



# How the New Testament came to be

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# A. Introduction

## B. Terms

### Canon

The word **canon** comes from the Greek word, canon (kanon), which refers to a reed (like bamboo) used for measuring things, like a yard stick

**Canon** refers to an authoritative voice in written or oral form that was read and received as having the authority of God.

### Scripture

**Scripture** is semi-durable, semifluid, slowly evolving conglomeration of sacred texts. Hindus have sacred texts, but not a canon. Muslims have the Qur'an, scriptures fixed within a canon

# C. First Century

## 1. OT: First Scriptures of Earliest Christians

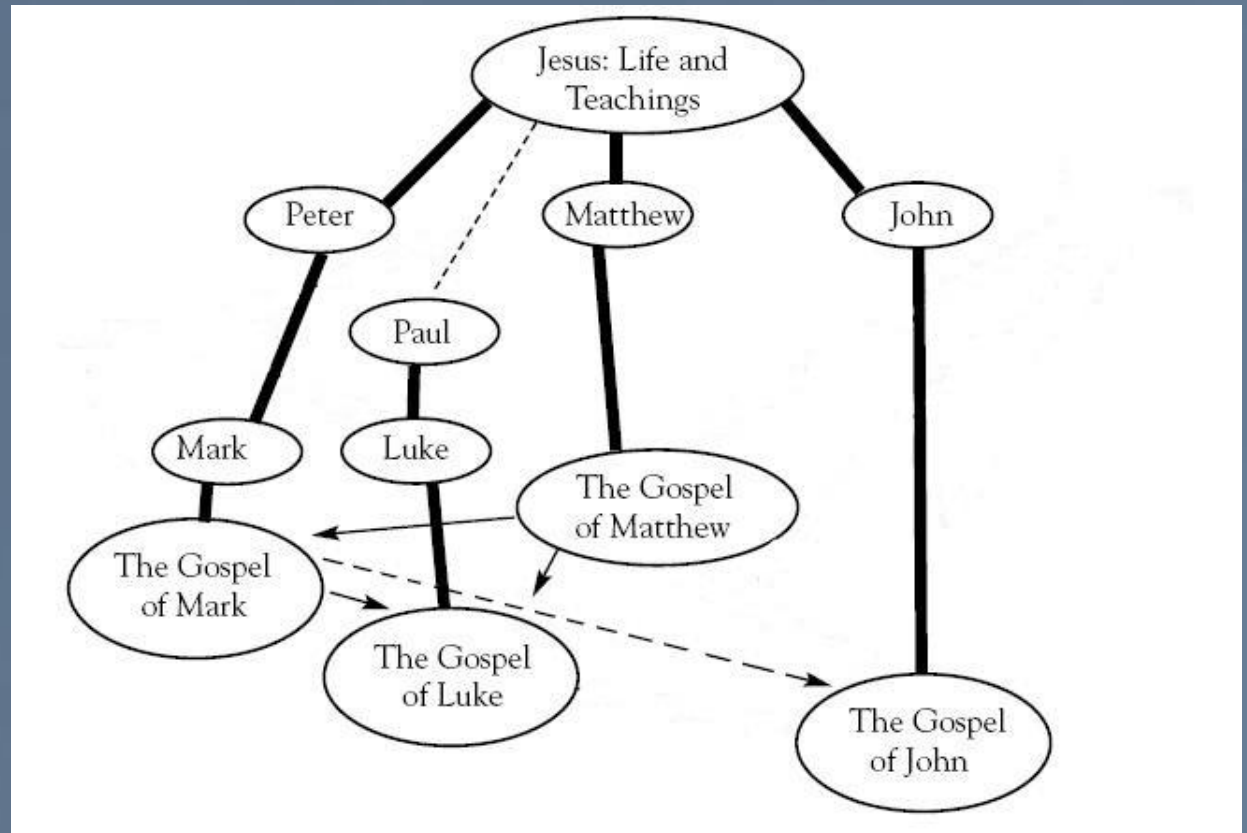
Luke 24:44. Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." (NRSV)

List of OT Scriptures from Church in from 2<sup>nd</sup> -4<sup>th</sup> centuries, have the 39 books we have today, but each list also has some or all of the apocryphal books, such as the Epistle of Jeremiah, Baruch, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, etc.

