

Tackling the *Da Vinci Code* 4

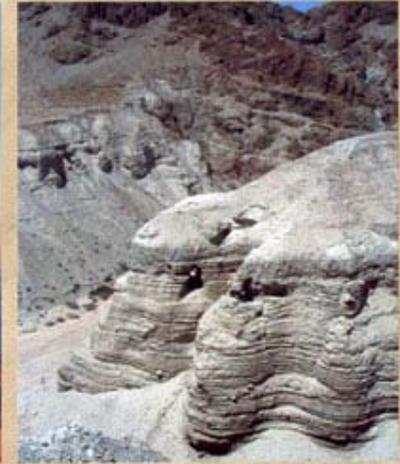
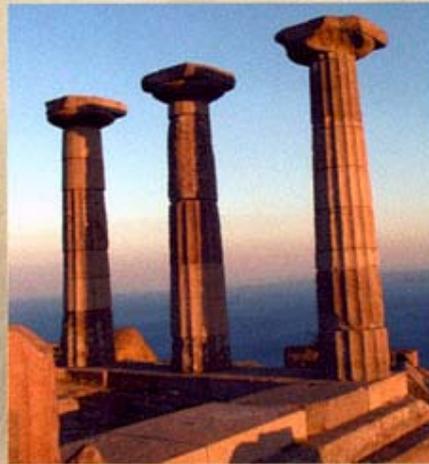
How and When Did the Early
Church Decide on the Books in
the New Testament?

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Primary References

EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND ITS SACRED LITERATURE



Lee Martin McDonald & Stanley E. Porter

Primary References



EARLY CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES

J. N. D. KELLY

"This book is a clear, precise and up-to-date account of the early history of Christian doctrine. It is invaluable for an understanding of the formative period when the main lines of Christian dogma were laid down; and it presents a balanced picture of the early controversies in the light of modern scholarship."

—Cyril C. Richardson



REVISED
EDITION

Primary References

❖ LOST ❖ SCRIPTURES

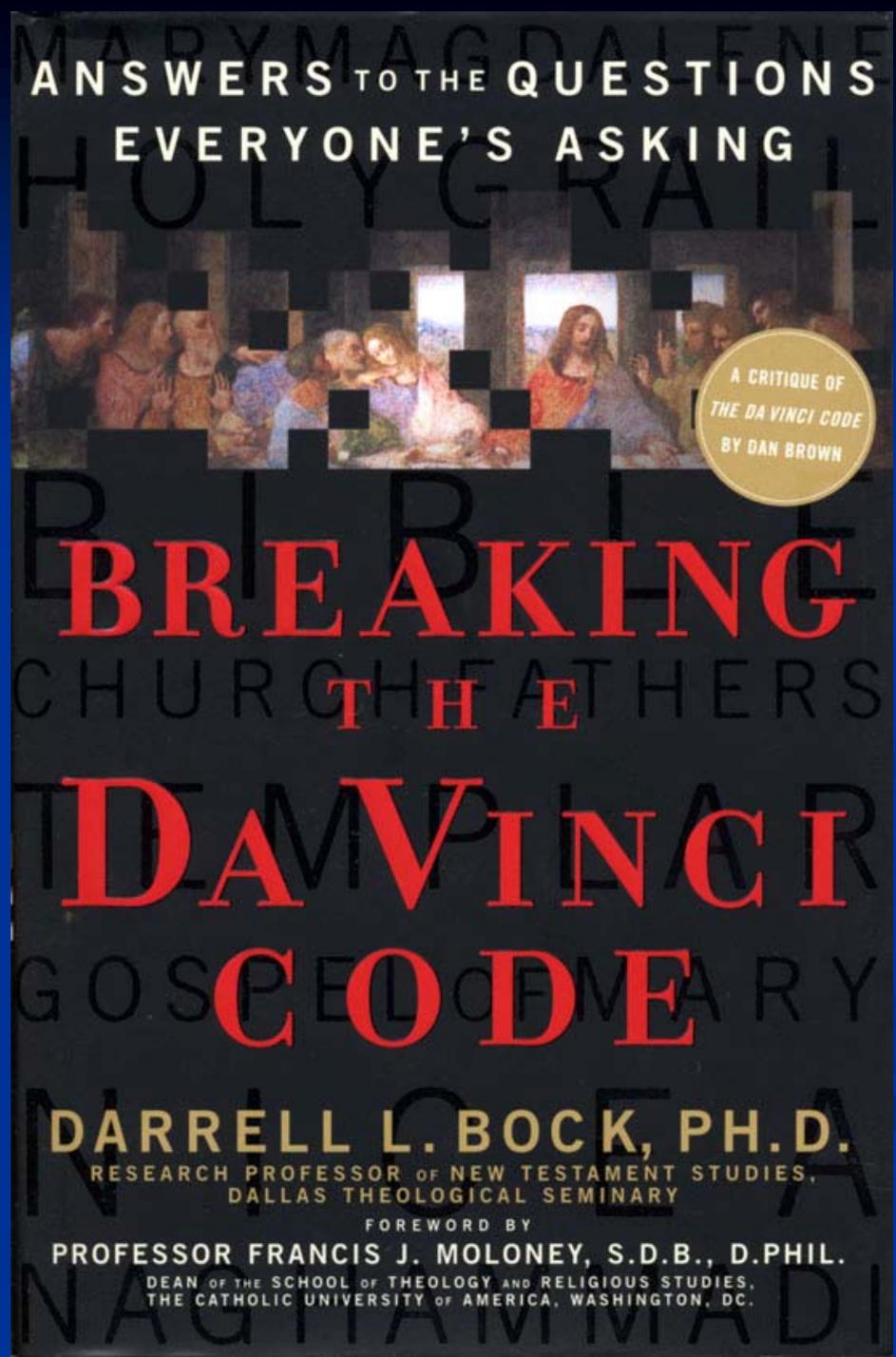
Books that Did Not Make It
into the New Testament



