

# How We Got Our English Bible

## Session 5

### *The Development of the New Testament Canon*

#### **The Stimuli for the Development of the New Testament Canon**

1. **Ecclesiastical.** There was a need to define the canon of the New Testament so as to know those books that were to be publicly read and those that were not.
2. **Theological.** There was a need to determine what books were to be studied and considered binding and authoritative.
3. **Political.** Rome ordered the destruction of the Christian scriptures. Which books deserved preservation and which did not.

#### **The Development of the New Testament Canon**

1. The *selection* of authentic books. Luke hints at the existence of non-authentic books in his prologue to Luke and the Thessalonians believers were warned about false epistles.
2. The *reading* of authentic books. Scripture reading was an integral part of New Testament worship and as a result many non-authentic books were discarded over time as the church began to recognize what was and was not Scripture.
3. The *circulation and collection* of authentic books. In Colossians Paul instructs that the letter be read in Laodicea and vice-versa.
4. The *recognition* of authentic books. For example, Peter quotes Paul as being Scripture.

#### **The Confirmation of the New Testament Canon**

1. The early church fathers taken collectively all quote the current 27 books as canonical although some may have disputed one or more books.
2. Early translations include many of the current 27 books. Taken together, they include them all.
3. There are several early lists of the canon of the New Testament, e.g. the Muratorian Fragment and Marcion.
4. Early church councils establish the current 27 books of the New Testament as Scripture.

## *The Extent of the New Testament Canon*

### **The Books Accepted by All - *Homologoumena***

This comprises 20 of the 27 books of the New Testament. Excluded Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, and Revelation.

### **The Books Rejected by All - *Pseudipigrapha***

The Pseudipigraph contains fanciful stories and legends which in some cases is harmless but in other cases contain theological and historical errors. Some of the more prominent ones are listed below.

<b>Literary Genre</b>	<b>Book</b>
Gospels	The Gospel of Thomas The Gospel of the Ebionites The Gospel of Peter Protoevangelium of James
Acts	The Acts of Peter The Acts of John The Acts of Andrew The Acts of Paul
Epistles	The Lost Epistle to the Corinthians The Epistle to the Laodiceans
Apocalypses	The Apocalypse of Peter The Apocalypse of Paul The Apocalypse of Thomas
Others	Secret Book of John Traditions of Matthias Dialogue of the Saviour

### **The Books Disputed by Some - *Antilogoumena***

The Antilogoumena were disputed books, accepted by some as Scripture and rejected by others.

**Hebrews** was disputed over the uncertainty of its authorship.

**James** was disputed over its authorship as well as apparent contraction with the teachings of Paul regarding justification by faith.

**Second Peter** was considered to not be genuine.

**2 and 3 John** were not considered to be genuine epistles of John.

**Jude** was questioned regarding its use of extrabiblical books such as the Assumption of Moses.

**Revelation** was considered non-canonical because of its authenticity and doctrine of Millennialism

### **The Books Accepted by Some - *Apocrypha***

The New Testament Apocrypha enjoyed only temporary and local acceptance as Scripture.

<b>Literary Genre</b>	<b>Book</b>
Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas	Considered Scripture by Clement of Alexandria and Origen.
The Epistle to the Corinthians	Written by Clement of Rome. Uses many quotes from the Book of Wisdom (Ecclesiasticus).
Ancient Homily	Supposedly the Second Epistle of Clement. No evidence exists that it was considered canonical.
Shepherd of Hermas	The most popular noncanonical book. Considered canonical by Irenaus and Origen.
The Didache	Held in high regard by the early church, but again, not considered as canonical.
The Apocalypse of Peter	Origin of Dante's Inferno. Widely circulated and accepted by some as canonical.
The Acts of Paul	Quoted by Origen. Contains the account of the conversion of Thecla, an Iconian woman.
The Epistle to the Laodiceans	A forgery containing various quotes by Paul strung out in no apparent order.
The Gospel According to the Hebrews	Survived only in fragments.
Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians	Polycarp did not claim inspiration but only that he quoted material he learned from the apostles.