

Chapter 3

CANONICITY

*"Faithful (is) the Word and worth of unqualified acceptance
...hold fast to the Word which I preached to you
...for I delivered among the first things that I also received..."*
I Timothy 1:15a; I Corinthians 15:2a,3a

The word "canon" has a simple meaning. "It means the list of books contained in scripture, the list of books recognized as worthy to be included in the sacred writings of a worshipping community."¹ The Greek word κανων, (Pronounced - "*kanon*") which gives rise to the term "canonical," seems to be derived from the Hebrew, קֶנֶה (Pronounced - "*kaneh*") — originally referring to an aromatical cane that contained spices used in the worship rituals of Israel. (Isaiah 43:24) In general the term refers to any "reed" whatever (I Kings 14:15; Isaiah 47:3), but in particular it signifies a reed made into an instrument wherewith measurements were taken. (Ezekiel 40:7; 42:16) In like manner, the Greek word, κανων, hence, "canon" properly denotes that which is "over the scales, bringing them to equality." Aristotle used the term in this manner when he said, "By that which is right we know itself, and that which is crooked, for the canon

is judge of both."²

From these original and proper usages of the word is deduced its metaphorical meaning, that is, to signify a "moral rule," or a "measure for direction, trial, and judgment." From this concept, the Christian Scriptures or the written Word of God, came to be known as the CANON. By the term "canon," it is, therefore, intended to infer that the Word of God is the absolutely right, perfect, and *only* rule or guide for the Believer's faith and obedience to the Will of God. As the "absolute canon,"^G the Bible becomes supreme over all ecclesiastical systems and human traditions. As such, any portion of, including the whole of the Bible must be authenticated as the perfect and infallible autograph^G of the Throne Room of God — the literal written copy of the divine viewpoint.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

"Canonicity" is a term which refers to the rules by which it has been determined which documents of the first century Christian community should be included in the Christian Bible. The documents that record and preserve the basis of the Christian Faith must have been clearly documented as having come from God; otherwise, they are no different than any other document produced by men. This is important to the thinking believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, because before he can have absolute confidence in all the principles and concepts of doctrine^G that come from the exposition of the Christian Scriptures, the canonical authority of those documents must be securely established. "Canonical" is a term which refers to documents which have been established through natural and scientific means as coming from God. The science of investigation into the nature of the canon of the Bible is an attempt to discover the true basis of its authority. Some have raised doubts about the full inspiration of the Scriptures because of the human share in their authorship. Therefore, it remains the duty of the student of the Scriptures to demonstrate whether the "authority" of the Scriptures is based on mere mystic hope or on divinely constituted oracles. Far-reaching and determining conditions existed at the time the books of the Bible were written, conditions which must be evaluated if the problem of canonicity is resolved. These divinely designed conditions resulted in the Bible coming together without human design or effort. The Bible came together out of the Christian community's approval of each particular document, based upon the merit of each. This means that no one person or group of persons set out to find 66 suitable books; no one set up a "special" or "ecclesiastical" criteria for what could be in the canon and then went looking for the same. There was no "Bible-forming committee" among these early believers. There simply came to be a traditionally recognized *canon of Scripture* emerging out of the Christian community's contact with Jesus, the Apostles and their experience. This canon has been defended from earliest records by the early church fathers. Compared to every other document of the same general period, the New Testament documents better fulfill the criteria for being absolutely reliable. In turn, the authenticity of the Bible as an historical document, supported by the evidence in *nature and reason*, resulting in a tremendous body of solid evidence, is demonstrated as being of divine origin. Hence, the study of canonicity confirms the authority of the Bible, and, in turn, of Christianity.

CANONICITY AND AUTHORITY

The science of investigation into the nature of the canon of the Bible is an attempt to discover the true basis of its authority. The true authority of the Scriptures of the Christian Bible does not depend upon laws enacted by human governments or ecclesiastical councils. F. F. Bruce states, "It is from its contents, the message, of the book that it derives its value..."³ However, the validity and accuracy of viewing the Bible as the voice of God in all its parts means to accept it as one's final authority for what he believes and how and to what end he conducts his life patterns. Therefore, it is no understatement that since the Scriptures are said to be imbued with the authority of God, and since they were written at the hand of men, and since the content of the canon was, to some extent, determined by men, *it is pertinent and fair to inquire about the nature of the "divine authority"* of these Scriptures and how it comes to reside in these particular writings and not in others.

Some have raised doubts about the full inspiration of Scriptures because of the human share in their authorship. [→Inspiration of Scripture - Chapter number unknown at publishing] Other doubts have been raised concerning the authority of the Scriptures because of the human part exercised in determining what writings should be in the canon. While most believers never think about these questions at all, to the *thinking* believer they at least raise legitimate questions about the documentation of the sources and processes that entered into the assembling of the Christian Bible. Christians have traditionally believed that God used human authors in the writing of Scriptures in such a way so as to reduce the Throne Room viewpoint to writing. God, at the same time, preserved the perfection of its content, while limiting the influence of the imperfections of which human limitations might impose on such writings so that mankind is in possession of the perfect written Word of God. However, to the *thinking* believer, it is not good enough to simply pass the questions of validity off as unimportant, unanswerable, or, worse, under the guise that "no true believer would raise such a question."

Therefore, it remains the duty of the student of the Scriptures to exhibit whether the "authority" of the Scriptures is based on mere mystic hope or on divinely constituted oracles comprising the perfect unity, balance, and completeness of their parts.

CLAIMS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

The study of "the canonicity of the Christian Scriptures" is greatly simplified in that the Scriptures actually exist and the Scriptures declare their own claims; hence, the problem only becomes one of tracing

back from the Scriptures themselves to the point of their inception and authorization. In other words, there is no occasion to theorize as to whether it is possible to assemble such a collection of writings — from many human authors, from different countries and dispersed through many centuries — into one Book. Such a book is here before us!!!

Far-reaching and determining conditions existed at the time the books of the Bible were written, conditions which must be evaluated if the problem of canonicity is resolved. The Scriptures of both Testaments were written when there were exceedingly few literary efforts being produced. There was nothing of the staggering proportions of literature production as today, in fact, there was so little competition that there was little to no need for elimination of anything that anyone wished to publish. The books of the Bible were written in times in which, among those who could write at all, there was minimal motivation to impel or inspire anyone to write. In the case of the Old Testament, the writings were produced, in the main, by men who were in authority over the religious areas of life and, to some extent, over the civil life of the people. These men were the undisputed authorities over the message and laws of Jehovah; indeed, few ever resisted the message as not being a message from Jehovah. They may not have obeyed, but few resisted these men as messengers from Jehovah.

In the case of the New Testament, the writing was performed, for the most part, by men whom Christ had chosen personally, including Paul. The New Testament Scriptures were addressed to a group of despised believers in the Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 1:26-29); however, positive volition to the content of the Scriptures by the believers of the first century became the NATURAL MEANS which had everything to do with what writings became a part of the final form of the canon of the New Testament. Communication of the sum total of written Scripture was restricted in that for many years the writings which were current and effective in one locality did not reach to all localities. All copies were hand written and few could possess these treasures. The portion possessed by the local assembly was preserved with greatest care and its "reading" was a large part of the activity when they assembled together. It is probable that no church came to possess a complete copy of all that enters into the New Testament canon until early in the second century.

THE NATURAL MEANS OF CANONIZATION

By usage of the terminology "natural means" to describe the canonization of the New Testament documents, it is not intended to infer that the canon of Scripture came together by any means which

involved human good, talent, accident, intuition, or mysticism.^G The general process by which both the Old Testament and New Testament canons came together is stated by Jesus Himself as being one which involved Divine Guidance^G through God the Holy Spirit. It is Jesus Who promised "...*the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you*" and "...*when He, the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all categories of truth...*" From this we can derive the basic principle and general process of canonicity for the New Testament. The BASIC PRINCIPLE is that the Lord Jesus Christ "controlled history"^G in such a manner so as to provide the necessary Divine Operating Assets,^G including sending the ministries of God the Holy Spirit,^G so that the Church was able to recognize through the normal and sensible function of the faculties of the soul those documents which are

consistent with the teachings of Jesus and His apostles. For example, this process of normal, sensible and natural analysis of the documents applied to canonicity of the Old Testament was applied by Jesus to those Scriptures of

His day by His imprimatur use of the those Hebrew Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God. But, there is no recorded or implied salient and spectacular revelation, or even inspiration, to the humanity of Jesus as to which documents were worthy of canonicity. In His humanity, Jesus merely grew in "wisdom and stature" so that He came to realize and understand Bible Doctrine^G from those documents which were by the natural process of selection, regarded as divine truth and canonical. It is evident that Jesus simply passed on to His followers, as Holy Scriptures, that memorized list of scrolls which were held with a full knowledge by Jewish contemporaries as being canonical books. The written Word of God does not reveal or imply that "guidance into all truth" by God the Holy Spirit in behalf of the humanity of Jesus, or anyone else, included special and salient means of direction.

