

How Did We Get the Bible?

Canon (def): measuring rod

Timeline & Events

- **170 AD Muratorian Canon** included all of the New Testament books except Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, and 3 John.
- **363 AD Council of Laodicea** stated that only the Old Testament (along with one book of the Apocrypha) and 26 books of the New Testament (everything but Revelation) were canonical and to be read in the churches.
- **367 AD Easter Letter of Athanasius** listed exactly the 27 New Testament books we have today. **393 AD Council of Hippo** affirmed the 27 books of the New Testament as authoritative
- **397 AD Council of Carthage** affirmed the same 27 books as authoritative, confirming what the church had already widely accepted as authoritative.

Old Testament

1. Was it inspired by God, written by a prophet or someone with the gift of prophecy?
2. Was it accepted, preserved, and read by God's people, the Israelites?

Compared to the New Testament, there was much less controversy over the canon of the Old Testament. Hebrew believers recognized God's messengers and accepted their writings as inspired of God. While there was undeniably some debate in regard to the Old Testament canon, **by A.D. 250 there was nearly universal agreement on the canon of Hebrew Scripture.** The only issue that remained was the Apocrypha, with some debate and discussion continuing today. The vast majority of Hebrew scholars considered the Apocrypha to be good historical and religious documents, but not on the same level as the Hebrew Scriptures.

Apocrypha - Efforts were made to add some 14 non-canonical books to the Old Testament. This collection, called the Apocrypha... The apocryphal books were not allowed into the Old Testament canon by the Jews, however, because:

1. They were written long after the canon was completed (approximately 397 AD)
2. None of the apocryphal writers claim divine inspiration, and some openly disclaim it.
3. Apocryphal books contain errors of fact and teach questionable ethics and doctrines. For example, apocryphal writings justify suicide and assassination and also teach praying for the dead.

New Testament

For the New Testament, the process of the recognition and collection began in the first centuries of the Christian church. Very early on, some of the New Testament books were being recognized. Paul considered Luke's writings to be as authoritative as the Old Testament (1 Timothy 5:18; see also Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7). Peter recognized Paul's writings as Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16). Some of the books of the New Testament were being circulated among the churches (Colossians

4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27). Clement of Rome mentioned at least eight New Testament books (A.D. 95). Polycarp, a disciple of John the apostle, acknowledged 15 books (A.D. 108). Ignatius of Antioch acknowledged about seven books (A.D. 115). Later, Irenaeus mentioned 21 books (A.D. 185). Hippolytus recognized 22 books (A.D. 170-235). The New Testament books receiving the most controversy were Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 John, and 3 John.

The councils followed something similar to the following principles to determine whether a New Testament book was truly inspired by the Holy Spirit:

- 1. AUTHORSHIP** - Was the book authored by an apostle or someone closely associated with an apostle? For example, Mark was not an apostle, but he was a close associate of Peter. Luke, the only Gentile writer of the New Testament, was not an apostle but he worked closely with Paul who was an apostle through his special experience on the Damascus Road.
- 2. CONTENT / DOCTRINE** - Did the writing square with apostolic doctrine? Did the book contain consistency of doctrine and orthodox teaching? In those early years of the church, heretics such as the Gnostics would try to slip in a phony book, but none ever made it. If it didn't square with apostolic doctrine, it didn't pass. The doctrinal aberrations were too easy to spot.
- 3. ACCEPTANCE** – Was the book accepted by the body of Christ, at large? Was the book read and used in the churches (and in the next generations after the early church, especially the apostolic fathers)? Did the people of God accept it, read it during worship, and make its teachings part of daily living?

Again, it is crucial to remember that the church did not determine the canon. No early church council decided on the canon. It was God, and God alone, who determined which books belonged in the Bible. It was simply a matter of God's imparting to His followers what He had already decided. The human process of collecting the books of the Bible was flawed, but God, in His sovereignty, and despite our ignorance and stubbornness, brought the early church to the recognition of the books He had inspired.

Did Roman Emperor Constantine influence the canon of Scripture?

No, Emperor Constantine did not influence the canon of Scripture or choose which books were included in the Bible. While popular culture suggests he created the Bible at the Council of Nicaea (325 AD), historians found zero evidence of this.

The canon was largely established by early church tradition before he was born, though he did commission 50 Bibles for the Church in Constantinople. Many people today, especially many freethinkers and atheists, wrongly believe that the Roman emperor Constantine I (lived 272 – 337 AD) was the one who decided which books would be included in the New Testament. This idea, despite its widespread popularity, is completely wrong.

The truth is that most of the Biblical canon was already decided long before Constantine I was even born. The remaining questions about the Biblical canon that still existed during Constantine I's lifetime were not resolved until at least several decades after his death. As far as we know, Constantine I himself had no significant involvement whatsoever in the selection of texts to be included in the New Testament.

This idea that the New Testament canon was determined by Constantine I has been popularized by the fictional mystery thriller novel *The Da Vinci Code*, which was written by the American thriller novelist Dan Brown and published in the United States by Doubleday in 2003. Most people know that *The Da Vinci Code* is a work of fiction, but this idea that the New Testament canon was settled by the Roman emperor Constantine I, or by members of the First Council of Nicaea under Constantine's direction, shows up routinely on various websites encouraging freethought.

Again, all of this is pure fantasy. There are no ancient sources that support this notion that Constantine I or anyone else paid early Christian leaders to come up with a set canon at the First Council of Nicaea or anywhere else. Instead, Christians came up with the canon on their own and which books were included in the canon was mostly decided long before Constantine I was even born. Also, there is no reliable record of the New Testament canon having even been discussed at the First Council of Nicaea.

Key Facts Regarding Constantine and the Bible:

- **No Role in Selection:** The Council of Nicaea did not discuss or decide upon the biblical canon.
- **Already Established:** Most New Testament books were considered authoritative by Christians by the late 2nd century, over a hundred years before Constantine.
- **No Editing:** Constantine did not personally edit, rewrite, or alter biblical texts.
- **His Only Involvement:** He commissioned Eusebius of Caesarea to produce 50 copies of the Scriptures to support the legalization of Christianity in his new capital.
- **Misconceptions:** The idea that Constantine created the Bible often stems from fictional works or incorrect historical sources written centuries later.

From [this article](#) on the Tales of Times Forgotten website