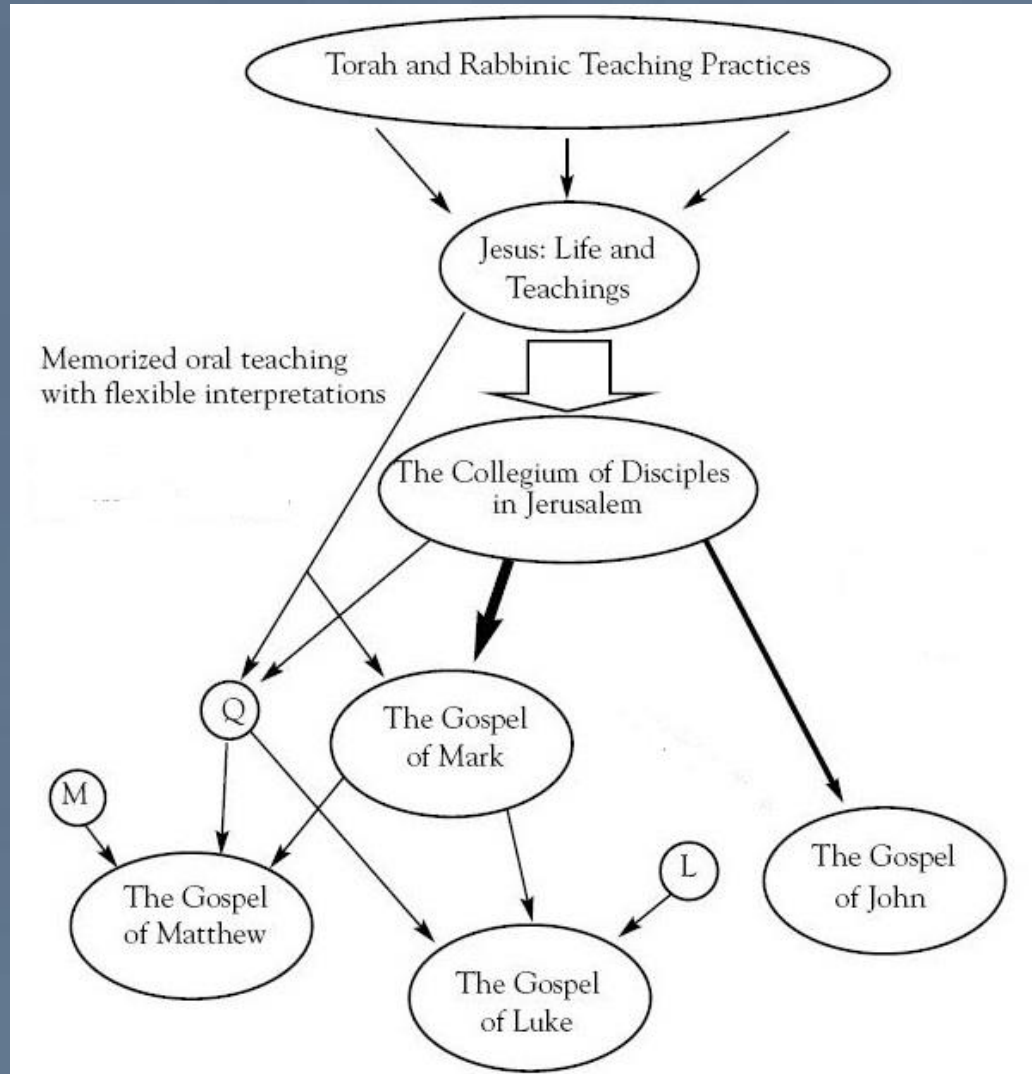
The driving force and religious authority behind the early church was not the OT, but Jesus.