With reference to doctrinal content, it is clear that the Word of God is perfect and infallible through the oversight ministry of Inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. This is called the "Verbal-Plenary Inspiration of Scripture." (II Timothy 3:16) However, it is not so clearly revealed, if at all, as to how the ministry of God the Holy Spirit accomplished the CANONIZATION of

the content of the Word of God. F. F. Bruce refers to the dual processes of inspiration and canonization which led to the recognition of the twenty seven books of the New Testament as being canonical, stating, "The historic Christian belief is that the Holy Spirit, who controlled the writing of the individual books, also controlled their selection and collection, thus continuing to fulfill our Lord's promise that He would guide His disciples into all the truth."⁴ This traditional view is one that has been stated over and over, but there is never an explanation of or a recorded event about any *spectacular means* by which God the Holy Spirit established a canonical list of books for the Church. *There is absolutely nothing in the Scriptures themselves which outlines the steps by which canonicity was revealed and established "by the Holy Spirit."* Bruce recognizes that the establishment of the canonical status of a book of the Bible was not a mystical, intuitive, or "spiritual" process, whereby "somehow" the Holy Spirit brought

it all together. He, in fact, compares the inadequacy of the traditional explanation of canonical status being established by the Holy Spirit when he states that it is not sufficient to simply state, "In the name of the holy

The reliability of the Canon of the Christian Scriptures is supported by a tremendous body of solid evidence which demonstrates the divine origin and authority of the Bible, hence, that of Christianity.

Scripture we do understand those canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church."⁵ The problem is that there was a lot of doubt, and for a long period of time, with regard to which documents should be in the canon. Therefore, the "never any doubt" statement is totally untrue. Bruce takes note of the fact that it is only through "historical research"⁶ that one is able to arrive at any conclusion as to origin of the New Testament canon. This knowledge is not arrived at by means of an intuitive, mystical, or "Holy Spirit" experience. This principle applies as much to the first century as to the twentieth.

To say the least, it is a matter of oversimplification to think that a list of twenty-seven books suddenly appeared in history, about which there was never any doubt, as the accepted books of the canon by the Church; that God the Holy Spirit inspired some writer and said, "Here is the list, take it or leave it!" Bruce states, "The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and generally apostolic

authority, direct and indirect.”⁷ This, simply put, is the early Church’s recognition of books as canonical, based on analytical thinking, not on mystical, “spiritual” intuitiveness.

By comparison, just as the Pastor-Teacher in the Post-Canon^G era must only rely on the canon of Scripture [→Chapter One, Atlas of Theology] and study through the normal-natural processes and laws of hermeneutics^G in order to “get his message,” [there being no bonafide post-completed-canon period “inspiration of the Holy Spirit”] so also, the books that were worthy of canonicity were recognized by means of the normal-natural process of linguistic and analytical examination of the texts for consistency with the teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

In fact, there were several clear spiritual, intellectual and analytical steps in the process of canonization which covered a wide variety of individuals, situations and years of time. A simple outline of those steps may be safely delineated as follows:

1. Those involved in any facet of the Christian Way of Life which will be acceptable to the norms and standards of the Righteousness of God must meet the basic minimal requirements of that Righteousness:
 - Must be a born again^G believer;
 - Must be under the "full control"^G of the Holy Spirit;
 - Must be positive^G to the authority^G, content^G, and mechanics^G of Bible Doctrine;
 - Must be aggressive in assimilation of Bible Doctrine into the soul and application of the same to history.

This includes those believers to whom would have fallen the privilege and responsibility of discerning which documents possessed “an innate worth and were of apostolic authority, direct and indirect.”

2. By means of the function of the above inscripturated^G Christian Way of Life^G requirements, the believer of the early Church, simply put, came to a recognition of certain books as canonical based on analytical thinking, not on mystical, “spiritual” intuitiveness.
3. The canonization of the Old Testament Scriptures is finalized by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, as described above.
4. The canonization of any New Testament Scripture begins with the establishment of the spokesman himself as an authentic and authorized messenger

sent from God, namely, either an apostle or one authorized by an apostle. Therefore, determination of the identity of authorized messengers involves identification of men with the Gift of Apostleship.^G

5. In turn, certification by an apostle that a given document is inspired and is to be accepted as the very Word of God is secured by simple apostolic attestation within the content of those writings themselves or by the testimony of reliable witnesses as to such.
6. This includes repeated apostolic exhortations for public reading (teaching and communication) of their writings. For example, I Thessalonians 5:27 commands that this letter be “read to all Christians” and in 2:13 Paul commends the recipients for their ready acceptance of his spoken word as “the word of God.” Other examples include:

“And as the occasion arises, this letter is to be read, exegeted, and explained exactly before and in the presence of you all; execute this command in the assembly of the Laodiceans, and the one from Laodicea in order that it also might be circulated and exegeted and explained to you all.” Colossians 4:16

“Happy is the one that exegetes and they that hear the communication of the words of this prophecy and guard those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”
Revelation 1:3

Compare II Peter 3:15-16 in which Paul’s letters are included with “the other Scriptures.” Since Peter’s letter is a general letter, widespread knowledge of Paul’s letters is thereby implied.

Compare I Timothy 5:18 in which Paul follows the formula “the Scripture says” by combining Deuteronomy 25:4 with Luke 10:7. Thus, an equivalence is implied between Old Testament and New Testament Scripture.

7. Therefore, the historic process by which the Christian community arrived at an agreement on a final list of canonical documents was a gradual and continuous one which involved no salient and spectacular methods by which God the Holy Spirit emblazoned in the sky, or in stone, or by a “warm feeling,” which books were to be canonical. “The first steps in the formation of a canon of authoritative Christian books, worthy to stand beside the Old Testament canon, which was the Bible of the Lord and His apostles, appear to have

been taken about the beginning of the second century, when there is evidence of the circulation of two collections of Christian writings in the Church.”⁸

8. There are discernible stages along the way. In the first century, the documents were composed by Apostles or their associates. Wide spread information regarding which documents had been authenticated by apostolic authority became common knowledge. By A.D. 95 Clement of Rome wrote to the Christians in Corinth using a free rendering of material from Matthew and Luke. He seems to be strongly influenced by Hebrews and is obviously familiar with Romans and Corinthians. There are also reflections of I Timothy, Titus, I Peter, and Ephesians.⁹

Therefore, the process by which the Canon of Scripture came into existence includes, first and foremost, understanding of the key — Divine Inspiration.^G The first stage of establishing the canonical status of a document includes application to that material the Doctrine of Verbal Plenary Inspiration. This is the function of God the Holy Spirit which secures absolute perfection and infallibility. ***It is to this absolute consistency, secured by God the Holy Spirit, which the Church clearly looked in their analysis of which documents were to be included in the canon.*** Therefore, the foundation of all canonicity is that the document must stand the test of exegetical, categorical and isagogical comparisons without a single flaw. By this process of elimination the materials to be compared were gathered for determination of authentic material. ***The second stage in the process occurred through quite a natural process of linguistic analysis of the doctrinal and historical content and comparing that material with the ever-widening circle of commonly known facts regarding its origin.*** Fisher states, “it is neither safe nor sound to say that recognition and reception was an intuitive matter ... hence the early church, with closer ties and greater information than is available to us today, examined the testimony of the ancient.”¹⁰ The key phrase here is, “with greater information.”¹⁰ Therefore, by means of the normal intellectual function of information, not by salient and spectacular “spiritual intuitiveness,” Fisher states, “...they were able to discern which were the authentic and authoritative books by their apostolic origin ... historically the procedure was essentially one of acceptance and approval of those books which were vouched for by knowledgeable church leaders.”¹¹

The “function of knowledgeable church leadership” refers to the fact that divine guidance^G in any area, including selection of canonical materials of the Word of God, is inseparably linked to a knowledge of the will of God. Therefore, divine guidance entered

the picture of selection of documents as canonical by church leadership in direct relation to their knowledge of the Apostolic teaching of the “mind of Christ.”^G This means that they readily recognized what was consistent and what was not consistent with the teachings of Jesus, hence; truth. This is not a salient and spectacular ministry of God the Holy Spirit; rather, they merely obeyed the procedures which they had been taught and commanded for determination of what is truth and what is not.

