernment was used to determine canonicity (1 Cor. 12:10). Recognition: Each must be recognized as canonical in the catalogues of the Church Fathers and must be used by those who had the gift of pastor-teacher. Internal: Each book must contain exhortation to public exegesis of the Word to be classified as canonical (Col. 4:16; 1 Th. 5:27; 1 Tm. 4:13; Rv. 1:3; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13; 2 Pet. 3:15-16).

There were 2 events in history during the period between 303-379 A.D. that were largely instrumental in determining the extent of the Canon: (1) The Diocletian Persecution: Great attempts at destroying the Scriptures were made. (2) Emperor Constantine: He ordered 50 copies of the Bible for use in the churches in Constantinople and during this period the Great Church Councils took place.

Eusebius (270-340): This great historian and trusted friend of Constantine enjoyed access to all the church archives and he promptly set about to record the
history of the Church. With scholarly precision, he set up a system for classifying the New Testament books, which would eventually solve the entire problem of Canonicity. He employed the same categories that were set up for the classification of the Old Testament.

The Acknowledged Books (Homologoumena): (1) 4 Gospels (2) Acts (3) 14 Pauline epistles (4) 1 Peter (5) 2 Peter (6) 1 John (7) Revelation. The Disputed Books (Antilegomena):

- James
- 1 Peter
- 2 Peter
- 2 John
- 3 John

The Spurious Writings (Apocrypha)

- The Acts of Paul
- The Epistle of Barnabas
- The Shepherd of Hermas
- The Revelation of the Twelve
- The Revelation of Peter

The Heretical or Absurd Writings (Pseudepigrapha)

- The Gospel of Peter
- The Gospel of Thomas
- Acts of Andrew


As far as canonicity is concerned, one of the greatest things ever to be discovered was the Muratorian Fragment. This was found in the Ambrosian Library, Milan, in 1740 by a librarian named Muratori. This document showed that cataloguing of the New Testament had been done as early as the 2nd century.
Old Testament Textual Criticism

Trying to divide textual criticism into separate subdisciplines is not really a useful business (since all forms of TC have large areas in common), but if categories must be devised, the obvious categories would be New Testament criticism, and Old Testament criticism. And the division is justified, because the differences between the fields are significant. For reasons of space, we can only touch briefly on OT criticism here. In terms of materials, Old Testament criticism resembles New Testament criticism in about the eighteenth century: There are many manuscripts, but all of the same Majority recension, and there are a few versions, some of which differ significantly from the Hebrew, plus a handful of fragments of older materials.

Since the manuscripts of the Majority recension appear not to preserve the original Hebrew and Aramaic with complete accuracy, there is an obvious need for textual criticism. This forces us to use rather different methods than we use in the New Testament.

To begin with, let us review the materials. The first and most important source is, of course, the Hebrew manuscripts. With a very few exceptions (which we shall treat separately), these were copied in the Middle Ages by scribes known as the Massoretes (hence the name Massoretic Text, frequently abbreviated MT or even M). The Massoretes were trained with exquisite care to preserve the text in all its details (down to such seeming minutiae as the size of certain letters in the text and their position above or below the line). They also followed very exacting techniques of checking their manuscripts. The result is a text, which shows almost no deviation, and manuscripts, which reproduce it with incredible precision. Had such techniques been in use from the very beginning, textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible would be a trivial task.

The Massoretic Text contains a handful of carefully preserved variant readings, the K\textsuperscript{t}ib and Q\textsuperscript{re}. The K\textsuperscript{t}ib ("written") are the readings of the text; the Q\textsuperscript{re} are marginal readings, which the reader is instructed to substitute for the text. Such noted variants are, however, relatively rare, and many of the Q\textsuperscript{re} readings correct places where the text is so bad that it could hardly stand in any case. Thus the K\textsuperscript{t}ib/Q\textsuperscript{re} variants add very little to our knowledge of the ancient text, and the accidental variants of Massoretic copyists add even less. Our earliest substantial MT manuscripts date from about the tenth century. Prior to this, we have only a handful of Hebrew manuscripts. The best-known of these are the Qumran manuscripts (the "Dead Sea Scrolls"), though there are others such as the relics from the Cairo Genizah. With only a handful of exceptions, such as the Qumran...
Isaiah scroll, these manuscripts are damaged and difficult to read, and the portions of the OT they contain are limited. In addition, many have texts very similar to the MT -- but a handful does not.