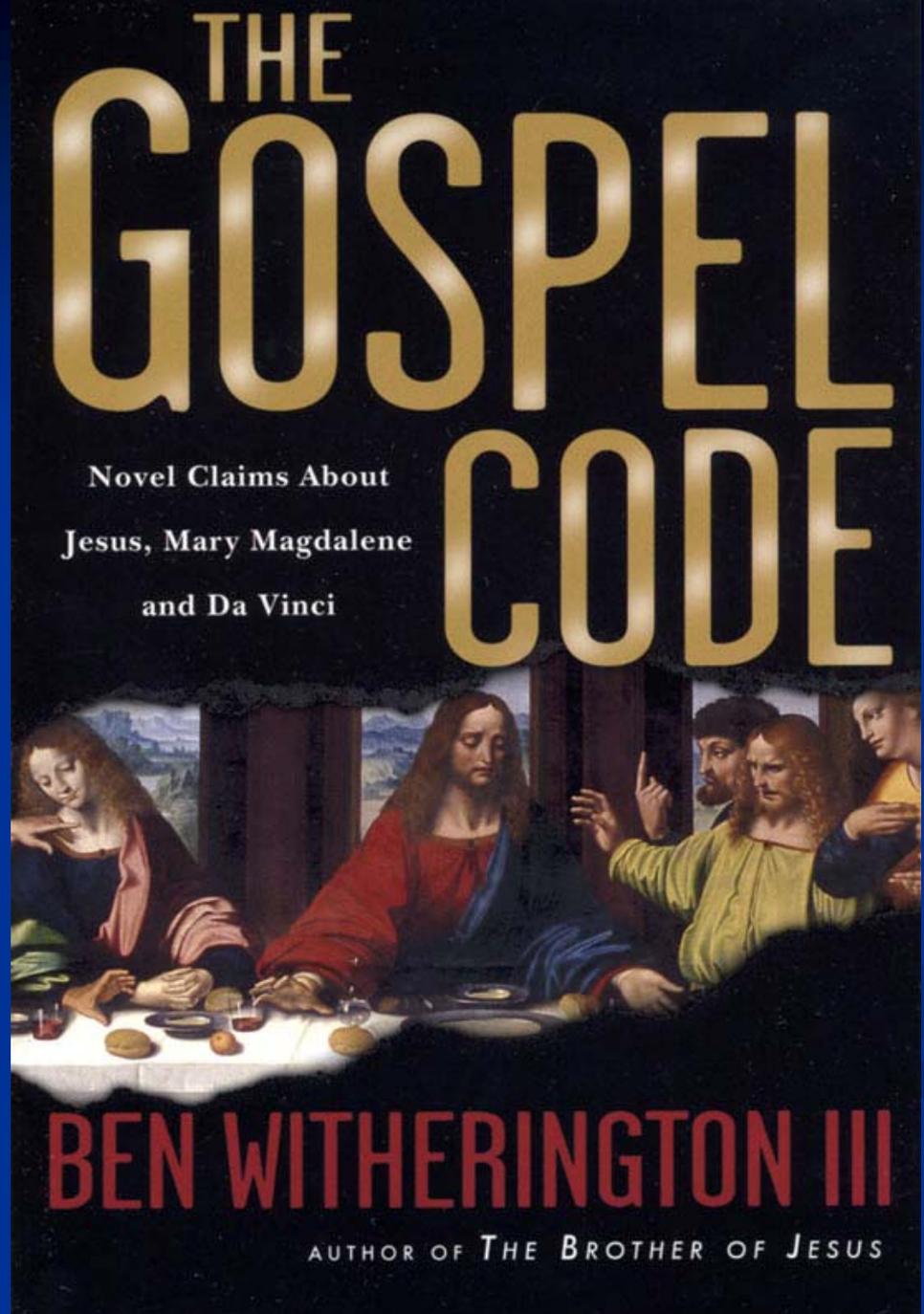
BART D. EHRMAN

Author of *Lost Christianities*

Primary References



Primary References



The Da Vinci Code
says...

The Da Vinci Code says...

- The notion that Jesus was *divine* was first proposed by Emperor Constantine in 325 AD at the Council of Nicene
- “until *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet” (Teabing, p. 233). Thousands of documents depicting Jesus’ life as a “*mortal* man” were in existence (p. 234)

The Da Vinci Code says...

- Constantine “commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s human traits and embellished those gospels that made him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned” (p. 234)
- “More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament.” Only four, which presented a more “godlike” Jesus, were chosen. (p. 234)

The Da Vinci Code says...

- Hundreds, if not thousands of other “earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned.” (p. 234)

The Da Vinci Code says...

- “Fortunately for historians... some of the gospels that Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950s in a cave near Qumran in the Judea desert. And, of course, the Coptic Scrolls in 1945 at Nag Hammadi.”

**How and when did the
early Church decide on
the books in the New
Testament?**

Review of the Canon of the New Testament

