



How did we Get the Bible?

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**A basic question:
How do we know anything at all from history?**

Some historians distort some facts.

But not all historians distort all facts.

Certainty without *absolute* certainty

E.g., how do I know the grocery store doesn't sell poison?

How do I know my parents will let me in the door?

General principles of reliability of “testimony”

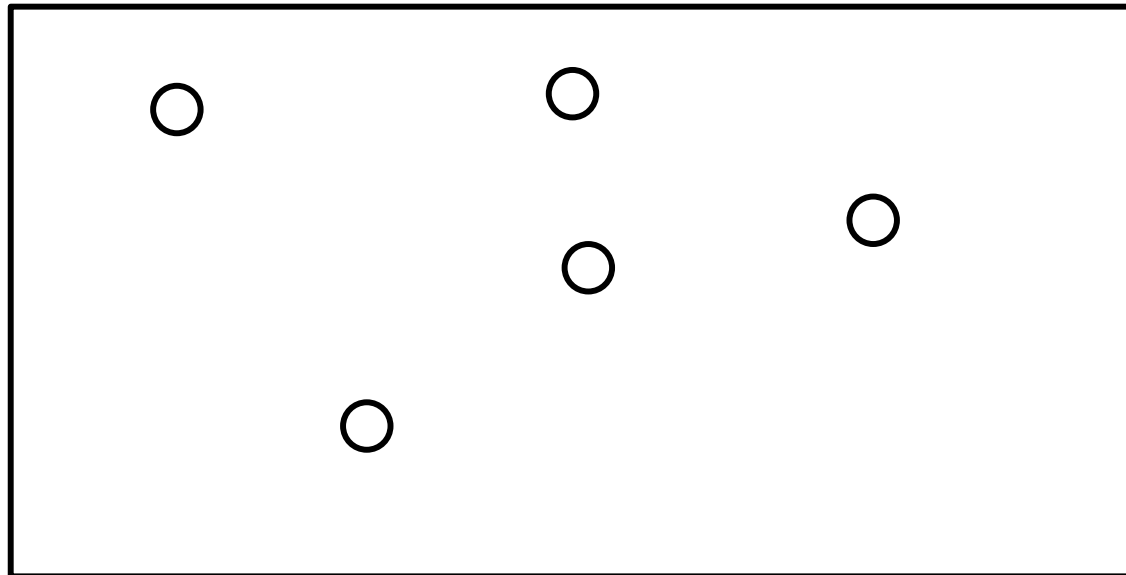
Similar to “hard” sciences

Corroboration

other, independent testimony

physical evidence

theory of “sampling”



General principles of reliability of “testimony”

Consistency

not self-contradictory

Style

historical narrative

allegory

poetry

stylized fiction

Expertise

nearness to events

understanding of events (e.g. tire expert)

Disinterest

but an agenda does not automatically rule out honesty

willingness to suffer for testimony?

The Role of the Spirit

Is it right to apply these tests?

Doesn't the Spirit give us a higher level of certainty?

“Private” revelation: no community, no accountability.

The Bible is a *communal* document.

The Spirit causes us to *respond* to what we have received from the church with faith; he *confirms* the Church's testimony.

“We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts. (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, I.5)

But what have we “received” from the church?

The “Canon” of Scripture

How do we know our canon is the right one?

Does the Church speak with one voice?

The importance of scholarship in the Church.

Original texts: Greek and Hebrew experts

Variant texts from different sources: history and archeology

Disputes about the canon: history and theology

Any proper Bible has “footnotes” discussing variant readings,
variant texts, and disputed texts.

This “uncertainty” should not cause us dismay, but rather confidence
that scholars are doing their jobs. We have “99% certainty” of the texts.

A Basic Overview of the Chain of the Canon

resource: F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (IVP, 1988)

1. Our present canon: identical to that of the Protestant Reformation.
(1500's-1600's)

We have many original copies of books from the Reformation.

The only serious dispute at that time was in regard to the "Apocrypha" (additional books from the Greek "Septuagint" Old Testament).

Catholic church and Anglican church accepted the Apocrypha, but have since "demoted" them to the category of "deuterocanonical."

A Basic Overview of the Chain of the Canon

2. The Reformation took its canon from the books of the Bible established by scholars of the church in the 300's.

We have many copies of works by these scholars, copied by scribes through the Middle Ages. Reliability of these copies is verified by many samples of ancient manuscripts with large parts of the originals.

Two lines of thought:

Athanasius (ca. 320-370)
Jerome (ca. 370-410)

rejected Apocryphal books;
differed with our canon on
a couple of OT books.