“Accordingly then, members of the Royal Family of God, stand in obedience and hold firmly in your possession the traditions which you have been taught, whether by verbal communication or by letters from us.” 11 Thessalonians 2:15

“Now I commend you, because, you have remembered all the things from the source of me, and according to a standard you have kept the teachings, taught to you for your advantage.” 1 Corinthians 11:2

Therefore, “natural means” is based on the fact that first century believers, originally divided into many individual groups and assemblies, could not have been concerned about a “canon list” per se or what belonged to a canon. They simply knew that they were in possession of documents which were consistent with what Jesus and the Apostles had taught and that these Scriptures provided a source of satisfaction of their intellectual need to be able to interpret history which, in turn, led to their secure prosperity. Therefore, by means of the natural appreciation for bits and pieces of copies which were consistent with the traditional teachings of Jesus and the Apostles, and which were able to fill their intellectual need to interpret history, a canon or what belonged to a canon, gradually began to be recognized among believers. Therefore, without design or effort the canon came to exist, consisting of copies of writings which had come to be approved upon the particular merit of each portion separately. This means that no person or group of persons set out to find 66 suitable books. No one set up a “special” or “ecclesiastical” criteria for what could be in the canon and then went looking for the same. Therefore, the canon of Christian Scriptures appeared on the historical scene through the “natural means,”^G that is, without strife or design or consciously seeking to establish the same.

Therefore, without consciousness as to what was going on in this momentous thing which they were doing, the early church selected the content of the canon by the criteria of not only adopting what was available, but adopting those portions of writings which carried peculiar merit of giving absolute norms

and standards for the interpretation of history. There is no reason to believe that there was anything that would correspond to a "Bible-forming committee" among these early believers. While it is natural that some did contest certain parts, the canon of 66 books stands now, as it did by the time of the early second century a.d., distinguished and obeyed as Holy Scripture.

Since no record exists as to what church first acquired a complete Bible and no records exist as to how an assembly came to know about and receive a new installment, the manner in which the New Testament canon was formed was wholly natural; yet, the thing achieved was just as wholly supernatural.

DAYS OF CHRIST AND CANONICITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

By the time of the days of Christ's ministry on the earth, the Old Testament canon, as in the case of the New Testament, had come together by means of natural selection.⁶ No one person or group of persons had acted with authority in the selection of the books which were to constitute a canon to be obeyed. Rather, by the same natural process of appreciation and subsequent collection of those writings which were particularized by quality, consistency, loyalty to the absolute answers and interpretation of history, the Old Testament canon came together. So much so, that by the time of Jesus and the first century church, the Old Testament was accepted with binding supremacy as is evident by the extent and manner in which the New Testament quotes the Old.

USE OF THE TERM "CANON" IN THE ANCIENT CHURCH:

The very fact that a "canon" of Scripture is referred to by the early church in defence of its basic doctrinal tenants, confirms the fact that the ancient church understood certain documents to be "canonical," and therefore, that other documents were not to be considered authoritative in Christian matters. In fact, Christianity would have been destroyed and, like the Roman religious system, incorporated other religions into it, had it not fought for its purity. In fact, there were several efforts to alter the character of Christianity by attempting to add other religious systems in part or in whole. An example is the Gnostic attack, about which Robert Baker states, "During the several centuries after the apostolic era Christian writers fought savagely against this system (Gnosticism) which would deny the true deity as well as the true humanity of Christ ... the very fact that Christians answered the attacks of Gnosticism provided a valuable source of literature which mirrored the condition of Christianity in the second and third

centuries ... it became necessary for Christianity to define its essential elements ... (which led to) [emphasis added] the various churches gathering together the writings of the apostles and primitive Christians and formed the canon (rule), or inspired writings. These writings had been tested in the crucible of daily living. It is true that a council of churches did not recognize this collection officially until some time later, but from the writings of various Christian leaders it is apparent that Christians of this period recognized as inspired the books that are now included in the New Testament."¹²

The synod of Laodicea, held later, sometime between 341 and 381 a.d., makes one of the first actual mentions of the term "canon" as a thing which had been generally admitted and used among the Christian community. It instructed, "That no private psalms ought to be said or read in the church, nor any uncanonical books, but only the canonical books of the New and Old Testament."¹³ Several other uses of the term began at this period in the Church at Antioch with the exposition of Paulus Samosatenus, who was charged with "departing from the canon or rule of Scripture."¹⁴ The term had been used some time before this by Ireneus (c.175), Chrysostom (c.344), and Augustine (354-430).¹⁵ Much later, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), one of the most famous influences on Roman Catholic thinking,¹⁶ believed that "Revelation is contained in the Scriptures, which are the only final authority; but they are to be understood in the light of the interpretation of the councils and the Fathers — in a word, as comprehended by the church."¹⁷ He acknowledged that the Scripture came to be called "canonical," because it is the rule of our understanding in the things of God.¹⁸

Therefore, not only was there a recognized **canon of Scripture**, but the criteria for becoming canonical has been defended from earliest records by the early church fathers. These include, Athanasius (c.296-373), Rufinus Tyrannius (345-410), and Augustine, (354-430), the latter stating, "Not without good reason is the ecclesiastical canon determined by wholesome diligence, unto which certain books of the prophets and apostles should belong."¹⁹ There have been many differences in various aspects of the church since the synod of Carthage, (c.258 ?) down through the last Council of Constantinople (879), but *the one thing that has remained consistent is that from the first century church to the present day, the mainstream of thought has long accepted the canon as we know it*. There has been little exception, and then, with regard to only one or two of the books of the New Testament.

Consequently, from this ancient defence of the "canonical nature" of documents as constituting the sum total of the Christian Scriptures, i.e., the rise and use of the term "canon," it is evident that the ancients

had a specific criteria for arriving at such a conclusion. Two things constituted canonicity: (1) the “*spring*” or “*origin*” of any book and (2) the “*design*” and “*objective*” of any book.

THE "SPRING" OR "ORIGIN" OF BOOKS ACCEPTED INTO THE CANON:

The priority rule of any book being accepted as canonical was that it must bear evidence of having been “θεοπνευστος” (Greek: pronounced - *theopneustos*), meaning “God-breathed.” (II Timothy 3:16) “God-breathed” means that it must give evidence of having been given by immediate inspiration of God. Without “*theopneustos*,” no book or writing can by any means attain any acceptance, approbation or any usefulness to the Church. This point of determining canonical status of a book refers to the process of **establishing the foundation of authority of any document** proclaimed to be Scripture. The question being, “What is the basis of the authority of any document over the faith and practice of the Christian Church?” John Owen stated it as, “It is the impress of the authority of God Himself on any writing, or its proceeding immediately from Him, that is sufficient for this purpose.”²⁰ By “impress of God” is meant that the canonical status of a document is determined when it becomes obvious that the “original of divine inspiration” has been “...designed by the Holy Spirit for the catholic, (general community of believers, emphasis added) standing use and instruction of the church, then any writing or book becomes absolutely and completely canonical.”²¹ Yet, it was recognized that this *subjective* rule alone would not suffice to render an objective verdict on all “revelation” or “writing” as being “God-breathed,” hence, as absolutely canonical. The *objective* rule of “spring” or “origin,” which determines whether a document or book sprang from divine inspiration is primarily based on the principle of the “chain of custody” of that book. That is, under the ordinary rules of investigation,^{A5} the question is, “Does a book appear to arise from a divinely inspired source?” There are **FOUR BASIC RULES** for determining “spring” or “origin” of documents, or, in the case of the Bible, determination of which of the ancient Christian documents are of divine “inspiration” and/or determining the authenticity of the claims therein:

RULE ONE: WAS THE ULTIMATE SOURCE (primary witness) ABLE TO TELL THE TRUTH?

This rule becomes one of the criteria by which the testimony of New Testament witnesses are judged as to reliability^G and as to whether their writings should be accepted as canonical books. It addresses the writer's:

- ❖ **COMPETENCY:** Was the witness competent to give competent testimony? Such determination is to be based on the witnesses' expertise, state of mental and physical health, age, education, memory, narrative skill, etc.
- ❖ **DEGREE OF ATTENTION:** Was the witness able or unable to see things clearly and as a whole?
- ❖ **DANGER OF LEADING QUESTION:** Was the witness asked argumentative or loaded questions, denoting an expected answer rather than the truth?
- ❖ **REASONING IN A CIRCLE:** Did the witness reason from a premise back to the same premise again?
- ❖ **EGOCENTRISM:** Does the witness emphasize what he thinks as most pertinent?

COMPARED TO EVERY OTHER DOCUMENT OF THE SAME GENERAL PERIOD, THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCUMENTS FULFILL THE CRITERIA OF HAVING BEEN RECORDED AND PRESERVED BY BETTER "WITNESSES" THAN ANY OTHER DOCUMENT IN EXISTENCE. [→Biblical Witness Able - Chapter 2, pp.5-6]

RULE TWO: WAS THE PRIMARY WITNESS WILLING TO TELL THE TRUTH?