Canon of the New Testament

Terminology

- Scripture:
 - “the written revelation of the word and will of God communicated to his people”
 - For the early Church, idea of “Scripture” also included a sense that its content was fulfilled by Jesus Christ

Canon of the New Testament

Terminology

- Canon, Greek (*kanon*)
 - Derived from (*kane*), a loan word from the Semitic *kaneh*, “measuring rod” or “measuring stick”
 - “that which is a standard or norm by which all things are judged or evaluated”
 - Canon of Scripture: “a fixed collection of sacred writings that defines the faith and identity of a particular religious community.”

Canon of the New Testament

Gospels

- Gospels (*evangelion*)
 - “Synoptic” Gospels (70 to 90 AD)
 - Called “synoptic” because they offer a similar picture of events in Jesus’ life
 - **Mark**
 - **Matthew**
 - **Luke**
 - **John** (90 to 100 AD)
 - Only 8% overlap with material in the synoptic gospels

Canon of the New Testament

Acts of the Apostles

- **Acts of the Apostles**
 - A sequel to Luke (~Luke II)

Canon of the New Testament

Pauline Letters

- Paul's Letters (50 to 62 AD)

- The Main Epistles (6)

- **Galatians**
- **1 Thessalonians**
- **2 Thessalonians****
- **1 Corinthians**
- **2 Corinthians**
- **Romans**

(**= Paul's authorship disputed by modern scholars)

