

How the Bible Came to Us Organization of the Bible's New Testament

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1. Is the book divinely inspired, a process that includes both the writer and his writing; in essence is the author a man of God?

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For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. (1 Pet 1:16, NASB)

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3. Does the author tell the truth about God?

Unique to the New Testament is that its authors were contemporaneous of each other, knew each other personally, and had a shared experience with Jesus Christ. The New Testament canon developed within a short period of time, because the hearers of the first century recognized that the writers were revealing the word of God; thus, the canon was established before it was formally recognized or fixed by any church council.

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. (1 Thes 2:13, NASB)

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Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet 3:14-18, NASB)

When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea. (Col 4:16, NASB)

4. Does the book come with the power God?

The New Testament canon is the inauguration and prophetic fulfillment of God's New Covenant. Here salvation is only possible through the work of atonement by the Son of God. Jesus Christ's sacrifice is the only means and power to avert the wrath of God His Father.

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:14-17, NASB)

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The physician historian Luke

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Cor 12:1-7, NASB)

As the New Testament writers attested to what they saw, heard, investigated, and learned from divine sources, their works were collected and preserved by the early church. If written by a prophet or apostle of God, the work was God's word, and it must be preserved. Several factors pressed the early church to collect and quickly codify the New Testament canon.

1. The early Christian church and their leaders needed to know the theological and ethical norms demanded by God, and the solution to practical problems of the church. The writings were read, circulated, collected, and quoted as part of Scripture; they supplemented the Old Testament.

Prescribe and teach these things. Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. (1 Tim 4:11-13, NASB)

2. The problem of heresy and false teaching was prevalent and contemporaneous with the apostles, and their supernatural abilities and stature attracted the unsavory for personal gain and false teaching.

When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. (Acts 13:6-8, NASB)

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3. Persecution, imprisonment, and death motivated the early church to copy, distribute, and hide canonical material so that it wouldn't be lost. This is in contrast to the early beginnings of the Hebrew Old Testament which didn't have such pressures until much later. Early Christianity would experience persecution from its beginning until Constantine the Great, who would become a Christian in 313 A.D.

Agrippa I, ruler of Judea (41-44 A.D.) effectively becomes the "King of the Jews," and supports Jewish suppression of the Christian sect of Judaism. The apostle James, the son of Zebedee who was Jesus' first disciple, is killed by the sword in 44 A.D. and the apostle Peter is arrested (Acts 12:2-5).

The Roman emperor Nero (54-68 A.D.) accused Christians of starting the Great Fire of Rome to remove suspicion from himself, and many were executed "by being thrown to the beasts, crucified, and being burned alive."

...To get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44)

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Validation of the New Testament canon can be seen in examples of other authors quoting others:

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The apostolic Fathers (first generation of leaders after the apostles and disciples of them) would add their mark of validation with extensive reference to and quotations of the gospels, Acts, and the epistles. As early as the second century, New Testament translations confirmed the list of canonical books, and for the first 500 years of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament existence, virtually all of them were quoted as authoritative and recognized as canonical by the younger contemporaries of the church Fathers.

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Teacher Notes

It takes a knowledgeable and skillful teacher to present this type of lesson without losing the attention span of students. If one is to attempt this, take the time to study, prepare, and plan your approach. It might also be worthwhile to consider teaching this material over 2 class periods.

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