NT canon same as ours.

Augustine (ca. 350-390)

accepted Apocryphal books.

NT canon same as ours.

A Basic Overview of the Chain of the Canon

Primary process of transmitting the “canon” is what books were published as the “Biblia” accepted by the churches.

No universal church council made a declaration, though some local ones did, in particular the council of Carthage in 397 (following Augustine). First universal decree was in 500’s (Gelasian decree) and uncontroversial at the time.

3. Scholars in the 300’s based their lists on what was “universally received in the churches.” This was based on communications between many churches. We have many letters to this effect going back to the early 100’s, preserved by historians (esp. Eusebius, ca. 300-340, with many copies) and some samples of transcripts of original letters as old as the 300’s.

A Basic Overview of the Chain of the Canon

4. The testimony of these early letters establishes the standards by which churches accepted books as from God.

Old Testament: What Jesus would have known as the “Scriptures.”

Confusion arose over the Apocrypha books because these were included in the widely-read Greek Septuagint. For many, the Septuagint “was” the OT, and Hebrew was unknown.

All the best Hebrew scholars disputed the Apocrypha, though they viewed some of those books as “helpful.”

New Testament: books consistent with the “what was received from the apostles.”

Many churches had been planted directly by apostles, and had a well-established “rule of faith” (oral catechism) to compare to.

Direct apostolic authorship was not as important as clearly apostolic teaching, and quality of the writing (sense of inspiration).

“Let what you **heard from the beginning** abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.” (1 John 2:24)

“For this is the message that you have **heard from the beginning**, that we should love one another.” (1 John 3:11)

“And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had **from the beginning**—that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.” (2 John 5-6)

“And they devoted themselves to the **apostles’ teaching** and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.” (Acts 2:42)

“For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as **last of all**, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.” (1 Cor. 4:9)

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the **foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Eph. 2:9)

“When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it **has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets** by the Spirit.” (Eph. 3:4-5)

“And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” (Rev. 21:14)

“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when **you received the word of God, which you heard from us**, you accepted it **not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God**, which is at work in you believers.” (1 Th. 2:13)

“Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.” (1 Thess. 4:1)

“What you have **learned and received** and heard seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” (Phil. 4:9)

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, **which you received, in which you stand**, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.” (1 Cor. 15:1)

“As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you **a gospel contrary to the one you received**, let him be accursed.” (Gal. 1:9)

Details of the NT Canon

Books universally received by the 100's	Books known but not universally received until 200's	"Helpful" books accepted as inspired by some churches
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Four Gospels• Acts• 13 Letters of Paul (7 churches, 3 friends)• 1 John• 1 Peter• James	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hebrews• 2 Peter• 2 John and 3 John• Jude• Revelation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Shepherd by Hermas• The Didache

Details of the NT Canon

Hebrews. Disputed because of anonymity (few attributed it to Paul), but universally agreed to be apostolic in origin, sometimes attributed to Barnabas, sometimes to another close associate of Paul.

Jude. Disputed because it quotes a clearly non-canonical book, the prophecy of “Enoch.” Some were led to accept Enoch, others rejected Jude. Eventually accepted that Jude’s quote does not imply his acceptance of prophecy of Enoch as authentic.

2 Peter. Disputed because of similarities of 2 Peter 2 with Jude. Jude may have been quoting 2 Peter as he does several other sources.

2 and 3 John. Disputed because they seem more “local” than 1 John.

Revelation. Reported by several writers to have been written before Gospel of John; Gospel of John reported as a later collaboration of several apostles. Accepted as from apostolic age, but disputed because some disliked its content.

Details of the NT Canon

Note that churches were much more likely to *reject* books under question than to adopt new ones. Emphasis on trusted witness and universality.

popular but rejected:

The Shepherd. Clearly recognized as 2nd century vision of Christian slave and not apostolic. Transmitted as “helpful” by many churches because it supported as ascetic and mystical version of Christianity. (Viewed somewhat like *Pilgrim’s Progress*.) Only “one repentance” allowed for Christians– like “holiness doctrine” of some charismatic churches.

The Didache. Clearly recognized as 2nd century compilation of apostolic ethics and liturgy. Probably accurate, but derived from earlier writings and oral tradition. (Mostly like NT but extra details such as forbidding abortion and pedophilia.)

The Gnostics

Many other books created in the late 100's and 200's by Gnostic groups. All soundly rejected by the churches which claimed to have the apostolic tradition.

Gnostics not always organized; also influenced Christian groups. (Like "New Age" today.) Related to "mystery cults." Some elements of teachings already appeared in late 1st century (1 John).