This rule becomes one of the criteria by which the testimony of New Testament witnesses are judged as to reliability and as to whether their writings should be accepted as canonical books. It addresses the writer's self-interest:

- ❖ **INTERESTED WITNESS:** Will the witness benefit the most from his own testimony?
- ❖ **BIASED WITNESS:** Will the witness stand to loose most from his testimony?

COMPARED TO EVERY OTHER COMPARABLE DOCUMENT OF THE FIRST CENTURY, THE WITNESSES WHO RECORDED THE STORY OF CHRIST DEMONSTRATE UNIMPEACHED CONFORMITY TO THE RULES OF "WILLINGNESS."

However, all do not agree. Skeptics, like Hermann Reimarus (1694-1768), an extreme German rationalist, would have us to believe that the disciples of Jesus perpetrated a lie and hoax on the world by saying that Jesus had risen from the dead and promised that He would come back and rule over his followers in peace and prosperity. Reimarus thought that the Gospel writers “...recounted with intent to deceive...” the miracles^G and resurrection of Jesus Christ and that “...all His super human characteristics a creation of myth.”²²

This means that we are asked to believe that the eleven immediate disciples, after the death of Jesus, concocted the story of the resurrection and then lived with it the rest of their lives, and so far as the record

is able to bring it to us, all but the Apostle John died a martyr's death. We are asked to believe, first, that 10 of the eleven went to a cross and other means of horrible death and they were told this, "We will spare you if you will recant and admit that this whole thing is a concocted myth." But, instead, everyone of them died for something that he knew to be a hoax. One is caused to wonder, if they were trying to keep a good thing going, what in the world was the good thing? Was it all the money they made from it? Was it all the respect and good treatment they received? Was it all the travel and the great motels they stayed in? II Corinthians chapter eleven documents all the suffering that these Apostles of Christ endured — for the sake of a hoax?

Secondly, we are asked to believe that literally hundreds of people were in on the plot (The Apostle Paul says that there were 500 together at one appearance of Jesus after the Resurrection) and that they lied about the resurrection of Jesus; and furthermore, not one of them broke ranks. Is this scholarship, or philosophical bias and prejudice — wishful thinking? [→Biblical Witness Willing - Chapter 2, p. 6]

RULE THREE: IS THE PRIMARY WITNESS ACCURATELY REPORTED WITH REGARD TO THE DETAIL UNDER EXAMINATION?

This rule becomes one of the criteria by which the testimony of New Testament witnesses are judged as to reliability and as to whether their writings should be accepted as canonical books. It addresses the writer's preconceived notions and style:

❖ **BIAS:** Did the witness insert bias, desire to please or displease, etc.? The fact that the New Testament writers are free from violation of this rule is evidenced by what happened to them because of their writings and stand for Christianity? Every one of them was Jewish (except possibly Luke) and all of them were excommunicated

from the local synagogues for what they said and recorded. In turn, they found it difficult to make a living; suffered unthinkable hardship because of their stand against the traditional thinking of religion^G and the times. Therefore, flattery was hardly the motive of these writers. (Galatians 1:10)

❖ **LITERARY STYLE:** Does the literary style distort the truth by the use of slogans, clichés, picturesque speech, etc.? Again, the New Testament writers consistently wrote in the remarkable "**κοινή**" Greek (pronounced - *koine*) — the plain and simple language of the street. [èHistorical Accuracy - Chapter 2, p. 7.]

RULE FOUR: IS THERE ANY INDEPENDENT CORROBORATION OF THE DETAIL UNDER EXAMINATION?

This rule becomes one of the criteria by which the testimony of New Testament witnesses are judged as to reliability and as to whether their writings should be accepted as canonical books. It addresses the issues of corroboration, plagiarism, and self-prejudice:

❖ **MULTIPLICATION OF COPIES:** Much of the "independent corroboration" comes under and from The Law of the Multiplication of Copies.

❖ **DISSIMILARITY:** "Independent" corroboration also arises out of the fact that even though each of the accepted canonical books is similar in content and aim and manner, there are enough differences and dissimilarities that they cannot be accounted for by simply having been copied from a single source, e.g., each of the four Gospel accounts when compared.

❖ **SELF NEGLECT:** Such corroboration also arises out of the fact that the writers either ignore self completely (as in Hebrews) or they record prejudicial statements against themselves. In light of the fact that it is not human nature to say, much less record, bad things about oneself, this feature is generally regarded by the historian as evidence of a true and accurate account of the entirety of the situation and circumstances of the affairs being related. [→Categories of Proof - Chapter 2, pp. 9-10]

THE "DESIGN" AND "OBJECTIVE" OF BOOKS ACCEPTED INTO THE CANON:

The "design" and "objective" of the New Testament writers are often revealed by the records of

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has to this date been refuted by an
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the ancient controversy over canonical books. These controversies are recorded as the Constantinopolitan

council in Trulla which confirmed the canons of both the synod of Laodicea and the third of Carthage. In these Councils, at first, the term "canon" is used very loosely. It was eventually used, however, in referring to the rules and regulations set up for the "reading" of both actual books (epistles), and the stories of the sufferings of the martyrs. The latter, which were added to the canon by the synod of Laodicea, are rejected by Melito, Origen, Athanasius, Hilarius, Gregorius Nazianzen, Cyrillus Hierosolymitanus, Epiphanius, Rufinus, Jerome, Gregorius Magnus, and others.²³ Therefore, the reading and citation of such

"stories" is generally declared by them to have been ONLY FOR DIRECTION OF MANNERS, AND NOT FOR THE CONFIRMATION OF THE FAITH. "Confirmation of faith," i.e., Bible doctrine, was to be confined to those books which had by then been established as "The Canon." Therefore, while the term "canon" was used loosely, there was also a clear division between those "books" which contained actual doctrinal principles and those which contained mere experiences of application or non-application of that doctrine.

For example, Athanasius states, "They [experiences of the suffering of martyrs] are not canonical, but are only read to the catechumeni."²⁴ Further, Jerome says the church reads them, "...for the edification of the people, but not for the confirmation of any points of faith."²⁵ Therefore, from this practice and application of discernment we can see that the early church fathers were able to discern that the books which were adopted as canonical should be "instructive" in nature, rather than merely, "informative." Lindanus aptly observes this when he speaks of those who tried to bring in books which did not meet the above criteria, saying, "They defile themselves with the impiety of sacrilege who endeavor to bring in, as it were, various degrees into the body of the Scriptures; for by the impious discretion of human folly, they would cast the one voice of the Holy Spirit into various forms of unequal authority."²⁶

EVIDENCES FOR CONFORMITY TO THE RULES OF CANONICITY

Evidences from ancient times regarding the documents of the Christian Bible are not only in abundance but they confirm that the canon of Christian Scriptures does conform completely and totally to the above FOUR RULES. Therefore, the authenticity of the Bible as an historical document, supported by the evidence in **nature** and **reason**, resulting in a tremendous body of solid evidence, demonstrates the divine origin and authority of the Bible, hence, that of Christianity.

Although a number of difficulties can be lodged against this conclusion, there does exist reasonable solutions to all of these and the difficulties do not in any case undermine the solid foundation of evidence supporting the Christian faith. Therefore, the question of the divine inspiration of Scripture and the authenticity of the documents containing that Scripture in hand is to be considered firmly established by acceptance of the following list of evidences:

1. The uniqueness of Christianity in that it is founded on historical events rather than merely on ethical teachings.

2. The strength of the Christian Documents lies in the fact that the written records of "Christian origins" are available in far greater variety, antiquity and number than are many other personages or happenings in the whole of history of the world prior to the invention of printing.

3. Indirect confirmations of the documents entails the fact that the general authenticity of the events reported in the New Testament has been amply verified by close examination of consistencies of the writings and also by external researches into the history and archaeology of the time.

NO STATEMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT HAS TO THIS DATE BEEN REFUTED BY AN UNQUESTIONED FIND OF SCIENCE OR HISTORY.

4. Attempts to discredit the sincerity of the New Testament writers in their recording the message of the life and times of Jesus Christ by charging them with fraud have utterly failed. Considerations of fraud are discredited in light of the fact that:

❖ "Conspiracy" among such a large number of people, of such diversity, so as to render such collaboration about a "tale of a supernatural Savior-King" is almost completely impossible.

❖ Evidences of collusion are notably absent in the writings themselves and/or in the writings of others about the Bible.

❖ Rather than confining their writings to generalities and to private events in their own lives which would make it more difficult to detect error or fraud, the records teem with references to public events, places, dates, and other matters which are confirmable by accessible secular knowledge.

❖ The atmosphere of the writings is pervaded with an unadulterated conviction on the part of the authors.

❖ The crowing proof of sincerity — free from adulteration and hypocrisy — is the fact that the New Testament authors were willing to suffer and die for their convictions. Others have also died for their convictions, but not for a practical joke or a hoax.