Perhaps the most important of all are the Qumran scrolls of Samuel, 4QSam\textsuperscript{a} and 4QSam\textsuperscript{b}, as they represent a tradition clearly independent from the MT, and apparently better (as the manuscripts lack many of the defects which afflict MT Samuel). Also in Hebrew, but with differences in dialect, is the Samaritan Pentateuch. The production of a sect considered schismatic by the Jews, the text (which survives mostly in recent manuscripts, and in rather smaller numbers than Hebrew bibles, as the Samaritan sect is nearly extinct) shows definite signs of editing -- but also seems to be based on a Hebrew text which predates the Massoretic recension. This makes it potentially valuable for criticism of the Pentateuch (the Samaritans did not revere the other portions of the Hebrew Bible) -- as long as we remain aware that it has been edited to conform to Samaritan biases. (We should also allow the possibility that the MT has been edited to conform to Jewish biases.) There are many ancient versions of the Old Testament. These fall largely into two categories: (1) Those translated directly from the Hebrew (2) Those translated from Greek version.

There are, of course, versions, which come from neither the Hebrew nor the Greek; examples include the various Western European versions translated from the Vulgate. These are, however, of almost no interest in textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible. If they have any significance at all, it is for Vulgate criticism. Setting aside the Greek version and its descendents for the moment, the most important versions descended from the Hebrew are the Latin and the Syriac.

As in the New Testament, the Latin actually went through two stages: An Old Latin phase (these versions being translated from the Greek) and the Vulgate Revision. The Vulgate (as in the New Testament) was translated by Jerome in the fourth century -- generally from the Hebrew, and with less attention to previous versions than Jerome showed in the gospels. The result is a text generally quite close to the Hebrew. It appears, however, that the MT was well evolved by this time; Jerome's translation rarely departs from the MT, and the differences we do see may be the result of attempts to clarify obscurities or simply alternate interpretations.

The Aramaic Targums also are translations from the Hebrew, and are generally believed to be older than the Vulgate. There is also the work of Jewish scholars. This does not, however, make them more valuable than the Vulgate. One man, Jerome, translated the Vulgate; the Targums are multiple (e.g. the "Targum of Jonathan" and the "Targum of Onkelos"), making it harder to control for the translator's idiosyncrasies. The most noteworthy characteristic of the Targums,
however, is their freedom. Often they do not even qualify as translations. They paraphrase, they expand, and they even include commentary. Thus it is better to treat the Targums as commentaries by Jewish Fathers than as actual translations. The Syriac Peshitta is the final major version to derive from the Hebrew. Its history and origin is disputed, but it is clear that several hands were involved, and there are also indications of revisions from the Greek. This mixed text makes the use of the Peshitta somewhat problematic.

Which brings us to the earliest and greatest of the versions, the Greek. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible is often called the Septuagint, or LXX. This name derives from the so-called "Letter of Aristeas," which gives an official pedigree to the LXX. According to Aristeas, the LXX was prepared at the instigation of Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt (reigned 285-246 B.C.E.), who wanted a version of the Jewish scriptures for the Alexandrian library. Seventy (in some versions, seventy-two) scholars were commissioned to translate the Pentateuch, hence the name LXX. The story of Aristeas is, obviously, legend; while Ptolemy II probably would have liked a copy of the Jewish scriptures for the Alexandrian library, there is little chance he would have supplied the funds needed for the translation project described by Aristeas. If there is any truth in Aristeas, it is only this: That the Pentateuch was translated in Egypt, probably during early Ptolemaic times. It is noteworthy that the LXX of the Pentateuch is a careful, skilled translation. It also conforms relatively closely to the Hebrew as we have it (there are exceptions, e.g. in the ages of the Patriarchs and in the order of a few chapters, but these are quite slight compared to what we see in the rest of the Old Testament). Thus it is possible that it was an official project of some kind. Still, it cannot be considered an official Jewish product, as the primary language of the translators appears to have been Greek. And as we move away from the Pentateuch, the situation becomes much more complex.

