

## HOW WE GOT THE BIBLE

By Mark Paynter

Josh McDowell states that the question of how the Bible came to be is really the question of how did the books of the Bible come to be included in the canon? The canon can be considered to be “a measuring devise “ or a “standard”<sup>1</sup>

“The writings of the prophets, the apostles, and their companions, which are inspired by God and authoritative for truth pertaining to doctrine and life. It means “rule” or standard”. A book is not inspired because it is declared canonical but is canonical because it is inspired. Therefore, the church discovered the canonicity of the Old and New Testament books; it did not determine or cause their canonicity.”<sup>2</sup>

McDowell points out that the Hebrew canon dates back to as early as the fourth century before Christ and no later than 150 B.C.<sup>3</sup>. McDowell identifies Athanasius (A.D. 367) as having given us “our earliest list of New Testament books that is exactly like our present New Testament”<sup>4</sup> Jerome and Augustine quickly followed. The Council of Hippo in A.D. 393 recognized the twenty-seven books that now form the New Testament.<sup>5</sup> The Council of Carthage in A.D. 397 decreed, “that only those canonical books were to be read in the churches.”<sup>6</sup>

From the very outset the writings of Moses and the book of Joshua were accepted as Scripture (Exodus 24:3; Joshua 24:26). The remaining books were books accepted only after testing for the writings conformity to the following principles:

1. Was the Book written by a recognized prophet of God or a leader in Israel?
2. Did the book contain internal evidence of its inspiration and authority? Was the reader able to recognize it as unique in communicating the revelation of God?

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<sup>1</sup> David Sper Can I Really Trust the Bible Chapter How We Got our Bible.  
<http://204.29.171.50/framer/1000/default.asp?realname=Google&cc=NZ&lc=en%2DNZ&frameid=1565&providerid=112&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Egoogle%2Ecom%2F>  
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<sup>2</sup> Radmacher, Allen and Wayne House page IVI

<sup>3</sup> McDowell page 26

<sup>4</sup> McDowell page 23

<sup>5</sup> MCDowell page 24, Enns page 172

<sup>6</sup> Enns page 172

3. Did the writing contain any obvious doctrinal or factual errors? If so that Book could not be included in the canon.

4. How widely was the Book accepted by the community that received them?

5. Did the Book reflect historical accuracy?

As the Church entered the New Testament, further validation of the divine authorship of the Old Testament was provided when either Christ or a New Testament writer directly quoted from the Old Testament in such a way that they showed they considered the Old Testament reference to be Scripture.

The 12 books of the Apocrypha were rejected as not being part of the biblical canon for three primary reasons. 1. Because they were not referred to in any of the Hebrew canon, 2. They were not directly quoted in the New Testament and 3. They were not included in any early list of the early church Fathers. They were also rejected because their content was considered too mythological.<sup>7</sup>

As far as the **New Testament** is concerned their acceptance was based on testing to see whether an apostle had written the Book either directly or indirectly. Books were received if evidence could be found “that they were written by an apostle, such as Peter or John, or by someone close to an apostle, such as Luke or Mark, who had apostolic authorization. We know that some false accounts of Christ's life were being distributed (Luke 1:1-4), as well as some false epistles (2 Thessalonians 2:2). Therefore, positive identification of the New Testament books was necessary.”<sup>8</sup>

Enns identifies four determining factors in recognizing the New Testament canon these were

- 1) The book written by an apostle?
- 2) The book widely read in the churches?
- 3) The books teaching consistent with canonical doctrine?
- 4) The book reflecting divine inspiration?<sup>9</sup>

McDowell concludes: “It is important to note that the church did not create the canon; it did not determine which books would be called Scripture, the inspired Word of God. Instead the church recognized, or discovered, which books had been inspired from their inception”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Enns page 171 and David Sper Can I Really Trust the Bible Chapter How We Got our Bible. <http://204.29.171.50/framer/1000/default.asp?realname=Google&cc=NZ&lc=en%2DNZ&frameid=1565&providerid=112&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Egoogle%2Ecom%2F> 23 February 2002

<sup>9</sup> Enns page 172

<sup>10</sup> McDowell page 20

