

DOES THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS BELONG IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON?

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[The following is excerpted from a larger work by the same author entitled, "Can You Trust the New Testament Canon as YHVH's Divine Word?" This work is available upon request and will be posted on our web site.]

The Uniqueness of the Bible

The Bible. There has never been any book like it. Its authors included kings and peasants and it was written over a span of 1500 years and 40 generations by 40 authors writing from palaces to jail cells. It was first translated into a foreign language circa 250 B.C. and has since, in whole or in part, been translated into several thousand languages or dialects. It has survived time. Though printed on perishable materials and recopied countless times over the past 2000 years by hand and by press, the main style and message of this book has never changed. The Bible has withstood vicious attacks of its enemies as no other book. Since Roman times, governmental and religious authorities have tried to ban it, burn it and outlaw it, but to no avail. It is still the most widely published and read book of all time (McDowell, pp. 13–24). Why?

Many have willingly given their lives to translate it, smuggle it, distribute it, preach its message or even simply possess a copy of it. Why? More than two billion people on earth today, about one-third of earth's population claim to be followers of the Bible. Why? Nearly 50,000 people are currently martyred each year for refusing to budge from their faith in the Bible's message. Why?

The answer is simple. Regardless of the language into which the Bible has been translated, regardless of the liberal or conservative biases of the translators, one thing is certain: The redemptive and salvation message of the Bible always comes through. It is a life-changing message of hope. Why? Because its pages contain words that have the power to change lives dramatically for good, for eternity. Why? Because these words are not the words of men, but of the Creator of men—of YHVH Elohim, the God of the Bible. As such, they carry the full force, power and anointing of divine origination. If not, how else can one explain the biblical phenomena? There is no human explanation for it other than the divine hand of YHVH Elohim has been on the Bible from its beginning until this very moment!

Can We Trust the Bible?

In spite of the impact the Bible has had on the lives of billions of souls over the past 2000 years, a question remains: Can *you* put your trust in every word contained therein? This is an important question, for if the Bible is correct, then whether you live again or not after your physical death will depend on how you orient your life with respect to the biblical message. So can we trust our lives with the words of Scripture—specifically, the message of Yeshua the Messiah as recorded in the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament)? Are the 27 books which comprise the Apostolic Scriptures in our Bible the true and accurate accounts of the words of Yeshua and his directly commissioned apostles?

In this work we shall see that the 27 books of the Apostolic Scriptures would not have been acknowledged as being "Canon" if they had not first been recognized by the apostles of Yeshua and the Body of Believers in the first and second centuries A.D. as having the same authority as the earlier Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). And the latter Christian church would not have accepted these books as canon, and subsequently affirmed their canonicity if they had not felt that these books carried the weight of apostolic authority. Period! Yet despite this profound and simple truth, many are beginning to question the authority of the New Testament Canon of Scripture.

A Problem: Some Are Questioning the Bible

The Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) are under fire. Some Messianic/Hebrew roots teachers are currently questioning if the 27 books of the New Testament are all divinely inspired or not. Some are even taking it upon themselves to begin tossing out certain books, such as the Epistle to the Hebrews, from the New Testament canon claiming that it was not divinely inspired and was added later to the canon of Scripture by the proto-Catholic Church. Others claim that the early church fathers “messed” with the original writings of the apostles leaving us to doubt whether we can trust the Apostolic Scriptures or not. What is the truth of the matter?

When was the New Testament canonized and by whom? Did YHVH Elohim leave his priceless Word hanging in the lurch for hundreds of years only to have the Christian church choose what would be Scripture or not?

We will produce substantial scholarly evidence from the Scriptures themselves and from first and second century historical documents that Yeshua commissioned certain apostles to canonize what would later become known as the “New Testament” Scriptures.

The work that follows will strengthen your faith in the inspired Word of Elohim as preserved in the 27 books of the Apostolic Scriptures, in the Gospel message and in the Person, Redemptive work and deity of Yeshua. You will also have the tools to defend your faith and to help those who have fallen under the sway of false teachings questioning the divine inspiration of all of the Messianic Scriptures from Matthew to Revelation.

What Some Messianic Teachers Are Now Saying About the Apostolic Scriptures

One Hebrew roots teacher has posted on his web site the following:

The Brit HaChadashah (the “New Testament”) is not “Scripture,” at least in the form that we have today, because there is no “Old Testament” or “New Testament” evidence for such a concept. Rather, the “New Testament” speaks of or alludes to the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings as Scripture in many places (Luke 4:21, John 10:35, Acts 1:16, Acts 8:35, Acts 17:11, 2 Timothy 3:16, James 2:8, 2 Peter 1:20). Thus, all “New Testament” doctrines must line up with the written evidence that is found in the Law, the Prophets, or the Writings. If we accept anything else as Scripture, when there is no written evidence to call it Scripture, then we are guilty of violating Scripture according to Deuteronomy 4:2 and 12:32 (13:1 in Hebrew), thus making us liars (Proverbs 30:6). This does not, however, mean that we cannot glean important insights and knowledge from reading it.