The LXX version of the Pentateuch seems to have been generally acceptable. The same cannot be said for the remaining books. The term "LXX" is rather misleading, as it strongly implies that there was only one translation. This is simply not the case. The Greek Old Testament clearly circulated in multiple editions. It is not clear whether these were actually different translations (as a handful of scholars hold) or whether the text simply underwent a series of revisions. But that the "final" LXX text differed recensionally from the earliest is absolutely certain. This is perhaps most obvious in the Book of Judges, where Rahlfs (even though he is really citing only two manuscripts, the Alexandrinus/A and the Vaticanus/B) was forced to print two different texts. Few other books show such extreme variation (except in Daniel, where the version of Theodotian has replaced the original text of LXX), but all show signs of editorial work. What's
more, the direction of the recension is clear: The translation was made to conform more and more closely with the late Hebrew text.

Secondarily, it was made to be smoother, more Greek, and possibly more Christian and theologically exact. (This process very likely was similar to that which produced the monolith of the Byzantine text of the New Testament.) We cannot detain ourselves here with the various recensions of the LXX. A statement by Jerome has led many scholars to believe that there were recensions by Hesychius (associated with Egypt) and Lucian (associated with Constantinople). These recensions cannot, however, be identified. (There are manuscripts, which contain the "Lucianic" text -- but there is good evidence that this type of text, or at least the majority of its characteristic readings, predate Lucian.) In Christian times, there was the "Hexaplar" recension of Origen, who placed in six columns the Hebrew text, a Greek transliteration, and the translations of Aquila (a woodenly literal Jewish translation said by Epiphanius to have dated from the second century though there are hints that portions of it are older; the translation of Ecclesiasticus, for instance, is Aquila-like), Symmachus (a late translator who provided a clear rendering), LXX, and Theodotian (also thought to be older than its historical second century date; it seems a revision of LXX which is freer in style but closer to the MT in text). Origin is known to have revised his LXX text to more nearly match the MT (while incorporating critical symbols to show what he had done), but later copyists simply took the text without copying the symbols. This seems to have been the last great revision of the Septuagint.

The question then arises, why did the LXX undergo such extreme revision? Why did later scholars see the need to revise, and even offer different translations? Why was this version different from all the other versions? The answer: While there may have been many reasons, such as an uneven Greek style, there seems to be only one basic one: Unlike the other versions, the early LXX does not agree entirely with the MT. The nature of the difference between LXX and MT varies from book to book. In Isaiah, it may simply be the incompetence of the original translator. In Job and Jeremiah, however, the LXX is shorter than the MT by more than 10%. And while it is possible that LXX Job was reduced because of the damage to the Hebrew text, this cannot account for Jeremiah -- nor for the smaller reductions found in LXX Ezekiel and many of the Minor Prophets.

In Samuel, on the other hand, the LXX is slightly longer (except that it omits a large portion of the story of David and Goliath), and in Kings we find many rearrangements of material. Lesser differences occur everywhere. It is now fairly common to refer to an "Old Greek" edition of the LXX -- believed to be the earliest, and certainly the one made from the most divergent text. Although it is by no means universally true, the Old Greek is often represented by Codex Vaticanus.
(B). This early translation went through several later recensions ("kaige," "proto-Lucian," etc.) but these, while interesting for LXX studies, are of little direct importance to OT criticism. The basic question is, how do we deal with the divergences between the MT and the Old Greek?

At this point we need to step back a little and examine the situation at a higher level of abstraction. What are the basic materials for criticism of the Hebrew Bible? Throwing out all revisions and minor translations, we come down to three things: A "Majority Text" -- the Hebrew tradition of the MT, found primarily in late manuscripts but universal in those late manuscripts.

The Old Greek -- a version, but made at a relatively early date, from materials clearly distinct from the MT, and surviving in manuscripts earlier than the oldest copies of the MT. A handful of Hebrew fragments (e.g. the Dead Sea Scrolls), some of which agree with MT, some with the Old Greek, and some with neither. Since in most places we are confronted with only two independent witnesses (MT and Old Greek), scholars have to decide what to do with them. Generally speaking, they choose one of two courses -- both of which, unfortunately, are logically flawed. One course is to treat the MT as the basic text, preferring it at all points where it can be construed. The LXX is used only where the MT is corrupt. The logical fallacy with this is that makes no sense. If the LXX has value at all, it has value everywhere. If it is too faulty to consult for the ordinary run of the text, there is no reason to consult it where the MT is corrupt. We should simply resort to conjectural emendation. Housman, in his "Preface to Manilius" (I, p. 36) had this to say about this sort of reliance upon a single source (in this case, a single manuscript, but the principle applies well to OT criticism): "To believe that wherever a best MS gives possible readings it gives true readings, and only where it gives impossible readings does it give false readings, is to believe that an incompetent editor is the darling of Providence, which has given its angels charge over him."