## 2. From Jesus to the Gospels: Three Models

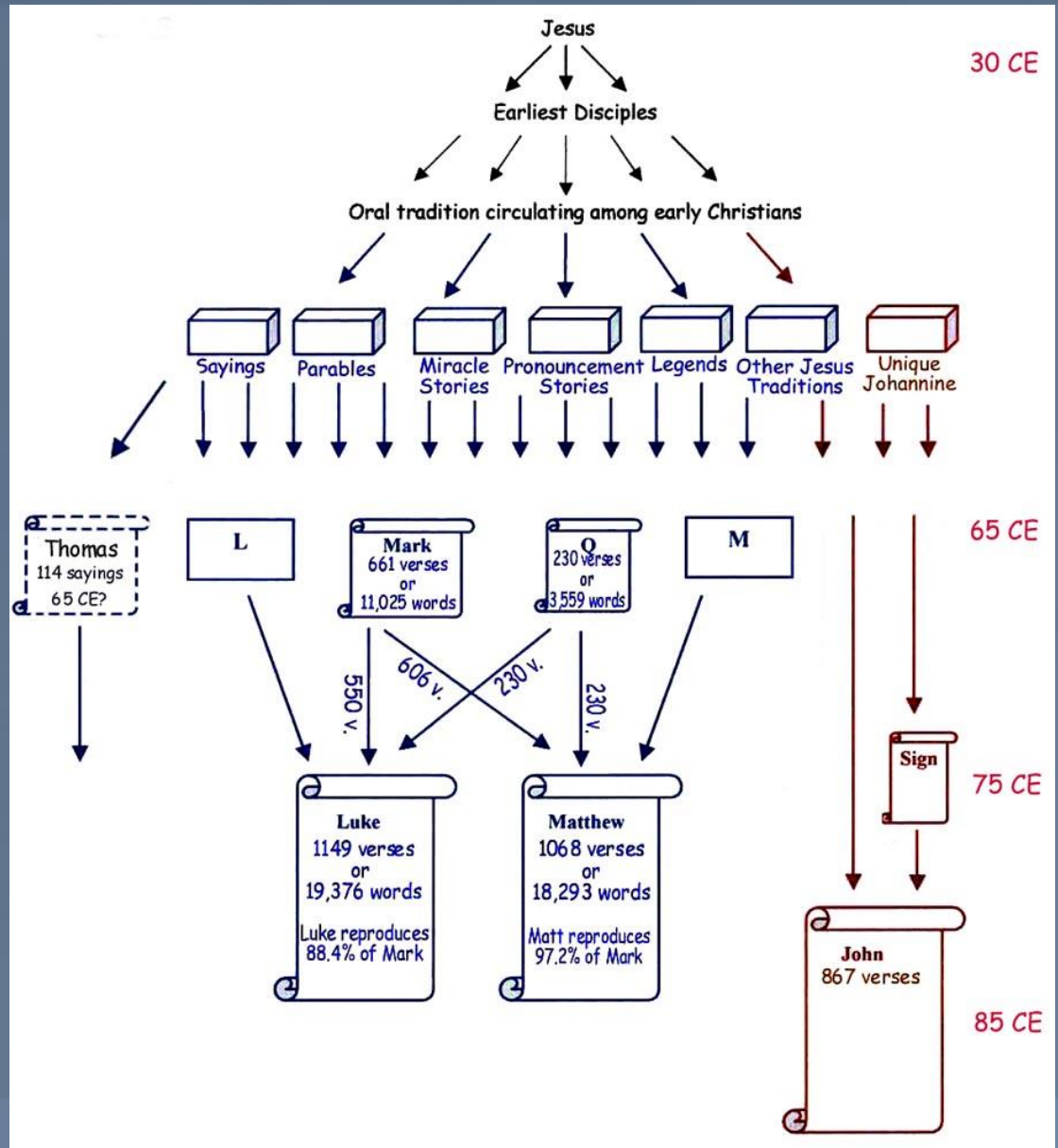
### a. Popular Model



## b. Rabbinic Model



## c. Oral Tradition Model



## 2. The oral traditions of Jesus

### a. Oral culture of Roman Palestine

In Roman Palestine, the vast majority of people ... were largely illiterate.” Perhaps literacy was as low as 3%.

Since it was not a *print culture*, and there were *no publishers* and *no mass-production*, oral communication was the primary means of communication and the primary way in which business was conducted.

That’s why Jesus said,

- “Let you ‘yes’ be yes, and your ‘no’ no” (Matt. 5:37).
- “On the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter” (Matt. 12:36)

Josephus, *Ant.* 4:210 (16:41). The sacred laws were taught aloud and “engraved on their souls... and guarded in their memory.”

### b. First Century Rural Galilee



### c. Characteristics of oral tradition

- 1) Oral tradition is communal in character
- 2) Oral communities had designated people responsible for performing the traditions—“the singer of tales, the bard [lyric poet], the elders, the teachers, the rabbis
- 3) Oral tradition subverts the idea of an “original” version
- 4) a combination of fixity and flexibility, of stability and diversity

Kenneth Bailey: Oral traditions were informal (no set teacher or student; anyone can join in) and controlled (the whole community knows the traditions well enough to object to serious innovations

In informal controlled tradition the story can be retold in the setting of a gathering of the village by any member of the village present, but usually the elders, and the community itself exercises the ‘control’.