Canon of the New Testament

Pauline Letters

- The Prison Epistles (4)
 - **Philippians**
 - **Colossians****
 - **Philemon**
 - **Ephesians****
 - The Pastoral Epistles (3) (felt today to be written by others after Paul died)
 - **1 Timothy****
 - **2 Timothy****
 - **Titus****
- (* ** = Paul's authorship disputed by modern scholars)

Canon of the New Testament

Hebrews and the General Letters

■ **Hebrews**

- Anonymous author
- In early Church, Paul felt to most likely be author
- Most modern scholars feel it is unlikely Paul was the author

■ General or Catholic Letters (7)

- **James**
- **1 Peter, 2 Peter**
- **Jude**
- **1 John, 2 John, 3 John**

Canon of the New Testament

Revelation

- **Revelation** or the **Apocalypse of John** (~81-96 AD)

The Formation of an Authoritative Collection of Christian Scriptures (“Canonization”)

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Overview: First Century

- In the first century
 - The only accepted “canon” of sacred Scriptures was the Hebrew Scriptures (later to called the Old Testament)
 - The Greek Translation begun in Alexandria called the Septuagint (LXX) was used. Included:
 - The Law (250-225 BC)
 - The Prophets (200-180 BC)
 - The Writings (130 BC or later)
 - The Scriptures that would one day make up the “New Testament” were being written and were circulating, but they were not yet thought of as “canon.”

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Overview: Second Century

- In the second century:
 - Within individual Christian communities, collections of Scriptures considered “canon” for that community became common
 - There were however many different such “canons,” undoubtedly some in which apocryphal and spurious writings were considered sacred authorities

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Overview: Third and Fourth Centuries

- Between the end of the second century to the end of the fourth century:
 - a general consensus developed on the core books that should be included in any “canon” of Scripture
 - Modern scholars continue to debate exactly how quickly the consensus developed during this period
- In the West, the entire New Testament canon was relatively fixed by the end of the fourth century
- In the East, the presence of certain books in the New Testament canon continued to be debated for another century and half (that is, into the sixth century)
 - Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, Revelation questioned

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Basic Process of “Canonization”

- Writers of the New Testament were not consciously aware they were producing sacred scripture
 - Possible exception: author of Revelation (Rev. 22:18-19)
- Early writings included:
 - Collections of the letters of Paul
 - Circulating by the end of the first century
 - The four “gospels” attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and the Acts of the Apostles
 - Call the “memoirs of the apostles” by Saint Justin Martyr (100-165 AD)

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Basic Process of “Canonization”

- Early Christian writings initially used for instruction
- Later, in the second century, as communities developed their own “canons” of Scripture, some Christian writings began to be read alongside Old Testament Scriptures in worship services
 - Described by Saint Justin Martyr (100-165 AD) as the practice in his church in *I Apology* 67

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Basic Process of “Canonization”

- Use of various Christian writings for:
 - Instruction
 - Preaching
 - Regular readings in worship services

Gradually led to the widespread acknowledgement of some of them as “Sacred Scripture” by the community, and the acceptance of a basic “canon” of Scripture, an “authoritative collection” = the “New” Testament

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Basic Process of “Canonization”

- Modern scholars debate over how long it took before there was the widespread acknowledgement of a single “authoritative collection” (which we call the New Testament)
 - Some say as early as the end of the second century (just minor changes after that)
 - Others say no earlier than the fourth century

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Basic Process of “Canonization”

- “...the fixation of the finally agreed list of books and of the order in which they were to be arranged, was the result of a very gradual process. While the broad outline of the canon was settled by the end of the second century, different localities continued to maintain their different traditions, and some (e.g. Alexandria in Origen*’s time) appear to have been less partial to fixity than others”
 - JND Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 60

* Origen (185-254)

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Criteria for Canonization

- Criteria for Canonization:
 - 1. Apostolicity
 - If a writing was produced (or believed to be produced) by an apostle or someone in contact with an apostle, it was included
 - 2. Orthodoxy
 - Writing must express the truth faith

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Criteria for Canonization

- 3. Antiquity
 - Anything believed written after the age of the apostles was rejected
- 4. Widespread Use or Catholicity (= universality)
 - The writing must be used widely through the churches