The other course is to treat the MT and LXX exactly equally, as different witnesses to the original text. This, unfortunately, has the defect that it treats a version as a text in the original language. This can hardly be allowed; one must know the method and style of the translation. The correct answer doubtless lies somewhere in between. The LXX must be consulted. From the standpoint of readings, it is as good and valuable as the MT (in some cases, such as Samuel, it is more valuable). But the form of the translation must be examined (e.g. an reading which would be accepted based on the Greek of the Pentateuch, which is carefully translated, might not be accepted for Isaiah, which is badly translated).

Great care must be taken to be sure we know the Hebrew behind the LXX, and only then to compare it to the MT. The rules of NT criticism will generally apply
at this point, but care must be taken to understand the peculiar circumstances of each section, each book, and even each part of a book (as some books seem to have been translated by more than one person). For details and examples, one must refer to specialized studies.

**New Testament Textual Criticism**

Textual criticism concerns itself with the problems suggested by various kinds of errors. NT textual evidence is so vast-exceeding that of any other literature so much so that 2 results follow: (1) Since copying by hand of any document of appreciable length most inevitably involves change and error, many textual errors and variants will be found in this great quantity of manuscripts. (2) Such a wealth of evidence makes it all the more certain that the original words of the NT have been preserved somewhere with the manuscripts.

Conjectural emendation (suggesting a reading that is not found in any manuscript), to which editors have resorted in the restoration of other ancient writings, has almost no place in the textual criticism of the NT. The materials are so abundant that at times the difficulty is to select the correct rendering from a number of variant readings in the manuscripts! It must not be overlooked, however, that the textual critic deals with a relatively small percentage of the text.

With the NT, as with ancient literature in general, the wording of perhaps 85% of the text is unquestioned. It is true that if the total number of variant readings of all the manuscripts were counted, the sum would be many thousand. But the true perspective is probably given by E. Abbot: “About nineteen-twentieths (95%) of the variations have so little support that...no one would think of them as rival readings, and nineteen-twentieths of the remainder are of so little importance that their adoption or rejection would cause no appreciable difference in the sense of the passages in which they occur.”

Textual criticism has gradually evolved certain rules, which are based upon patient classification and weighing of all the documentary evidence available, both internal (i.e., intrinsic probability) and external (i.e., the value of the manuscript). The basic principle of internal evidence is that the reading from which the other readings could most easily have arisen is probably the original reading. Bear in mind that scribes were engaged in copying a manuscript, not in studying it. Errors could therefore arisen through a scribe’s superficial grasp of the meaning of what he was transcribing.

External evidence seeks to determine which reading the most reliable witnesses-Greek manuscripts, versions, and patristic quotations support. Many of the witnesses can be put into one of four groups or text-types: (1) Alexandrian (2)
Caesarean (3) Byzantine (4) Western. By examining a large number of textual variants, the scholar can determine the relative reliability of these text-types.

There are 6 Major Codices: (1) Sinaiticus (Aleph 01) (2) Aleandrinus (02 A) (3) Vaticanus (03 B) (4) Ephraemi Rescriptus (04 C) (5) Bezae Cantabrigiensis (05 D) (6) Claromontanus (06 E).

A codex is what we call today a book. It is interesting to note that the books of the NT were almost certainly originally written on scrolls. We see evidence of this in the texts of Matthew and Luke, both of which drastically compressed the material in Mark in order to make their books fit on the largest possible scroll. These scrolls were probably papyrus, which was the cheapest and most important writing material in the ancient world. But the urge to collect the writings that eventually made up the NT must have been very strong. It is generally believed that collections of Paul’s writings were in existence by 100 A.D., if not earlier. This posed a problem: A collection containing the writings of Paul, or the four Gospels, was far too long for a single scroll. A complete NT would have been even more impossible.

The solution was the form of book known as the codex. This is, in fact, what we think of today as a book. Instead of sheets being placed side to side to produce an immensely long single “page,” they were folded over each other, permitting books of any length—and, not insignificantly, saving expensive writing material (since codices could be written on both sides). The Christian church seems to have adopted codices with great enthusiasm; over 99% of known NT manuscripts are in codex form, and the few minor exceptions were already-written scrolls that Christians salvaged and reused. The earliest manuscripts rarely if ever contained complete NT’s (for one thing the canon of the NT was not finally complete until about the 4th century).