Bailey identifies various types of oral tradition in Middle Eastern village life

- Pithy proverbs: The oral community can create and sustain over 6000 wisdom sayings
- Story riddles: A hero is presented with an unsolvable problem and comes up with a wise answer
- Poetry: Classical and popular
- Parable: “Once there was a ...”
- Well-told accounts: Stories of important figures in the history of the village.



## d. Evidence of oral tradition embedded in the Gospels

### (1) Same story or saying, but in different contexts

The first when we look at the Gospels, we can see small, paragraph size units. These paragraph size units are, more-or-less, the oral units that were passed on and eventually embedded in the written Gospels. The oral units were the “building blocks” of the written Gospels.

For example: the *same story/saying of Jesus* put in *different contexts* in the gospels. Jesus’ prophecy against Jerusalem

- Is *after* he enters Jerusalem in Matthew (23:37-39)
- Is *before* he enters Jerusalem in Luke (13:34f).

For example: Look at the "Sermon on the Mount. Notice that Matthew’s material moves in order from Matt. 5-7.

<b>Matthew's Sermon on the Mount</b>		<b>Luke</b>	<b>Mark</b>
1. The Beatitudes	5:3-12	6:20b-23	—
2. Parable of Salt	5:13	14:34-35	9:49-50
3. Parable of Light	5:14-16	8:16	4:21
4. The Law and the Prophets	5:17-20	16:16-17	—
5. On Murder	5:21-26	12:57-59	—
6. On Adultery	5:27-30	—	—
7. On Divorce	5:31-32	16:18	10:11-12
8. On Oaths	5:33-37	—	—
9. On Retaliation	5:38-42	6:29-30	—
10. On Love for One's Enemies	5:43-48	6:27-28, 32-36	—
11. On Almsgiving	6:1-4	—	—
12. On Prayer	6:5-8	—	—
13. The Lord's Prayer	6:9-15	11:1-4	—
14. On Fasting	6:16-18	—	—
15. On Treasures in Heaven	6:19-21	12:33-34	—
16. Good Eyes	6:22-23	11:34-36	—
17. On Serving Two Masters	6:24	16:13	—
18. On Anxiety	6:25-34	12:22-32	—
19. On Judging Others	7:1-5	6:37-42	[4:24]
20. On Profaning the Holy	7:6	—	—
21. On Answers to Prayer	7:7-11	11:9-13	—
22. The Golden Rule	7:12	6:31	—
23. The Narrow Gate	7:13-14	13:23-24	—
24. Parable of the Tree and its Fruit	7:15-20	6:43-45	—
25. Saying, "Lord, Lord"	7:21-23	6:46; 13:25-27	—
26. The Wise and Foolish Builders	7:24-27	6:47-49	—
27. End of the Sermon	7:28-29	—	—

## d. Evidence of oral tradition embedded in the Gospels

### (1) Same story or saying, but in different contexts

### (2) Literary seams

When we look at Mark, we find *very general* or *vague introductions* and *conclusions* to each new story or saying without any necessary connection with what precedes. For example:

Mark's use of "and immediately" 11 times in chapter one; e.g.,

<sup>10</sup> And immediately (*euthus*) coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him;

<sup>12</sup> And immediately (*euthus*) the Spirit impelled Him *to go* out into the wilderness.

<sup>18</sup> And they immediately (*euthus*) left the nets and followed Him.

<sup>20</sup> And immediately (*euthus*) He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.

<sup>21</sup> And they went into Capernaum; and immediately (*euthus*) on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and *began* to teach.

Mark 4:1 "Again he began to teach beside the sea ..."

Mark 4:21 "And he said to them ..."

Mark 4:26 "And he said ..."

Mark 4:30 "And he said ..."

## d. Types of Oral Tradition in the Gospels

### f. Summary and importance of the oral model

First, if we can accept there were oral traditions behind the gospels, and when we consider the number of stories or sayings included in the Gospels, then we can infer that hundreds of independent short stories or sayings of Jesus circulated among the early Christians for many years.

This means that the gospels are not the memories of a few individuals, but the memories of hundreds or even thousands of first generation Christians—it was “community property.”