Characteristics:

- Rejected physical world. Could imply either extreme asceticism ("will worship") or extreme libertinism (the physical doesn't matter).
- Desired to unify all religions. Thus as Christianity became popular, they incorporated it too and presented themselves as part of it.
- Valued "secret" knowledge, like Masons or Mormons. New books were presented as newly revealed secrets passed on by the apostles.

Influenced the Alexandrian school including Ptolemy and Origen, who founded the mystical, allegorical school of interpretation that dominated the Middle Ages.

Marcionites

Early “dispensationalists” ca. 150: only Luke and the letters of Paul inspired, and even these were edited to remove parts that sounded too Jewish.

Not really influential, but Marcion was wealthy and published many copies of his reduced canon.

Shows that Paul and Gospels were already universally accepted by 150.

“Charismatics”

Not the same as Gnostics, they published “visions” and “heroic fictions” based on their visions. Didn’t present them as apostolic literature, but as lesser words from God.

Contra the claims of some modern revisionists, the books by Gnostics and others were no “secret” and were well known to the churches, but rejected.

General remarks

1. Universal view that “age of the apostles” ended with them; no claims by any to be new apostles, rather only to be transmitting the tradition of the apostles.
2. Universal strong distinction between Word of God and other words. No “evolving” or “creating” the Word of God.

Bible study: Harmony of Gospels published in late 100's
Parallel Old Testament published in late 300's

Many church disputes as early as 100's revolved on exact wording of “Scripture” of NT.

Mystical, allegorical preaching by end of 100's relied on exact words of NT, and also exact canon, e.g. 4 Gospels, 7 cities of Paul.

Persecutions in late 200's demanded giving up Bibles, and many Christians died rather than give them up.

Riot in north Africa in 300's when one word changed in Jerome's OT.

Details of the OT Canon

Our OT canon is based on the Jewish Scriptures in place about 100 years before Christ. Most of our knowledge of this canon is from documents from the late 1st century (e.g. Josephus) and 100's to 200's from both Christian and Jewish sources.

Jewish scholars of the 1st century universally rejected the extra books of the Septuagint (the Apocryphal books) as Scripture, although some viewed them as "helpful."

Jesus and the apostles never quoted from these extra books, although they quoted from the rest of the OT extensively. Apostles sometimes used the Septuagint translation. (Some argue that there are "allusions" to the Apocryphal books in the NT.)

Details of the OT Canon

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5 books of Moses (“Torah”)• Joshua, Judges, Ruth	final form around 1000 BC, time of David (ca. prophet Samuel, who appears to have founded “school of prophets”)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 and 2 Samuel• 1 and 2 Kings (a.k.a. 1,2,3,4 Kings)	final form around 600 BC, time of exile (ca. prophet Jeremiah)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 and 2 Chronicles• Ezra and Nehemiah (a.k.a. 1,2 Ezra/Esdras)	final form around 500 BC, time of return (prophet Ezra)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Isaiah, Jeremiah + Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel (“major prophets”)	final form around 500 BC, time of return two odd stories added to Daniel in Septuagint
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 12 “minor prophets”	final form around 500 BC, time of return

Details of the OT Canon

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5 books of Psalms	final form around 500 BC, time of return
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song (“Wisdom”)	final form around 600 BC, based on much older texts (school of scholars?)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Esther	final form ca. 400 BC disputed by several scholars (no direct mention of name of God, late date) Septuagint adds extra chapters
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tobit, Judith	final form ca. 300 BC included in Septuagint
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah	final form ca. 300 BC included in Septuagint. accepted by Athanasius but not Jerome

Details of the OT Canon

• Wisdom of Ben Sirach (a.k.a Sirach, Ecclesiasticus)	ca. 180 BC included in Septuagint
• 1-4 Macabees appendix	ca. 150 BC, history of downfall of 2 nd temple Judaism and origin of Pharisees. included in Septuagint as
• Wisdom of Solomon	ca. 100 BC included in Septuagint, written in Greek
• Apocalypse of Ezra (a.k.a. 4 Esdras)	ca. 80 AD included in some later OT collections

General remarks on the view of the OT by the Jews before Christ

The Talmud (compiled over many years, ca. 200 BC to 500 AD) is an extensive commentary on the OT, especially the books of Moses. Detailed arguments about the meaning of single words.

The synagogue system in place at the time of Jesus has high regard for the holy Scriptures. “Scribes” worked hard to copy the exact words.

“Law, Prophets, and “Teachings” recognized different eras of revelation but viewed each as inspired and authoritative.