5. The sanity of the writers has been called into question. Could the writers, even though sincere, have been simply mistaken, subject to mass delusion or hysteria, or simply highly unstable, therefore, easily convinced by their own emotions that they were seeing supernatural manifestations? Were they gullible, deluded by slight-of-hand artistry and clever persuasion? The miraculous events seem to be the hardest to

believe, therefore, were the writers merely amenable to mass hallucination or mass deception? The facts which suggest the validity of the miracles include:

- ❖ They were performed in the open, among crowds of people, not in isolation or in dark corners or under controlled circumstances.
- ❖ They were reported in a great variety of times and places, by many different people of varied backgrounds and characteristics.
- ❖ They were written up by men who were clearly not the type of men subject to credulity or hallucinations.
- ❖ They were accepted by great numbers of people, who, because of the intense persecution they endured for their faith, should have certainly had every reason to analyze and test very critically the claims made concerning Christ by the early apostles.

Question: Is it conceivable they could have persisted in their faith if there were any grounds for believing the Apostles to be nothing but deluded fanatics?

6. The New Testament has been demonstrated as being historically accurate. This discussion entails a somewhat different, but nonetheless powerful line of proof of the validity of the New Testament portrait of Christ. The New Testament documents record a number of statements which have proved to be totally accurate for 2,000+ years.
7. The Canon of Scripture known as the "Old Testament" has proven to stand the test of time as the divinely inspired Word of God. The exact process by which these 39 books came to be "canonized" is not known, any more than the process by which the New Testament books were later accepted. The most realistic conclusion is that each book was essentially self-authenticating by the fact that it gave the absolutes which answered the questions regarding the interpretation of history, the origin, regulation, and ultimate destiny of history. In the absence of an official political or ecclesiastical determination of their character, the fact that they gave the absolute interpretation of history which satisfied the desire for the truth about history, is the only reasonable way to account for their universal acceptance. The question, then, is how the "Scriptural writings" could have ever become so universally accepted as authentic among the Jews if, in fact, they were not authentic. The conclusion is, therefore, that the manuscript evidence of

textual accuracy back to the very time of its completion and the universal acceptance by those who used it as authentic and divinely inspired, both Jews and Christians, means that the 39 books of the Old Testament should be taken at face value until some clear evidence of fraud or forgery or falsehood comes to light.

The "higher critic" deals at great length with the details of grammar, vocabulary and style, but none of these speculations can offset the universal testimony of the ancient Jews and the early church and especially that of Christ Himself, that the writings are authentic. While space will not allow us to discuss in detail the grammar and vocabulary questions raised by the "higher critic," it should be noted, however, that all such critical speculations have been thoroughly answered and refuted by conservative Bible Scholars.

Dr. Robert Dick Wilson, long time Professor of Semitic Philology at Princeton Seminary, proficient in 45 languages and dialects, and probably more intimately familiar with the Hebrew Old Testament than any man of his generation (who died in 1930) summarizes,

"In conclusion, we claim that the assaults upon the integrity and trustworthiness of the Old Testament along the line of language have utterly failed. The critics have not succeeded in a single line of attack in showing that the diction and style of any part of the Old Testament are not in harmony with the ideas and aims of the writers who live at, or near, the time when the events occurred that are recorded in the various documents ... We boldly challenge these Goliaths of ex-cathedra theories to come down into the field of ordinary concordances, dictionaries, and literature, and fight a fight to the finish on the level ground of the facts and the evidence."²⁷

8. The Geographical and Historical Accuracy of the Old Testament: Critics are far more eager to cast doubt on the Bible than on any other ancient book and they have systematically refused to accept its historicity at any point unless there is a large amount of external supporting evidence. The 19th Century "higher critics," for example, denied the historicity of the Hittites, the Horites, the Edomites, and various other peoples, nations, and cities mentioned in the Bible, for the expressed reason that other ancient historians did not mention them. This is called the "argument from silence." This argument has long since been defeated by the archaeologist's shovel and brush, and few critics any longer dare to question the geographical and ethnological reliability of the

Bible. The same is true of the histories of the kings and empires, the conquest of Canaan by Joshua, the destruction of Jericho; the Davidic-Solomonic empire, the histories of the kings of Israel and Judah, the Babylonian captivity and the return from exile, are all now considered to be historical. *Nothing at all exists in ancient literature which has been even remotely as well confirmed in accuracy as has the Bible.*

9. The Testimony of Christ: The New Testament records represent Jesus Christ to be the perfect and infallible Son of God. As such, He must also have been perfect Son of Man, sinless and without defect. All the New Testament writers claimed Him to be perfect in knowledge and power, plus, He Himself claimed these things to be true. That being true, His own evaluation of the accuracy and reliability of the Old Testament Scriptures is of supreme determinative importance, especially to those who profess to believe in Christ. It is, therefore, significant and there is no question at all about the fact that Jesus Christ accepted the Old Testament Scriptures throughout as both historically authentic and divinely inspired.

The same is true of all the writers of the New Testament as evidenced by the fact that there are at least 320 direct quotations from the Old Testament in the New, always cited of absolute authority, in addition to hundreds of other allusions. Jesus Christ said, *"The Scripture cannot be broken."* (John 20:35) and *"It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail."* (Luke 16:17) He accepted Moses as the author of the Pentateuch (Luke 24:27; John 5:46,47), Isaiah as the author of both major "divisions" of the book of Isaiah (Matthew 13:14, citing Isaiah 6:9,10; John 12:38, citing Isaiah 52:1), Daniel as the author of the book of Daniel (Matthew 24:15), the historicity of Adam and Eve (Matthew 19:4-5), Abel (Matthew 23:35), Noah (Luke 17:26), Abraham (John 8:56-58), and Lot (Luke 17:28). He believed the Genesis records of Creation (Mark 10:6-9) and the Flood (Matthew 24:37-39), as being historically true.

Christ believed in the Old Testament miracles such as the supernatural destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17:29, the calamity of Lot's wife (Luke 17:32), the miracle of manna (John 6:32), the healing of the serpents' bites (John 3:14), the miracles of Elijah and Elisha (Luke 4:25-27), and the deliverance of Jonah from the whale (Matthew 12:39-40). Therefore, it is no light burden when a theologian assumes to know more about such matters than did the One whom they profess as their master - THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

10. The Witness of the Passover: The "higher critics" attribute the ritual of the Passover and such like rituals to a number of priests or others who wrote them hundreds of years after Moses, — "if indeed," they say, "Moses ever existed at all!!" The problem with this attack on the Old Testament Scriptures is that the "real writers and editors of the documents" would have had to be the most unscrupulous and yet the most brilliant forgers and charlatans the world has ever encountered. They have somehow contrived a marvelous story of creation and the earth's history, the moving narratives of the lives of the patriarchs, the tales of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and wanderings in the wilderness. Most amazing of all, these scheming liars devised the Ten Commandments, the greatest moral and ethical code in all history, and convinced everyone for three thousand years that all of it had come from God through Moses!

11. The Unique Birth of Christ: As noted above, Christianity is built upon the essential character of the Lord Jesus Christ, which character is reflected in every aspect of Who and What He is and what He did. Based on the information given previously in this development, it is axiomatic that the New Testament portrait of the deeds and words of Christ is authentic and reliable. This is not a *BLIND FAITH*, rather, it is based upon overwhelming historical evidence. Based upon the evidence for the reliability of the Biblical Documents, the discussion of the unique birth of Christ tends to include mostly documentation from the New Testament, itself. This is notwithstanding the fact that each of the areas of evidence presented above lends invaluable support to the infallible validity of the Christian Documents, hence, the Christian Faith. Documentation of the unique birth of Christ is clearly defined in Scripture.

[→ The Doctrine of the Pre-Incarnate Christ;
 → The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Christ; and,
 → The Doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Christ.]

ADDITIONAL AREAS OF EVIDENCE AS TO WHICH DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE CONSIDERED CANNONICAL:

There are three additional areas of evidence which strongly point to the authenticity of the 66 books of the Bible as accurate, historical, canonical documents. This evidence, in turn, establishes additional standards which documents must meet in order to qualify for canonicity and/or to be included in the 66 books of Bible. These include: The nature of the

death of Christ; The confirmation of the resurrection of Christ; and, the sensibleness of the evidence for the existence of God.