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Four Gospels

- Early on, the four gospels written in the first century were recognized as having a special status
 - Saint Justin Martyr (100-165 AD) in *Dialogue with Trypho* (160 AD):
 - Called them “memoirs of the apostles”
 - Said they were being used and read in worship

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Four Gospels

- Saint Irenaeus (140-60 to 200 AD)
 - Served as Bishop of Lugdunum (Lyon) in Gaul
 - Defended the “four-fold gospel”

It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is scattered throughout all the world, and the “pillar and ground” of the Church is the Gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that she should have four pillars, breathing out immortality on every side, and vivifying men afresh... He who was manifested to men, has given us the Gospel under four aspects, but bound together by one Spirit.

- Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Chapter 3.11.8

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Four Gospels

- Origen (185-254 AD) of Alexandria
 - “generally considered the greatest theologian and biblical scholar of the early Eastern Church”
 - At age 18, succeeded Clement of Alexandria as head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria

I know a certain gospel which is called the 'Gospel according to Thomas' and a 'Gospel according to Matthias,' and many others have we read – lest we should in any way be considered ignorant because of those who imagine they possess some knowledge if they are acquainted with these. Nevertheless, among all these we have approved solely what the church has recognized, which is that only the four gospels should be accepted.

- Origen, from a homily on Luke 1:1

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Effect of Heresies

- In the second century, the rise of competing views of the faith (“heresies”) prodded the early Church towards defining a canon of Scripture to guide true belief. The competing beliefs included:
 - Marcionites
 - Gnostics
 - Montanists

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Effect of Heresies

- Marcion and Marcionites
 - Marcion (born?; died 160 AD) rejected the Hebrew Scriptures and all Jewish influences in Christianity
 - Produced for his community the first formal “canonical” list of Christian Scriptures:
 - Rejected all Old Testament books
 - Accepted ten of Paul’s letters
 - Rejected all gospels except Luke, from which he purged all Old Testament references

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Effect of Heresies

- In reaction to Marcion, Church Father Tertullian of Carthage (155-220 AD) defended the inspired character of:
 - all four of the gospels
 - Acts of the Apostles
 - all 13 letters of Paul (as opposed to the 10 in Marcion's canonical list)

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Effect of Heresies

■ Gnostics

- Second century movement
- Rejected the goodness of creation in Genesis
- Taught that matter was evil, and that the world was created by an evil demiurge (a lesser god or divinity), who was the God in the Old Testament
- Produced numerous writings in the second century claiming to be the secrets revelations of the apostles

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Effect of Heresies

- There was never a time when any of these “Gnostic gospels” were considered for inclusion into the canon
 - Irenaeus **“For if the apostles had known hidden mysteries, which they were in the habit of imparting to ‘the perfect’ apart and privately from the rest, they would have delivered them especially to the those whom they were also committing the leadership of the churches themselves.”**
 - None of the Gnostic writings met the criteria of apostolicity, orthodoxy, antiquity, or widespread use

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Effect of Heresies

- Largest Gnostic Movement was led by Valentinus (100-175 AD)
 - Used John's gospel selectively, interpreting it to support Gnostic beliefs

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Effect of Heresies

- Montanists
 - Emerged from Phrygia in 156 AD
 - Founder Montanus and his associates believed themselves vehicles of a new effusion of the Holy Spirit
 - Focused on need for “new prophecy,” the power of the Holy Spirit, and a rigid asceticism
 - Produced numerous prophetic books claiming to be divinely inspired, which supplemented the ancient scriptures

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Effect of Heresies

- The greater Church rejected the views of the Montanists and the Gnostic faith of Valentinus
- However, these heresies also caused some churches to become hesitant about the Gospel of John, because of its emphasis on the Holy Spirit

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Tatian's *Diatessaron*

- Tatian
 - 2nd century native of the Assyrian territory between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers
 - Student of Saint Justin Martyr's School of Philosophy in Rome
 - Converted to Christianity after a long spiritual struggle
 - 172 AD: wrote the *Diatessaron* (Greek for "through the four"), a harmonization of the four Gospels
 - Most early Church communities refused to abandon the four gospels, and the harmonization was never adopted by most of the Churches
 - Was used in the Syrian Church until the fifth century