Now, it must be noted that none of the original autographs still exist today and even in the 1st century the original autographs were copied. There are over 5,000 manuscripts of the NT, which have been discovered up to the present time. These manuscripts have come to us in various forms: (1) Egyptian papyri: The oldest copies of parts of the Greek NT dating back to the A.D. 200. (2) Majuscules: The 2nd oldest copies of NT manuscripts. (3) Minuscules: Copies dating back to the 9th century. (4) Writings of the Early Church fathers: Early Christian writers from the 1st 4 centuries. (5) Lectionaries: Manuscripts which were not Scripture themselves but contain Scripture quotations. (6) Early versions: Translations of the NT from Greek. The best known is the Latin Vulgate by Jerome.

There are 3 major majuscules: (1) Codex Aleph (Codex Sinaiticus): Discovered in the mid-1840’s by the great scholar Tischendorf at St. Catharine’s Monastery, located at the foot of Mount Sinai. It contains the entire NT and is
dated in the 4th century. (2) Codex A (Alexandrinus): Originated from the city of Alexandria in Egypt. (3) Codex B (Codex Vaticanus): Housed in the Vatican Library and along with the Sinaiticus, it is the main witness for the Egyptian text type. However, it is important to realize there are more than 3,000 differences between these 2 manuscripts in the Gospels alone. From the manuscripts, which have just been described, various types of Greek texts have been formed.

The 2 most prominent text types are the: (1) Byzantine: Also called the K (Koine), Syrian, Antiochian and Traditional. (a) It is generally believed to have been produced at Antioch in Syria, and then taken to Byzantium, later known as Constantinople. (b) For about 1000 years, while the Byzantine Empire ruled the Middle East, this was the text used by the Greek Orthodox Church. (c) It also influenced Europe. (d) Because of this background it became the basis for the 1st printed text editions, among others the famous Textus Receptus, called the “received or acknowledged text.” (e) This description however, originated with the text produced by Elzevir. (f) He described his 2nd edition of 1633 by the Latin phrase Textus Receptus, or the “Received Text,” that is, the one accepted generally as the correct one. (g) Among the oldest majuscules the Byzantine is, among others, represented by Codex Alexandrinus (02 A), 07, 08, 09, 010, 011, 012, 013, 015, and others. (2) Egyptian: This text type originated in Egypt and is the one, which gained the highest recognition and acceptance there in the 4th century. (a) It was produced mainly by copyists in Alexandria, from which it received the name Alexandrian. (b) This text form is represented mostly by two codices: Sinaiticus (01 Aleph) and Vaticanus (03 B) from the 4th century, also from Codex Ephraemi (04 C) from the 5th century. (c) The use of this text type ceased about the year 450 but lived on in the Latin translation, the Vulgate produced by the great scholar Jerome.

**Textus Receptus**

The Textus Receptus is based upon the Byzantine text type and is also called the K (Koine), Syrian, Antiochian and Traditional and is generally believed to have been produced at Antioch in Syria, and then taken to Byzantium, later known as Constantinople. For about 1000 years, while the Byzantine Empire ruled the Middle East, this was the text used by the Greek Orthodox Church and also influenced Europe. Because of this background it became the basis for the 1st printed editions, among others the famous Textus Receptus, called the “received or acknowledged text.” This description however, originated with the text produced by Elzevir. He described his 2nd edition of 1633 by the Latin phrase
Textus Receptus, or the “Received Text,” that is, the one generally accepted as the correct one.

The Egyptian text type originated in Egypt and is the one, which gained the highest recognition and acceptance there in the 4th century. It was produced mainly by copyists in Alexandria, from which it received the name Alexandrian.

Now it must be noted that 2 great British scholars Westcott and Hort who have played a prominent role in deciding which text type should be used have classified the Byzantine text as corrupt because of the young age of its supporting manuscripts. They proceeded to develop their own text (1881-86), which was really a restoration of the Egyptian text from the 4th century. It depended mainly on 2 codices: (1) Sinaiticus (2) Vaticanus. It was also supported numerous majuscules such as: (1) 02 (2) 04 (3) 019 (4) 020 (5) 025 (6) 032 (7) 033 (8) 037 (9) 044.