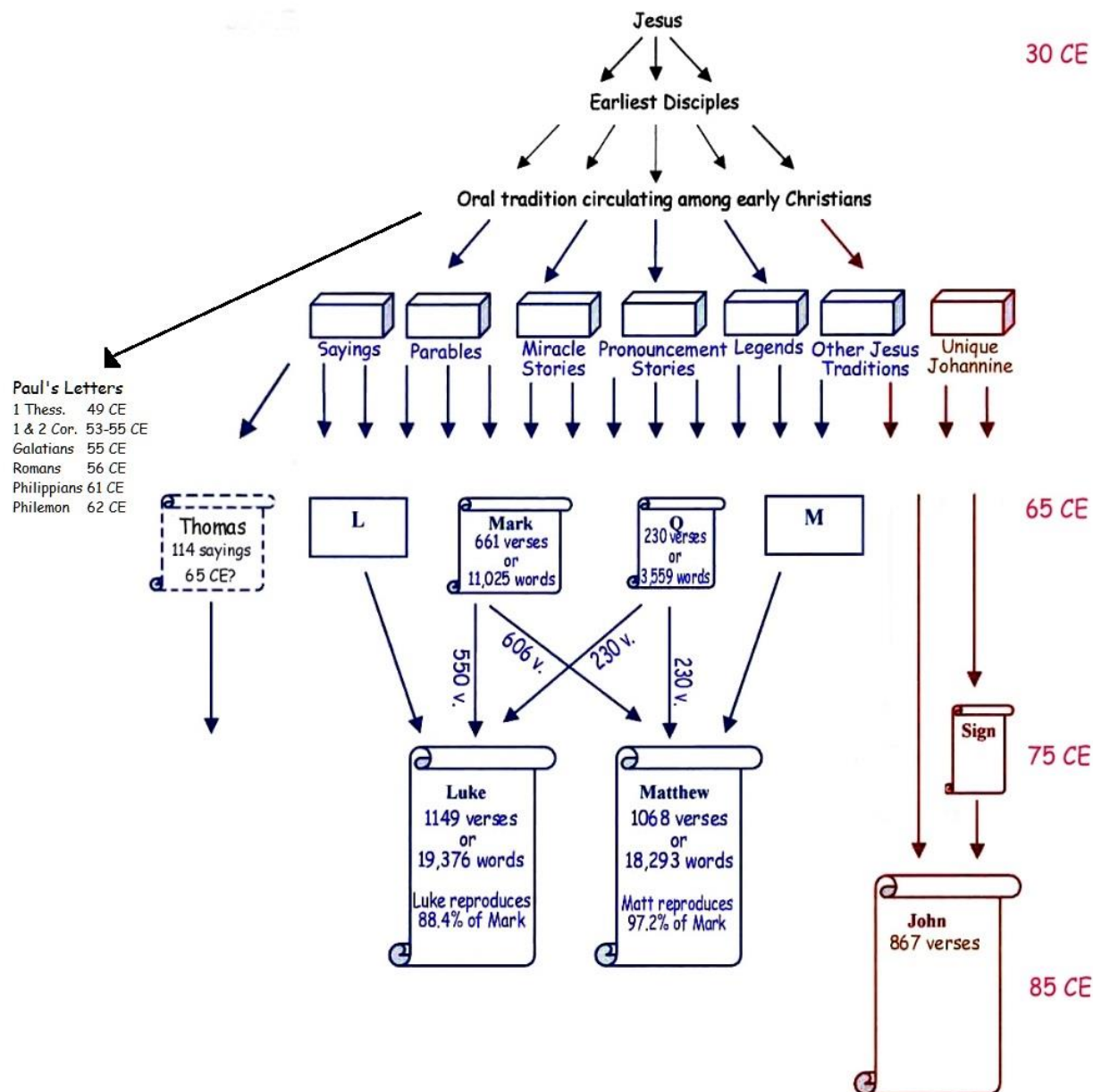
Second, in oral tradition one telling of a story is not an exact retelling of the story; rather, each telling of a story is an oral performance that allows for *performance variation*.

#### 4. Earliest Christian writings

#### 5. Why was there a delay in writing the Gospels

#### 6. Why did Christian Scripture develop?

#### 7. Why were many different “canons” of scripture?



# D. Second Century

## 1. The “sayings of Jesus”

## 2. 2 Clement (95 AD)

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus; for he said, “Woe to that man. It would be better for him if he had not been born, rather than that he should offend one of my elect. It would be better for him that a millstone were hung on him, and he be cast into the sea, than that he should pervert one of my elect.” (1 Clem. 46:7-8)

## 3. Ignatius of Antioch (martyred in 110 AD)

## 4. *Didachē* (70-150 AD?)

*Did.* 8:2. “Pray like this, just as the Lord commanded in his Gospel” followed by the Lord’s Prayer from Matthew 6:9-13.