The Nature of the Death of Christ:

The Prophecies of the Death of Christ

There is nothing in all of human history comparable to the prophecies associated with the death of Jesus Christ. There are literally scores of prophecies in the Old Testament that focus on the death of the coming Messiah, many of detail and specific facts, unlike the vague and hidden messages from the fortune-tellers. All of these prophecies were recorded hundreds of years, some thousands, before they were fulfilled absolutely down to the last letter. By comparison, it is quite easy to prophesy that someone will die, for everyone must sooner or later die. But, to prophesy literally hundreds of details surrounding a death, as is the case with the prophecies about the death of Jesus Christ, and to have them all to come true, down to the last letter, is quite another matter. And, under certain conditions one can be very accurate, especially with "hindsight," plus a little embellishment on "what one meant to say," in a predicting death. Some of the famous predictions, for example, Jeane Dixon's famous prophecy of John Kennedy's assassination, seem to come true, but many of these clearly involve demonic forces who have limited knowledge through channels of communication with other demons about seemingly "hidden" human affairs that are about to happen. The one thing that is never published is the thousands of predictions, which are made by these human and demonic sources, that are never fulfilled at all. The following is a short list of prophecies regarding the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross, all of which tend to confirm His Messiahship, the reliability of the Biblical documents, and the accuracy of the process which chose what documents should be included in the Canon of Christian Scriptures:

1. The birth of Christ in Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2 cf. II Samuel 5:2 cf., I Chronicles 11:2) Fulfilled exactly as prophesied. (Matthew 2:6; John 7:42)
2. The killing of the innocent children by Herod in an attempt to prevent the birth of a new ruler. Jeremiah 31:15 Perfectly fulfilled in Matthew 2:16-18.
3. The family of Jesus moving to Egypt for safety. (Hosea 11:1 fulfilled in Matthew 2:15)
4. The date on which Jesus would ride into Jerusalem on an unbroken colt to die was prophesied in Daniel 9:24-26. This was fulfilled exactly as prophesied, 483 years later, as recorded by Luke 19:37-44.
5. The betrayal of Messiah by a friend was prophesied in Psalm 41:9, including the price of that betrayal, 30 pieces of silver. (Psalm 109:4-5,7-8; Zechariah 11:11-13 fulfilled in Matthew 26:15; 27:3)
6. The mockery of the accepted judicial process which constituted His trials were prophesied in Isaiah 50:6; 53:7-8 fulfilled in Matthew 26:67; 27:30; including "false witnesses" prophesied in Psalm 35:11 fulfilled in Matthew 28:15.
7. The details of His suffering on the Cross were prophesied graphically in Psalm 22 by David approximately 1,100 years before their fulfillment:

Psa 22:1 cf. Mat 27:47 Psa 22:2; Amos 8:9 Psa 22:7-8 Psa 22:14 cf. Jn 19:34 Psa 22:14-15 Psa 22:15 cf. Psa 69:21 Psa 22:16 Psa 22:17	"My God, My God,..." Darkness Mocking priests & others Collapse of heart cavity Bodily sufferings Thirst & vinegar Piercing of hands & feet Stripping and gambling for garments
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8. Although the custom was to break bones in order to speed up the death of the victims of crucifixion, none of the bones of Jesus were broken, as per the prophecy of Psalm 34:20. (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12 cf. John 19:36.)
9. Prophecy of the piercing of His side. Zechariah 12:10 cp., 13:6 Fulfilled exactly in John 19:37.
10. Isaiah 52:13ff prophesies the death of the Messiah 750 years before it came to pass. This chapter is quoted at least 6 times in the New Testament in which the writers cite that the Messiah was predicted to come and die a "substitutionary death" offered as a sacrificial substitution for the sins of others.
11. Prophecy in the graphic portrayal of His physical sufferings. (Isaiah 52:14)
12. His silence before His accusers at His trial was foretold. (Isaiah 53:7 fulfilled in Matthew 26:63)
13. His mock trial was foretold. (Isaiah 53:8 cf., Matthew 27)
14. His death with criminals was foretold. (Isaiah 53:9 fulfilled in Matthew 27:38)

The Miracles Which Occurred at Calvary

Given as clear physical evidence in terms of the coin of the realm of this world, the death of Christ and its importance is manifested in cosmic events which occurred at the time of His death. There is no naturalistic explanation that will suffice. The miraculous events which took place at Calvary were witnessed by multitudes of people, which, if such events were mere fabrications that actually never occurred, the Gospel writers would have quickly been indicted as liars.

1. **SUPERNATURAL DARKNESS:** (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44-45) At the time of the event, there is no evidence in astronomical history for a normal solar eclipse that could account for this darkness. The fact of the darkness was well known to all those that dwelt in Jerusalem and universally accepted by those who read the first accounts of it in the Gospels.
2. **EARTHQUAKE:** (Matthew 27:51) Earthquakes are a natural phenomena; however, the miraculous aspect of these quakes was in their peculiar timing. Also, this is documented as a particularly violent earthquake.
3. **TEARING OF THE TEMPLE VEIL:** (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45) This veil was a very heavy, thick drapery, that would have required tremendous force to tear; yet, it is recorded that it was torn from the "top to the bottom." The natural explanations do not suffice, plus the way it is recorded in the Gospel infers that this was a Divine act for the purpose of symbolism. That doctrinal symbolism being that the veil which formerly separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, but now torn in two, depicts that the Holy of Holies is now open to all who would come to the Throne Room via Grace.^G (Hebrews 10:19-22)
4. Jesus died at exactly the time when He was ready to die, not before, and not later. This was prophesied in Psalm 31:5 and fulfilled in John 19:30 cf. Luke 23:46 This miracle involves the fact that, even though the Jews and Romans condemned Him to death and the soldiers carried out the death sentence, it was not they who put Him to death. (John 10:17-18)

The Circumstances of Christ's Burial

The Gospel message is made up of three components: The Death of Christ; The Burial of Christ; and, The Resurrection of Christ. (I Corinthians

15:2-4) It is obvious that the death and resurrection are basic to Christianity; but the Apostle Paul places equal emphasis on Christ's burial. The emphasis on the burial of Christ is for the purpose of documentation of the reality of the Humanity of Christ, i.e., that He really "is come in the flesh." (I John 4:2) Deadly is the heresy of the Gnostics, as are other numerous philosophies, both ancient and modern, that the man Jesus and a great "Christ-spirit" were somehow united only in a superficial way, so that when Jesus, the man, died, the "Christ-spirit" returned to the Father. The importance of the literal physical death of Jesus as the God-Man is noted in I John 4:3. Therefore, it is vital that all men and angels know beyond a shadow of a doubt that it was the humanity of Jesus which rose from the grave, hence, the emphasis on the *literal bodily burial* of Jesus.

Therefore, the Gospel message must be careful to document the careful burial of His body after death and that this burial was known to all, both friend and foe. This accomplished; the empty tomb, 72 hours later, would stand as infallible proof of His bodily resurrection, hence the claims as to who and what He was. Such an important niche in history as the burial of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ could not be left to random choice, or to those who might dispose of it in some obscure manner. On the other hand, it is clear that the authorities would not let the body fall into the hands of the disciples who were, in fact, hiding out at this time. These disciples were enemies of the crown and furthermore, they might dispose of it and claim, as Jesus had forecast, that he actually did come back from the dead.

Therefore, who is suitable to handle the burial detail of Jesus so as to result in His claims being fulfilled in the eyes of the cosmos and in terms of the coin of the realm of this world? SOLUTION: Burial by someone in an authoritative position, yet, who was also a disciple of Christ. Two candidates were on the scene at the right time, with the right doctrine, with the right resources, with the right motivation and right disposition to apply the doctrine they knew: Joseph and Nicodemus.

Through positive volition to the Old Testament prophecies, these two men added up the facts and arrived at the perfect application of the pertinent Bible Doctrine to the situation. It is apparent that these two men had spent much time in the study of Isaiah 53. Their actions were clearly based on resident Bible Doctrine in the soul, not a mystical "awakening" or vision. Discerning themselves to be in the particular niche described in Isaiah 53:9, Joseph proceeded to purchase the land, cut out the tomb, plant a garden, purchase the required materials for the burial and then hide them away and wait along with Nicodemus until they could perform this service for the Lord, for which they had been born into the family of God.

The Nature of the Resurrection of Christ:

The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the crowning proof of Christianity. Everything else that was said or done by Christ and the Apostles, no matter how great or marvelous, is secondary to the resurrection in importance. (I Corinthians 15:17) Therefore, if the resurrection did not take place, then Christianity is a false religion. But, if it did take place, then Jesus Christ is God and the Christian Faith is absolute truth. Therefore, the actual evidence for the resurrection of Christ must be examined carefully. [→Reliability of the Biblical Documents - Chapter 2]

The Sensibleness of the Fact of the Existence of God:

The Biblical evidence for the existence of God is very extensive. (Psalm 14:1; 53:1; Proverbs 1:7; Romans 1:20,28, etc.) The strong language by the writers of Scripture is either absolutely reckless or it is their viewpoint that there is an abundance of incontrovertible evidence that God exists. However, a point of caution is appropriate here, that is, to remember that no argument or combination of arguments can ever convince someone of the existence of God who is prone not to submit to authority. Nevertheless, the evidence is there! The evidence must be of such a sensible nature so as to completely satisfy the mind which is positive to the truth.

