

THE FORMATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Notice three definite steps in the formation of the Old Testament: (1) the writing of the books under the inspiration and authority of God; (2) the recognition of these books by the people as the Word of God; and (3) the collection of the books into an accepted Canon. Study below how these same three steps were followed in the formation of the New Testament:

A. The New Testament Books Written:

1. How had much of the information contained in the New Testament first been given to the people? II Thessalonians 2:15a, 3:6b, Luke 1:4

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1. The actual writing of the New Testament books took place during a period of about 51 years, from A.D. 45 to 96. Probably the earliest was the Epistle of James, about A.D. 45, and the latest were the three Epistles of John, the Gospel of John, and the Revelation, about A.D. 90-96. All the others were probably written during the 18 year period from A.D. 50-68.

B. The New Testament Books Recognized as “Scripture” and Collected:

1. What did Paul call his quotation from Luke 10:7? I Timothy 5:18

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2. What did Peter imply that Paul’s writings were? II Peter 3:15-16

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3. What churches would naturally be first to recognize a given book as Scripture? (THINK! Who would accept Romans first? Ephesians? Colossians 4:16, II Thessalonians 5:27

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4. How would other churches get copies of these writings? Colossians 4:16, II Thessalonians 5:27

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5. Thus each church would collect the writings of the Apostles and other great leaders, but means of communications were limited, and not all churches knew of the existence of all the writings at first. Thus, collections in the extreme East would differ from those in the far West.

6. Beginning in the first century, the Apostolic Fathers began to recognize our present New Testament writings a “Scripture.” This continued throughout the second century, with recognition from outstanding men such as Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian. In the third century, formal recognition began to be given to these books. Origen lists as being received everywhere all of our 27 books except Hebrews, James, II Peter, II and III John and Judo. These were disputed in some of the churches, either because they were unknown, or because their authoritative authorship was questioned. Origen also lists certain apocryphal books as being rejected by the churches. By the end of the fourth century, the entire church seemed to be agreed that

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our 27 books and no others were inspired by God and deserved a place in the New Testament Canon.

C. The New Testament Apocryphal Books: At least 36 additional books were written claimed to be written at about the same time as the New Testament books. Some of these were received by some of the churches for a time as being the Word of God, but later they were rejected. Among the more well known are the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, The Epistle of Barnabas, The First and Second Epistles of Clement, The Shepherd of Hermas, The Apocalypse of Peter, and The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians. There were also numerous Gospels, Acts, and Apocalypses, and a few other Epistles. These books are strikingly different from the New Testament books. They contain much that is legendary and fanciful, and contrary to the Scriptures. None of them claims to be inspired, and several of their authors definitely contrast their writings with those of two apostles. None of them ever received anything like universal recognition by the early churches.

QUESTIONS FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT:

1. What distinguishes Scripture from all other writings in the world?

2. Can I recognize teachings which are contrary to the Scriptures?