Westcott and Hort opposed the Textus Receptus because it was based on the Byzantine text form. Most scholars agreed with their contention, and the Textus Receptus fell into disrepute. However, Westcott and Hort made their assumptions before the Greek papyri were discovered, and in recent years some scholars have come to the defense of the Byzantine text and the Textus Receptus. They have learned that some of the readings in the Byzantine text are the same as those found in the earliest papyri, dated about A.D. 200 and even earlier (p45, p46, p64 and p66 for example). This seems to take the Byzantine text back at least as far as the Egyptian! It must be remembered that scholars support both sides of the debate. Since it was the original writings, which were inspired by the Holy Spirit, it is important for us to ascertain as closely as possible how well our present-day text agrees with the original autograph. It should alleviate the fears some may have as to whether we have the true gospel enunciated in the 1st Century to know that most of the differences in the Greek text (about 1 percent of the total) are minor in nature and do not affect the great Christian doctrines we hold dear. Significant differences may be found in only a very few cases.

External Bibliology

There is a tremendous amount of external evidence for the existence of the Canon. Continuity: Over a period of 60 generations (1600 years) the Old and New Testaments were produced by 40 human authors from all walks of life and yet they had perfect organized continuity, perfect agreement of type and anti-type, of prophecy and fulfillment, of historical sequence and the progression of doctrine in the original languages. Inexhaustible Extent of Revelation: The Bible covers everything necessary for mankind to know and which could never be known apart
from divine assistance and revelation. Distribution: The Bible is the most widely circulated book in the world and has been translated into nearly 1000 languages and dialects. Unprejudiced Authority: The Bible does not compliment man but instead records his weaknesses, sins and doom. Attacks on the Bible: No other book in history has been attacked like the Bible. The Influence on Individuals and Society: No other book has influenced the course of history as much as the Bible. Scientific Data: (1) Static Electricity (Jer. 10:13) (2) The Earth is Spherical (Isa. 40:22) (3) The Earth Rotates on its Axis (Lk. 17:31-36) (4) Air Has Weight (Job 28:25) (5) Winds Have Circuits; the Laws of Evaporation and Precipitation (Eccl. 1:6-7). (6) Radiation and Polarization of Lights (Ps. 65:8). (7) Messages Are Sent by Lightning (Job. 38:35). (8) The Circulation of the Blood (Eccl. 12:6) (9) Quarantine for Communicable Diseases (Lev. 13:45-46).

The Bible is indestructible. Why? First, there is The Witness of Scripture. "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven" (Psalm 119: 89). This verse is in a remarkable setting. Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible, its outstanding feature being that all but six of the one hundred and seventy-six verses speak directly about the Word of God. What the inspired writer is saying in verse 89 is that God's Word was established in heaven before He revealed it to men and reduced it to writing. The Word of God is "forever," it is eternal. That which holy men of God wrote on earth is but a copy of what God had already written in heaven in eternity past. You see, there is a permanent quality about the Word of God. It is forever. It was with God in the beginning, and so shall it ever be. "Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of Thy righteous judgments endures forever" (Psalm 119:160). The prophet Isaiah said, "The grass withereth, the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (I Peter 1:23-25). Peter describes God's Word here with the Greek word αφθαρτος translated in our English Bible incorruptible, meaning imperishable. Because of its Source, the Word of God, like its Author, is incapable of diminishing one iota. Isaiah said, "The Word of our God shall stand forever."

Man may criticize it, ridicule it, and burn copies of it, but it stands and will stand because it is imperishable. The Lord Jesus said, "For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18). "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my
words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). Should any Christian be surprised at the remarkable preservation of the Scriptures? Of course not! When one has read what our Lord and the inspired prophets have said about the incorruptibility and indestructibility of God's Holy Word, he should expect it to stand. God Himself has guaranteed their preservation. There is no other explanation for the survival of the Bible through the many centuries. The very fact of the Bible's continued existence and influence should convince any person that this Book is indestructible.