The Christian Evidences

The Christian Evidences include all those factors which *caused the early church believers to accept the inscripturated Gospel of Christ as absolute truth*. Christian Evidences refers to those facts of the Gospel which were so evident and universally held by all that they could be viewed as being no other than the absolute truth about what actually happened. The Scripture writers themselves used the experiential events that had happened in the life and work of Christ and in their own lives and work as evidence of the validity of Christianity. (Acts 4:33; 14:15-17; Romans 1:20; etc.) The sensibleness of the Christian Evidences which point to the existence of God is based on the fact that all involved in the Biblical first century church experiences testify to their belief in, application of, and benefits from the existence of the one true God. The first century church's belief in God is based on their belief in the deity of Jesus Christ.

The evidences for the Deity of Jesus Christ constitute a Christian Evidence for the existence of God. The Deity of Christ has been evidenced and agreed upon by the entire early church via universal knowledge of: the unique virgin birth, unique miracles, unique death, unique burial, unique resurrection, etc.

Therefore, if Jesus Christ is God, then God exists!!

The Metaphysical^G Evidences

The Biblical description of the God of the Bible is absolutely consistent with the scientific principles of there being a *Prime Mover*. Considering the facts included in the principles of "cause-and-effect," sensible logic may only conclude that the First Cause of all things — The Prime Mover — is an infinite, eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, personal, volitional, moral, spiritual, aesthetic, holy (justice & righteousness), loving, and living being. Therefore, the scientific principles of metaphysics furnish evidence that the Biblical description of God is accurate. This in turn establishes one of the "rules" for canonicity. The subject of origins in the field of metaphysics deals with the universe as an orderly system. There are five subcategories of study of the metaphysical origin of the universe: Teleology, Cosmology, Ontology, Anthropology, Systematological, Aesthetics, Volition, and Morality.

Teleology entails the study of goals or ends with the argument that the evidence of order and design in nature indicates purpose, therefore, a Designer. *Cosmology* entails the study of the cosmos and its processes with the argument that the existence of motion implies ultimately a Prime Mover. *Ontology* entails the study of "being" with the argument that the existence of the idea of God can only be explained if God really exists. *Anthropology* entails the study of man having a conscience which alerts him to the recognition of high norms and standards. This, in turn, points to recognition of the ultimate set of norms and standards of a supreme "law giver"; Man is also intelligent, this too points to the existence of a supreme intelligence. *Systematological* entails the normal processes where by one is exposed to a knowledge of God by a religious system. Other systems of arriving at a doctrine of an ultimate origin include: *Aesthetics* entails the study of beauty and truth with the argument that since there are standards in the world of relative beauty and truth; there must be somewhere an absolute standard to which all things must ultimately be compared; *Volition* entails the study of "choice" with the argument that from the existence of the finite will, it follows there must be an infinite Will; and, *Morality* entails the study of "rightness" vs. "wrongness" from the existence of awareness of moral actions and their relative correctness, there must exist somewhere an absolute standard and arbiter of moral actions.

Each of these arguments for God is met with philosophical objections; nevertheless, when the phenomena which they "explain" in terms of God are tested in terms of other philosophical systems and criteria (atheism, pantheism, animism, etc.) on a comparative basis, Theism emerges in even a far

better light. These arguments do not “prove” God, but they do provide strong evidence when considered as a whole and when compared with other systems.²⁸

The Causation Evidences

The basic premise of *science* is that “From nothing, nothing comes!” Each effect, therefore, must have a cause adequate to produce it. Therefore, logic compels us ultimately to one of two conclusions as to the origin of the universe: Either the chain of causes is infinite, with no beginning of the sequence at all, or, we must finally see the chain terminate in a great FIRST CAUSE, which itself was eternally uncaused, capable in and of itself to initiate the entire succession of secondary causes and effects. These are the only two possibilities if the “Law of Cause and Effect” operated in past ages as it does today.

The corollary scientific premise is that “An effect can never be greater than its cause.” This law implies that the universe has not emerged as a result which is greater than the original cause which brought it into existence. Consider some of the effects which are observable in the universe:

- ❖ The vastness of the universe is inconceivably great, therefore, the first cause must be infinite and eternal.
- ❖ Everywhere and always in space and time the phenomena of energy and matter and motion occur; therefore, to both cause and maintain such an infinite array and variety of power producing processes, the first cause must be omnipotent and omnipresent.
- ❖ The universe everywhere is orderly and capable of systematic and intelligent description and mathematical formulation; this clearly bespeaks of intelligent design. Therefore, the first cause must be omnisciently intelligent.
- ❖ Personality in the universe is an obvious effect. Although some materialists think that such phenomena is purely physio-chemical reactions, the very fact that they can think independently of any such physio-chemical reactions and evaluate those very physio-chemical reactions, demonstrates consciousness. Therefore, the first cause must be a being with personality.

Therefore, these observable effects in the universe, because they have meaning and definition, must have some kind of reality, which in turn infers that, because nothing can exist independently of causes, they did not cause themselves.

CONCEPT:

- THE FIRST CAUSE of limitless space must be infinite in extent.
- THE FIRST CAUSE of endless time must be eternal in duration.
- THE FIRST CAUSE of perpetual motion must be omnipotent in power.
- THE FIRST CAUSE of unbounded variety must be omnipresent in phenomena.
- THE FIRST CAUSE of infinite complexity must be omniscient in intelligence.
- THE FIRST CAUSE of consciousness must be personal.
- THE FIRST CAUSE of will must be volitional.
- THE FIRST CAUSE of ethical values must be moral.

Therefore, reason concludes from “cause-and-effect” that the First Cause of all things — The Prime Mover — is an infinite, eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, personal, volitional, moral, spiritual, aesthetic, holy (justice & righteousness), loving, and living being. ***This is nothing less than consistent with the Biblical description of the God of the Bible; hence, it also tends to confirm the Biblical documents as reliable and canonical.***

Evidences for a Tri-une God

The evidences for a “Tri-une God”^G serve also to establish the validity of the Bible which claims that God is One in a Trinity. This in turn confirms the documents which are consistent with this rule as worthy of being in the Canon of Scripture. The evidence for a Tri-une God is best manifest by the fact that polytheism is simply not reasonable. Polytheism fails for several clear reasons:

- ❖ The evidence points to an omnipotent and omnipresent God; but if there were more than one god, none of them could be either omnipotent or omnipresent.
- ❖ The universe is not “multiverse;” hence, its intrinsic unity as a vast space-mass-time “continuum” is explicable only in terms of a unified First Cause, not as a conglomerate of first causes.
- ❖ Polytheism, in practice, is always merely the popular expression of Pantheism. The latter identifies “god” with the universe and is experienced primarily as Animism. However, a God who is essentially synonymous with the universe and its varied components could never be the cause of the universe.

Evidence from the Creation

If God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, it is reasonable to expect to find built into the structure of the creation clear testimony of His character. (Psalm 19:1) From this principle, the Scripture is so bold to

claim that the elements of the Universe itself will reveal to the inquiring mind, not only that God exists, but something of His power and God-head. (Romans 1:20) Therefore, it follows that the documents which are accepted into the Canon of Scriptures, as being valid and authentic, should be compatible with the fact that the nature of the universe, in its basic structure, reveal God in two aspects:

❖ His Eternal Power: His eternal power is witnessed by the laws He created to govern the universe, namely, the Law of Conservation, and the Law of Universal Decay.

❖ His God-Head: His God-head is reflected by the structure of the creation, namely, that the universe is a tri-universe. The universe is a continuum of (1) space, (2) mass-energy, and (3) time. Space is the invisible but omnipresent background of all things, in the same manner that God is the invisible, everywhere present source of all things. Mass-energy goes to the subject of the fact that everywhere in space and time, things happen. Herein, again, is a trinity: Energy is generated, Motion is manifested, and Phenomena is experienced. The third element of the universe, time, is also clearly a trinity: Time is Future (originated), Present (manifested), and Past (experienced). Therefore, the entire physical creation as a trinity, clearly reflects "...even His God-Head."

Secular Evidences to the Accuracy of the New Testament

Secular history offers its own conformation of the Reliability of the New Testament. Many first century historians combine to confirm the historicity of early Christianity in general and verification of specific persons and events in the New Testament in particular. Geisler lists the first century historians which confirm the general historical outline of the New Testament:²⁹

1. Jewish Historian, Josephus (A.D. 37-100) -- The historical records of Josephus abound with references to figures familiar to New Testament Readers.³⁰
2. Roman Historian, Cornelius Tacitus (A.D. 55? - after 117) -- Confirms many points, including Nero's burning of Rome, Christus being put to death by Pontius Pilate, etc.
3. Greek Satirist, Lucian (second century A.D.) -- Lucian alludes to Christ in the words "...the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced a new cult into the world..."
4. Roman Historian, Suetonius (c. A.D. 120) --

Suetonius, a court official under Hadrian, made two references to Christ in the *Life of Claudius* and in the *Lives of the Caesar*.