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

The Muratorian Fragment

- Muratorian Fragment (late second century)
 - Oldest surviving formal list of “canonical” Scripture
 - Discovered in 1740 by Italian scholar Ludovico Antonio Muratori in a library in Milan
 - Felt by most scholars to be written in the late second century, possibly in Rome

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

The Muratorian Fragment

- Muratorian Fragment
 - Listed 22 of the 27 books in the New Testament
 - Excluded Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 3 John
 - Included as “canonical” some books not present in the present New Testament:
 - Wisdom of Solomon
 - Apocalypse of Peter
 - Listed as good for reading, but not part of sacred Scripture:
 - Shepherd of Hermas

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

At the End of the Second Century

- Situation at the end of the second century:
 - The most that can be said is that there was a general recognition of the scriptural status of the four Gospels, Acts, and most of the Epistles of Paul at the end of the second century.
 - McDonald and Porter, *Early Christianity and its Sacred Literature*, p. 616

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

At the End of the Second Century

- Books in our New Testament, but not widely accepted as canonical in the early Church:
 - Hebrews
 - The General or Catholic Epistles:
 - James
 - 1 and 2 Peter
 - 1, 2, and 3 John
 - Jude
 - Revelation

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

At the End of the Second Century

- Books not in our New Testament, but often accepted as canonical in the early Church:
 - **Apocalypse of Peter**
 - Ultimately excluded from the canon when it was realized it was not written by Peter
 - **Shepherd of Hermas** (first half the second century)
 - In the fourth century Codex Sinaiticus manuscript of the New Testament
 - Popular among pious Christians the first four centuries of the Church
 - Commended as important reading for new Christians by many of the Church Fathers
 - Ultimately excluded because it did not meet apostolicity and antiquity

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

At the End of the Second Century

- Books not in our New Testament, but often accepted as canonical in the early Church:
 - **The Didache (Teaching of the Apostles) (100-120 AD)**
 - Lost until a copy found in monastery library in Constantinople in 1873
 - **The Letter of Barnabas (around 130 AD)**
 - In the fourth century Codex Sinaiticus manuscript of the New Testament
 - **Letter of 1 Clement (about 95 AD)**
 - In the fifth century Codex Alexandrinus manuscript of the New Testament
 - **Eldad and Modad (a lost apocalypse)**

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

The Canon of Origen

- Origen (185 to 254) in his writings, indicated he considered as canonical:
 - The four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
 - Letters of Paul
 - Expressed opinion that Paul was not the author
 - One letter of Peter
 - Allowed for a possible second letter
 - One letter of John
 - Allowed there might be two others
 - Revelation or the Apocalypse of John
 - Shepherd of Hermas

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Effect of the Diocletian Persecution

- 303 to 313 AD: Emperor Diocletian began an empire-wide persecution of Christians
- Required Christians to turn over their sacred books for burning by the Roman authorities
- Forced Christian communities to decide what books they truly considered sacred Scripture

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

The Canon of Eusebius

- Eusebius of Caesarea (260 to 339 AD)
 - “Father of Church History”
 - About 320-330 AD: published the 10 volume work *Church History*, sketching history of the early Church from Jesus to his day
 - 4 classifications of Scripture:
 - Acknowledged as canonical
 - Disputed
 - Spurious (orthodox, but not written by an apostle)
 - Rejected

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

The Canon of Eusebius

- Acknowledged Books:
 - Among the first books must be located the holy quaternity of the Gospels, which are followed by the Acts of the Apostles. After this must be reckoned the epistles of Paul. Then to be confirmed are the first epistle bearing the name of John and likewise that of Peter. After these is to be placed, if it seems right, the Apocalypse of John; we will set forth other opinions about it at the appropriate time. These then are among the acknowledged books.

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

The Canon of Eusebius

- Disputed Books
 - But among the disputed books, which are nonetheless known by many, are found the epistle of James, as it is called, that of Jude, the second epistle of Peter, and those called the second and third epistles of John, whether they come from the evangelists or from someone with the same name.