Another Messianic teacher has recently written the following in his widely circulated magazine concerning the Apostolic or Messianic Scriptures/Renewed Covenant or New Testament (all names for the same thing) and the Epistle to the Hebrews in particular:

The Bible is organized and printed by the church fathers to support their theology about the Old Testament (everything lumped together as the Old Covenant), and then starting with the Gospels, headed by a page never written by any Apostle, there is a page called ‘The New Testament.’ This definition for our present Bible did not actually happen until the fourth century when Jerome (the Bishop of Rome) put the Book of Hebrews into his compilation of the New Testament. Prior to that, the Book of Hebrews was disputed as appropriate for the Bible.

So, how did the early Gentile believers get so befuddled and confused about God’s covenants? There are probably a number of reasons relating to past mistakes already mentioned, but I personally believe that the greater number of Churchmen have been misled by something put into the New Testament—the Book of Hebrews.

There are contradictions and mistakes in the Book of Hebrews that have Bible scholars scratching their heads to this day.

Is the Book of Hebrews an example of Scripture written by Holy Men moved by the Holy Spirit, or is it a better example of second or third century Churchmen trying to sound like a first century Apostle with an agenda to get rid of the Jewish writings (the Old Testament). [Note: The author asks a question at the beginning of his sentence, but does not end with the proper punctuation of a question mark. So

is he asking a question, or making a statement consistent with his own personal belief? In light of the author's negativity toward Hebrew's inclusion in the canon of Scriptures, it would seem that the latter (a statement) would be the likely answer.] By the way, the Book of Hebrews is one of the last books put in the New Testament. It was included in the New Testament by Jerome, the Bishop of Rome (the Pope) in the fourth century.

These two writers make some serious allegations, yet they fail to give us one scintilla of documentation for their assertions. Are we to accept what they say just because they have said it? Who are they, or who is anyone, for that matter, that one should accept what another says on the merits of what is said alone? Yet, this is what these authors seem to be expecting of their readers. Are their accusations against YHVH's Word, as preserved in the canon of Scripture, correct, or have they fallen to a spirit of confusion or delusion?

It seems to the reasonable mind that any valid study of the canonization of Scripture should be grounded in historical facts, not in the unsubstantiated opinions of men. Any author who bases his arguments on his own unverified opinion has failed to do his proverbial homework!

In this work, we will attempt to provide you with scholarly proof, historical evidence and biblical references for everything we say. Scripture commands us to prove all things and to hold fast to that which is good (1 Thes. 5:23), to study to show yourself approved unto Elohim by rightly dividing YHVH's Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15), and to be noble as the Bereans by searching the Scriptures daily to determine the truth of what a biblical teacher says (Acts 17:11).

Certain Key Issues That Must Be Considered Before Commencing This Study

- ☞ There must be bedrock aspects of our faith that remain non-negotiable. Period. To open the door of doubt in the areas of the deity, incarnation and virgin birth of Yeshua, the basic message of the cross, the means of salvation (by grace through faith in the atoning blood of Yeshua), as well as the divine inspiration and infallibility of YHVH's written Word from Genesis to Revelation, is to begin falling down a slippery slope that can lead nowhere good. If we hit a snag in our understanding in any of these areas, the problem does not lie with the Word of Elohim, but with our understanding.
- ☞ Authority and canon(icity) are not synonymous terms, although some try to make them to be so. In confusing these terms they attempt to make official recognition of the New Testament books by the church also the act of deciding their authoritativeness. The historical record shows that their authoritativeness had already been long determined and recognized by the early second century. In other words, recognized authority proceeds canonization.
- ☞ One thing becomes apparent when studying the writings of the early church fathers (A.D. 70–120). None questioned apostolic authority. They held the writings of the apostles to be on a plane above their own writings, and no other contemporary writings, no matter the author, was on the same par. The Person, work and message of Yeshua had touched, transformed and anointed the apostles in such a fundamentally profound way that it was impossible for others to deny this fact, as was the case with the Jewish rulers of the Temple (Acts 4:13). They marveled at the wisdom, demeanor, anointing and authority of the apostles, for they recognized that they had been with Yeshua. The same was the case with the early church fathers. Therefore, their writings were revered and venerated from the very beginning. An analysis of the writings of the early church fathers reveals this.