5. Pliny the Younger (c. A.D. 112) -- Writing to the emperor of his achievements as governor of Bithynia, Pliny the Younger gave information that "...he had killed multitudes of Christians ... had attempted to make them curse Christ, which a genuine Christian cannot be induced to do."
6. Samaritan-born historian, Thallus (c. A.D. 52) -- According to Julius Africanus (c. A.D. 221), "Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness [at the crucifixion] as an eclipse of the sun--unreasonably, as it seems to me."
7. Letter of Mara Bar-Serapion (after A.D. 73) -- In a letter, a father compares the deaths of Socrates, Pythagoras, and Jesus as follows, "Nor did the wise King die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he had given."
8. The Jewish Talmud (completed by A.D. 500) -- The Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 43a, "Eve of Passover") contains passages which explicitly refer to Jesus: "On the eve of the Passover they hanged Yeshu (of Nazareth) ..."

From these and other similar secular testimony, it is possible to arrive at the conclusion that a man named Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate at Passover time; that He was believed by his disciples to have risen from the dead three days later; that Jewish leaders charged Christ with sorcery and believed he was born of adultery; that the Judean sect of Christianity could not be contained but spread even to Rome; that Nero and other Roman rulers persecuted and martyred early Christians; and that these early Christians denied polytheism, dedicated their lives to Christ's teachings and worshiped Him. "This picture is perfectly congruent with that of the New Testament."³¹

CONCLUSION:

The Bible (meaning "the book") is not only the greatest and most widely read book ever written, but it stands in a class altogether by itself in several critical respects:

1. UNITY IN DIVERSITY: Consisting of 66 separate books written by about 40 different authors over a time span of at least 2,000 years, brought gradually together into one volume by a process which no one has ever been able to fully define or

describe, the Book represents a unity and development of a singular theme from beginning to end with no errors and no internal discrepancies. There is nothing remotely comparable to this among all the millions of books written by man.

2. **FULFILLED PROPHECY:** There are hundreds of prophecies recorded in Scripture which have been meticulously fulfilled, often hundreds of years later. This unique characteristic of the Bible is not found in the Vedas, Koran or any other "scriptures" of mankind. The prophecies of Nostradamus, Edgar Cayce, Jeanne Dixon and others are totally different, always being of such an ambiguous nature that almost anything that happens can fit the prophecy.
3. **ACCURACY:** Not only has the Bible proved accurate in its prophecies, but also in its very frequent references to matters of history and principles of natural science. It is still true that not a single uncontroverted fact of history or science refutes a single statement in the Bible. It is also true that archaeological and historical research has confirmed the Biblical references in hundreds of instances and that scores of now-known facts of science were written in the Bible long before men recognized them in nature. Norman Geisler states, "The archaeological evidence in support of the Bible in general is overwhelming."³² He notes that to date more than 25,000 sites within the Bible lands, dating to Old Testament times, have been located. Of these thousands of archaeological finds, R. K. Harrison quotes the eminent Biblical archaeologist Nelson Gueck who stated in the New York Times that "...he was prepared to go on record as stating that no archaeological discovery has ever been made that contradicts or controverts historical statements in the Scripture."³³
4. **THE UNIQUE PRESERVATION:** No other book has ever been the object of such antagonism as has the Bible. Not only have these efforts to obliterate and contradict the Bible failed, but the number of Bibles and usage of the same has actually multiplied the more with every attack. In both modern and ancient times, kings and priests and common men have tried desperately to destroy it; unbelieving intellectuals have ridiculed and attempted to refute it; but today it is read by more people in more nations and languages than ever before.
5. **THE UNIQUE CLAIMS OF THE WRITERS OF THE BIBLE:** The writers of the Bible maintain again and again that their writings were inspired by the

One True God, often consisting of the directly recorded words of God. Although other writers have claimed "divine inspiration," the frequency of such claims and assertions are unique to the Bible. In view of the unique character and history of the Book which, the 40 some-odd writers produced, at various times and places (Hebrews 1:1-2), usually totally out of contact with each other, the exhortations to adjustment to the Righteousness of the One True God should not be regarded as anything but that which it, itself, claims to be, i.e., inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity of the God-Head of the One True God.

6. **THE UNIQUE SALVATION BY GRACE:** The final proof of uniqueness is that the all-important teaching concerning eternal destiny — SALVATION — that is taught by the Bible, is one which is uniquely a salvation through non-meritorious faith alone. While the specific list of "objects of faith for salvation" and the "list of works" vary greatly, all other religions teach salvation through faith plus works. Biblical Christianity alone, among all the religions of mankind, past, present, and future, teaches that eternal salvation is the free gift of God's grace, to be received by non-meritorious faith alone, apart from works of any kind.

Once the early church accepted a book as canonical based on these criteria, regardless of the difference as to subject-matter, manner of writing, and present usefulness, it was fully taken as authoritative over the church. All the books of the Bible were regarded with equal canonical authority and equally interested in that which is the formal reason for the whole -- the revelation of the Divine Viewpoint^G. [→ Divine Revelation - Chapter 4]

NOTES----Chapter 3

1. F. F. Bruce, The Canon of Scripture (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), p. 17.
2. John Owen, An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 6 Vols., ed. W. H. Goold (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 1: 26.
3. Bruce, p. 24.
4. F. F. Bruce, The New Testament Documents (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), p. 21
5. Ibid., Quotes from "Article VI of the Thirty-Nine Articles".

6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 27.
8. Ibid., p. 23.
9. Philip Comfort, ed., The Origin of the Bible (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1992), art. by Milton Fisher "The Canon of the New Testament," p. 69-71
10. Ibid, p. 76.
11. Ibid.
12. Robert A. Baker, A Summary of Christian History, (Nashville: Broadman, 1959), p. 31
13. Owen, 1:27.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 525)
17. Ibid., p.245-252.
18. Ibid., p. 296.
19. Owen, 1:28.
20. Owen, 1:29.
21. Ibid.
22. Walker, p. 492.
23. Owen, 1:30-31.
24. Owen, 1:31.
25. Ibid.
26. Owen, 1:32.
27. Henry Morris, Many Infallible Proofs (San Diego: CLP Publishers, 1974), pp. 45-46.
28. Norman Geisler, Christian Apologetics (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), pp. 121-127, 145-147. While teaching as professor of Systematic Theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, Dr. Geisler developed solid rules for "justification of truth statements within a world view." He coined the descriptive phrase, "systematic consistency," traditionally called "combinationalism." His "tests for truth" are indispensable documentation with regard to why such tests of the Bible such as "instincts," "custom," "tradition," "Consensus gentium" (consent of the nations), "sense of perception," "intuition," "Pragmatism," etc., as all being inadequate for distinguishing materialism from theism. He firmly establishes the divine authority of Scripture by testing the truth^G of the Christian system using "systematic consistency." In his section titled, "The Reasons for Adopting Systematic Consistency," he concludes that "once an overall framework has been determined, then it follows that whatever most consistently and comprehensively fits into that system is true. If that system is not only a world view but a world and life view, then the applicability of that truth to life also becomes a crucial aspect of that truth." [èThe basic concept

of "systematic consistency" is the principle of what is called the "Grace Grid" in the Rephidim Canon of Interpretation.]

29. Ibid., p. 323.
30. Bruce, p. 104.
31. Geisler, p. 325
32. Ibid., p. 322.
33. R. K. Harrison, Introduction To The Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 94.

STUDIES----Chapter 3

[The following is a list of Bible Studies taught by Dr. Killingsworth in Rephidim Church, Wichita Falls, Texas. The listing includes the name of the doctrinal subject and the corresponding cassette tape number(s). For additional information write: RDBS, INC., 4430 Allendale Rd., Wichita Falls, TX 76310]

DOCTRINE OF CANONICITY -- F75-F101

DOCTRINE OF THE CANONICITY OF "THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS" -- F145-F148

DOCTRINE OF CANONICITY, ADDENDUM -- K195-K197

DOCTRINE OF COMPLETED CANON CONDITIONS -- D306

SPIRITUAL GIFTS -- D193-D195 (Increment One - Romans 12:6 -- Discusses temporary spiritual gifts and the time frame of their legitimate function; **D260-D262** -- Increment Two - Ephesians 4:11)

SPIRITUAL GIFTS -- E15 (Increment Three - I Corinthians 14:21-22 -- Discusses the "sign" nature of the Gift of Tongues & their temporary nature.)