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

The Canon of Eusebius

■ Spurious Books

- Among the spurious are to be placed the Acts of Paul and the book called the *Shepherd* [of Hermas], the Apocalypse of Peter, the surviving Epistle of Barnabas, and the book called Teachings [= Didache] of the Apostles, and, as I have said, the Apocalypse of John, if that seems right – a book that some reject but others judge to belong to the acknowledged books.

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

The Canon of Eusebius

- Rejected Books
 - [Books] “set forth by heretics in the names of the apostles, whether Gospels allegedly by Peter, Thomas, Matthias, and of some other than these, or Acts allegedly of Andrew, John, and other apostles. No one standing in the succession of the true churches ever thought it worthwhile to mention any of these in any of his treatises. And their literary character differs greatly from the style characteristically found in the apostolic writings... they should not be counted even among the spurious works, but are to be rejected in every way as absurd and godless.

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Influence of Emperor Constantine

- Emperor Constantine asked Eusebius to produce 50 copies of the Sacred Scriptures for use in the Churches in Constantinople (“New Rome”)
- Constantine was likely a force for conformity in Scripture among the Churches in the empire

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

The Canon of Athanasius

- 39th Festal (Easter) Letter of Saint Athanasius (295-373 AD) of Alexandria, 367 AD
 - First formal listing of the 27 books of the present New Testament as canonical Scripture

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

The Canon of Athanasius

- 39th Festal Letter of Saint Athanasius (295-373 AD) of Alexandria, 367 AD
 - **And now without hesitation I should speak of the books of the New Testament. For they are as follows. The four Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Then after these the Acts of the Apostles and the seven books by the apostles called the Catholic Epistles: one of James, two of Peter, then three of John, and after them one of Jude.**

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

The Canon of Athanasius

- 39th Festal Letter of Saint Athanasius (295-373 AD) of Alexandria, 367 AD:
 - In addition to these are the fourteen epistles of the apostle Paul, written in the following order: first to the Romans, then two to the Corinthians, and after these to the Galatians and next to the Ephesians; then to the Philippians and to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians and then to the Hebrews, one to Titus, and finally, one to Philemon. In addition is the Apocalypse of John.

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

The Canon of Athanasius

- 39th Festal Letter of Saint Athanasius (295-373 AD) of Alexandria, 367 AD
 - ...there are books other than these that are not, on the one hand, included in the canon, but that have nonetheless been designated by the fathers as books to be read to those who have recently come to the faith and wish to be instructed in the word of piety: the Wisdom of Solomon, Esther, Judith, Tobit, the book called the *Teaching* (= Didache) of the Apostles and the *Shepherd* [of Hermas].

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

Western Church: Synod in Hippo

- Canon of the Synod in Hippo, 393 AD
 - New Testament Canon never ratified in an “ecumenical council”
 - Several smaller synods and councils did pronounce judgments on books to be considered canonical.
 - First synod that ratified Athanasius’ list of 27 books was a Synod in Hippo, North Africa, in 393 AD, where St. Augustine (Bishop of Hippo) put his weight behind Athanasius’ list
 - Established the canon in the Western Church

Forming a Canon of Scriptures

In the Eastern Church

- In the East, the process was not complete for at least another century and half (that is, into the sixth century)
- Continued to have doubts about:
 - Hebrews
 - 2 Peter
 - 2 and 3 John
 - Jude
 - Revelation

The New Testament Canon and the 21st Century

The Canon and the 21st Century

- There are many unresolved questions about how the early Church came up with the New Testament canon
- These questions do *not* include:
 - Did Constantine dictate the canon?
 - NO.
 - Were the four gospels chosen from at least 80 others?
 - NO. They were the only “gospels” from the first century

The Canon and the 21st Century

- Some more important questions:
 - How should we view the present canon when modern scholarship tells us that a particular book does not in fact meet the criteria used by the early Church to justify its inclusion (apostolicity, orthodoxy, antiquity, widespread use)?
 - Reject an included book?
 - Include a rejected book?
 - Presume the process, however flawed, was guided by the Holy Spirit?