Second, consider The Work of Scribes. The story of the transmission of the Scriptures is a miracle in itself. Even though we are cut off from original manuscripts, God's providential care over His Word during the long period in which the sacred text was transmitted in copies written by hand is a miracle. It is inconceivable that Almighty God, Who chose to give His Word to man as the vital and essential instrument in the salvation of His people, would fail in the preservation of His own written revelation. Both the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and the Greek text of the New Testament have been preserved with remarkable purity. The scribes who copied Hebrew manuscripts were keenly aware of the fact that they were handling a sacred and precious revelation. They were trained to exercise the greatest care. They counted not only the words but the letters, making note of how many times each particular word and letter occurred. If an error was detected, the entire sheet would be destroyed and the scribe would begin again. They knew they were handling God's revelation to man; therefore the rule for the copyist to follow was that of pronouncing each word aloud before writing it, and never was a single word to be written from memory. No other written work of ancient times has been transmitted with such care and therefore as accurately as the Word of God has been. Modern scholars who have spent many years in study and research are agreed that the copies of the original documents have been handed down with substantial correctness.

Men like F. J. A. Hort, Bishop Brooke, Foss Westcott, Robert Dick Wilson, William Henry Green, Benjamin B. Warfield, and many others have labored long and hard to produce incontrovertible evidence that God has preserved His Word, causing it to triumph over the hazards encountered in the transmission of the Scriptures. The miracle of preservation is witnessed in the remarkable way in which the apocryphal or spurious books were omitted from the canon.

In 1545, at the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church voted to add all the volumes of the Apocrypha to God's Book. But God saw to it that those monstrous absurdities of human origin were never added to His Holy Writings. The Roman Catholic Church has been successful in corrupting many areas of Christendom, but she has failed to force her fourteen extra books into God's Holy
Book. What is truly God's Word belongs in God's Book, therefore God saw to it that the uninspired writings of men should not be allowed to creep in and corrupt His message.

Third, consider The Wiles of Satan. Through all of the centuries, God in sovereign grace and by His power watched over and protected His Word against the wicked onslaughts of the Devil. Paul warned the believers at Ephesus that they would be facing "the wiles of the Devil" (Ephesians 6:11). The word "wiles" means methods. Satan's methods are characterized by cunning, deceit, and trickery. One of his methods is to infiltrate the good and the holy with the bad and the unholy. This he tried to do when the Roman Catholic Church officially recognized the apocryphal books in A.D. 1545. But God overruled Satan's trickery to include those forgeries. But the battle against God's Word has been a never-ending one. The story of the Bible's persecution is an amazing one. The hatred against it has been persistent and relentless. Every scheme of destruction which man's unregenerate mind could conjure has been brought against it. During the early centuries of the Christian era some of the most cruel and merciless persecutions were meted out to men and women who held sacred the Word of God. So seemingly effective were the attacks that the enemies supposed they had eradicated the Bible.

In A.D. 303 Diocletian, Emperor of the Roman Empire, sought to obliterate the Bible through an official decree that any person possessing even a portion of the Bible should be slain. When John Wycliffe presented the Scriptures in the vernacular of the people in England, the Roman Catholic Church marked him out for death. That saintly scholar of Baliol College, Oxford, escaped the Devil's attempt to slay him. He died in 1384, but the Roman Church was so infuriated over Wycliffe's publishing the Scriptures in English that in 1415 she dug up his bones, burned the remains with fire, and threw the ashes upon a dunghill. And then in 1816 Pope Pius VII issued a papal bull declaring every organization and institution that distributed the Scriptures "a fiendish instrument for the undermining of the foundations of religion." And yet the Bible stands, this impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture. Men fling themselves against it in all their fury, but instead of them breaking the Book, the Book crushes them. Bibles have been burned and torn to pieces, but God's Holy Word remains triumphant. In our world of darkness and despair the Bible shines forth as the scintillating light to lead men aright.

The Bible is the only light for man's pathway (Psalm 119:105); the one Light shining in a dark place (II Peter 1:19). The Bible is the greatest luminary on the earth to bring men to God. It is the one beacon of hope in the night of men's sin. However dark the shadows of sin and sorrow might become, the Light will always
be there for those who will follow. “Holy Bible, Book divine, Precious treasure, thou art mine.”

When the poet and novelist, Sir Walter Scott, lay dying, he said to his son-in-law, Lockhart, "Son, please bring me the Book." The son-in-law was a bit uncertain because Walter Scott had a large library, so he replied, "Sir, which book? Which book?" The dying saint answered immediately, "My son, there is just one Book. Bring me the Book." At once Lockhart went to the library and returned with Sir Walter's Bible. Yes, there is but one Book!