# D. Second Century

## 5. Papias (ca. 70-140 AD)

*But if I met with anyone who had been a follower of the elders anywhere, I made it a point to inquire what were the declarations of the elders. What was said by Andrew, Peter or Philip. What by Thomas, James, John, Mathew, or any of the other of the disciples of the Lord. What was said by Aristion, and the presbyter John, disciples of the Lord; for I do not think that I derived so much benefit from books as from the living voice of those that are still surviving. — Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.39.4.*

## 6. Justin Martyr (100-165 AD)

**1 Apol. 66.3.** “For the apostles in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered to us what was enjoined upon them; ‘that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks,’ said, ‘This do in remembrance of me, this is my body’; and, ‘after the same manner...’”

**1 Apol 67.3.** “On the day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place of those who lived in cities or the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits.”

## 7. Marcion (A.D. 150)



# D. Second Century

8. Irenaeus (A.D. 180)

9. Muratorian Canon (A.D. 180-200)

# E. Third Century

## Origen (d. 254)

Origen traveled throughout the Christian world and investigated which churches accepted which writings as Scripture. He came to the conclusion that there were four types of writings:

***Undisputed writings:*** Four Gospels, thirteen Pauline letters, 1 Peter, 1 John, Acts, and Revelation.

***Disputed writings:*** 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Hebrews, James, Jude.

***Writings that are not Scripture:*** Shepherd of Hermas, Barnabas, and the Didache.

***Heretical writings:*** Gospels of the Egyptians, Thomas, Basilides, and Matthias.

# F. Fourth Century

## 1. Persecution and the Burning of Christian Scriptures

## 2. Emperor Constantine (c. 272-337 AD)

**Edict of Milan (313 AD)** *Perceiving long ago that religious liberty ought not to be denied, but that it ought to be granted to the judgment and desire of each individual to perform his religious duties according to his own choice, we had given orders that every man, ... both Christians and all men [should have the] freedom to follow the religion which they choose .... And we decree still further in regard to the Christians, that their places, in which they were formerly accustomed to assemble, shall be restored to the said Christians, without demanding money or any other equivalent, with no delay or hesitation... (Eusebius Hist. eccl. 10.5.2-3)*

**Eusebius:** *To the Church of God Constantine paid particular personal attention. When some were at variance with each other in various places, like a universal bishop [koinos episkopos] appointed by God, he convoked councils of the minister of God. Nor did he disdain to be present and attend during their proceedings, and he participated in the subjects reviewed, by arbitration promoting the peace of God among all*

# F. Fourth Century

Things Constantine did for the church

1. Built new churches
2. Paid the clergy out of the state treasury
3. Intervened in church disputes
4. Convened councils of bishops
5. Issued edicts and laws for the church
6. Helped determine the date for celebrating Easter
7. Mandated Sunday as the universal day of worship
8. Outlawed heresy

*Victor Constantius, Maximus Augustus, to Eusebius .... Since the city [Constantinople] is rapidly advancing in prosperity in all other respects, that the number of churches should also be increased. Do you therefore receive with all readiness my determination on this behalf. I have thought it expedient to instruct you to order fifty copies of the sacred scriptures ... to be written on prepared parchment in a legible manner, ... by profession transcribers thoroughly practiced in the their art,... [and that they] be completed with as little delay as possible.*

# F. Fourth Century

3. **Eusebius** (A.D. 325). Constantine commissions Eusebius to write 50 copies of Scripture. This forced Eusebius to decide what was Canonical Scripture. He concluded the following:

- ***Undisputed writings***: Four Gospels, Acts, fourteen letters of Paul (including Hebrews), 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation of John.
- ***Disputed writings***: Gospel of Hebrews, James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John.
- ***Not Scripture***: Acts of Paul, Andrew, and John; the Revelation of Peter, Shepherd of Hermas, Barnabas, Didache, Revelation of John (which contradicts his placement of John's Revelation in the undisputed writings), the Gospels of Peter, Thomas, and Matthias.

4. **Athanasius** (A.D. 367). A very important bishop of North Africa wrote a letter to his churches and designated the twenty-seven books of our NT as the canon. Athanasius was probably the first person to use the term “canon.”

5. **Council of Carthage** (A.D. 397). Proclaimed the 27 books of our NT as canon.

6. **The Orthodox Church** did not accept the Revelation of John until about the tenth century.











