

# CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE?

What Books  
Belong in the Bible, and  
Who Decides?

CANONIZATION (PART 1)



# SERIES OVERVIEW

- **INSPIRATION:** PART 1. What Does the Bible Mean When It Says It Is Inspired by God? PART 2. How Do We Know that the Bible Is Really Inspired by God?
- **CANONIZATION:** PART 1. What Books Belong in the Bible, and Who Decides? PART 2. How Do We Know that the Books in the Bible Are the Right Ones?
- **TRANSMISSION:** PART 1. If the Original Writings Are Gone, Do We Really Have the Bible? PART 2. What Is Textual Criticism, and Why Does It Matter?

REVISED AND EXPANDED

# A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE



NORMAN L. GEISLER  
WILLIAM E. NIX

ANDREAS J. KÖSTENBERGER

## The HERESY OF ORTHODOXY

HOW CONTEMPORARY CULTURE'S  
FASCINATION WITH DIVERSITY  
HAS RESHAPED OUR UNDERSTANDING  
OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

MICHAEL J. KRUGER

FOREWORD BY T. HOWARD MARSHALL

# WHY ~~SHOULD~~ I TRUST THE BIBLE?



ANSWERS TO REAL QUESTIONS  
AND DOUBTS PEOPLE HAVE  
ABOUT THE BIBLE

**WILLIAM D. MOUNCE**

Author of the bestselling Greek textbook *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*  
Past member of the **ESV** translation team  
Current member of the **NIV** translation team

JOHN D. MEADE & PETER J. GURRY

# SCRIBES & SCRIPTURE

THE AMAZING STORY OF  
HOW WE GOT THE BIBLE

# WHAT IS THE CANON?

- DEFINITION(S): The word “canon” (Gr. *kanon*) originally meant “rule” or “standard” and eventually described the list of inspired writings (Gal 6:16; cf. Mic 7:4 LXX).
- QUESTIONS/REJECTIONS: In ancient and modern times, people have questioned the canon (e.g., Eusebius = undisputed, disputed, spurious, heretical → postmodernism).

[Sir Leigh Teabing replied,] “The Bible is a product of *man*, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book. . . . More than *eighty* gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John among them.”

“Who chose which gospels to include?” Sophie asked.

“Aha!” Teabing burst in with enthusiasm. “The fundamental irony of Christianity! The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great.”

— Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (2003)

# WHAT IS THE CANON?

- **DEFINITION(S):** The word “canon” (Gr. *kanon*) originally meant “rule” or “standard” and eventually described the list of inspired writings (Gal 6:16; cf. Mic 7:4 LXX).
- **QUESTIONS/REJECTIONS:** In ancient and modern times, people have questioned the canon (e.g., Eusebius = undisputed, disputed, spurious, heretical → postmodernism).
- **INSPIRATION-CANONIZATION:** People do not **DEVELOP** the canon. They **DISCOVER** it. God **DETERMINES** it by inspiring only certain books (2 Tim 3:16–17; 2 Thess 2:1–2; Col 4:16).

# ANCIENT STANDARDS

- TESTS: No single person (e.g., Constantine) created the canon. The postapostolic Christians carefully tested what they collected (= apostolicity, orthodoxy, catholicity).
- EXAMPLE: Skeptics claim that naïve (or powerful) people omitted viable “Christian” writings, but scrutiny of “lost gospels/letters” proves fatal (e.g., Gospel of Thomas).

## APOSTOLICITY = WAS IT WRITTEN BY AN APOSTLE OR PROPHET?

“While some of these sayings [in the Gospel of Thomas] may be quite old—may, in fact, go back to Jesus himself—the document as a whole was probably written early in the second century” (Bart Ehrman, *After the New Testament: A Reader in Early Christianity*).



**ORTHODOXY = DOES IT MATCH WITH THE OTHER INSPIRED WRITINGS?**

**“Jesus said, ‘Where there are three gods, they are gods. Where there are two or one, I am with him’” (Gos. Thom. 30). POLYTHEISM?**

**“Jesus said, ‘It is I who am the light which is above them all. It is I who am the all. From me did the all come forth, and unto me did the all extend. Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there’” (Gos. Thom. 77). PANTHEISM?**

**“Jesus said, ‘If those who lead you say to you, “See, the kingdom is in the sky,” then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, “It is in the sea,” then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are that poverty’” (Gos. Thom. 3). GNOSTICISM?**

ORTHODOXY = DOES IT MATCH WITH THE OTHER INSPIRED WRITINGS?

“Simon Peter said to him, ‘Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.’ Jesus said, ‘I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven’”  
(Gos. Thom. 3). MISOGYNISM?

## CATHOLICITY = HAS IT ENJOYED WIDESPREAD USE BY THE CHURCH?

“The Church has four Gospels. Heretics have very many. ... ‘Many have tried’ [Luke 1:1] to write, but only four Gospels have been approved. Our doctrines about the Person of our Lord and Savior should be drawn from these approved Gospels. I know one gospel called *According to Thomas*, and another *According to Matthias*. We have read many others, too, lest we appear ignorant of anything, because of those people who think they know something if they have examined these gospels. But in all these questions we approve of nothing but what the Church approves of, namely only four canonical Gospels” (Origen, *Hom. Luc.* 1.2).

It was not until 1945 that a complete copy of the Gospel of Thomas—a Coptic translation of the Greek original—was discovered. “It was never read, much less acknowledged, by the worldwide church. It was merely the writing of a heretical sect” (William D. Mounce, *Why I Trust the Bible*).

# ANCIENT STANDARDS

- TESTS: No single person (e.g., Constantine) created the canon. The postapostolic Christians carefully tested what they collected (= apostolicity, orthodoxy, catholicity).
- EXAMPLE: Skeptics claim that naïve (or powerful) people omitted viable “Christian” writings, but scrutiny of “lost gospels/letters” proves fatal (e.g., Gospel of Thomas).
- ILLUSTRATION: Ancient and modern Christians do not create the canon any more than Sir Isaac Newton created gravity. We merely discover what God has already determined.

# COMPLETED AND CLOSED!

- **SCRIPTURE:** The result of inspiration and canonization is Scripture(s)—the completed (and collected) writings of God (2 Tim 3:16–17; 2 Pet 3:15–16; cf. Rev 22:18–19).
- **CONFIDENCE:** We need not fear the attacks of critics. Many such “hammers” before them have beat on the “anvil” of Scripture to no avail (= “The Anvil,” John Clifford).
- **EVANGELISM:** As we try to help skeptics, doubters, Catholics, or liberals, one simple question opens the door to further discussion: “What book(s) should be added or removed?”