Derivation of the Word *Canon*

The term *canon* relates to the list of books in the Bible that are considered inspired and of divine origination. There is the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures or Tanakh (Old Testament) and that of the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament).

Canon derives from the Latin, which comes from the Greek *kanon*, which in turn was borrowed from the Hebrew *qaneh* meaning *reed* or *cane*. "The word was used of an instrument made of reed or other material, and denoted especially such an instrument used as a rod or ruler, as an aid in making straight lines or accurate measurements.

Thus it came to mean a standard of straightness or accuracy” (Filson, p. 15–16). Since a reed was used as a measuring rod, one of the word’s derivative meanings came to be a rule or standard in a metaphorical sense. “It is in this last sense that a Greek Father like Origen used the word *kanon* to denote what we called the rule of faith, the standards by which we are to measure and evaluate everything that may be offered to us as an article of belief” (Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, p. 95). Filson further notes that *canon* “in a figurative sense, [refers] to rules or standards for conduct or for workmanship. Paul, the only New Testament writer to use the word, used it in Gal. 6:16 of the rule or standard of Christian living, and in 2 Cor. 10:13–16 of the ‘limit’ or prescribed ‘field’ of the Christian leader’s work” (Filson, *ibid.*).

“One use of the word *canon* was to describe documents which provided a standard or norm. In this connection we should note the word’s use with the special meaning of a list of items or writings. It is not entirely clear whether the first use of the word *canon* to designate the books of the Bible referred primarily to the list of them or to the rule or standard of faith and life which they contained. It seems that neither idea could ever have been completely lacking—each was at least implied from the first—but conviction that these books were basic and authoritative appears primary” (Ibid.).

Distinction Between Authority and Canonicity

There is much confusion in terms when it comes to discussing the idea of the canon of Scripture. As we shall see below, some view *canon* and *authority* as synonymous and codependent terms. Is it correct to assume this? It is probably safe to say that most Believers think that until the Christian church placed its official stamp of approval upon the writings of the apostles no one could be certain whether they were authoritative or not. Is it possible that the Apostolic Scriptures were viewed as authoritative by the majority of Believers, and that there was an unofficial, yet generally accepted list of apostolically-authored books long before there was an official Christian “Sanhedrin” to place its stamp of approval on that list? We will discuss these issues below.

Modern Christian apologist, Josh McDowell in his classic book, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, addresses the issue of apostolic authority this way: Quoting Stonehouse, he says,

“N.B. Stonehouse writes that the apostolic authority ‘which speaks forth in the New Testament is never detached from the authority of the Lord. In the Epistles, there is consistent recognition that in the church there is only one absolute authority, the authority of the Lord himself. Wherever the apostles speak with authority, they do so as exercising the Lord’s authority. Thus, for example, where Paul defends his authority as an apostle, he bases his claim solely and directly upon his commission by the Lord (Gal. 1 and 2); where he assumes the right to regulate the life of the church, he claims for his word the Lord’s authority, even when no direct word of the Lord has been handed down’ (1 Cor. 14:37; cf. 1 Cor. 7:10). (McDowell, p. 36).

“The only one who speaks in the New Testament with an authority that is underived and self-authenticating is the Lord” (Ibid.).

Next Prof. F. F. Bruce relates for us the concept of “authority” with that of “canonicity”:

“There is a distinction between the canonicity of a book of the Bible and its authority. Its canonicity is dependent upon its authority. For when we ascribe canonicity to a book we simply mean that it belongs to the canon or list. But why does it belong? Because it was recognized as possessing special authority. People frequently speak and write as if the authority with which the books of the Bible are invested in the minds of Christians is the result of their having been included in the sacred list. But the historical fact is the other way about; they were and are included in the list because they were acknowledged as authoritative” (Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, pp. 95–96).

Various Viewpoints on the Canonization of the New Testament and Its Timing

We present the testimonies of the following “expert witnesses” to show the reader that there is not a unanimous consensus among modern leading scholars on the issue of the canonization of the Apostolic Scriptures. Ostensibly, they all have access to the same historical data, yet there exist differentials among them as to how to interpret

that data. This, hence, gives rise to various speculation, opinion and theories regarding the canonization. Again, there is not one viewpoint on this subject, but credible data to support several viewpoints—even opposing ones. Where does this leave the reader? It is the belief, and therefore the bias, of this author that the apostolic writers themselves, under divine mandate, canonized their own writings. We provide evidence for this view later. But, even if the reader does not end up accepting our position on this matter, we hope to provide enough evidence, at least, to show that the Apostolic Scriptures were accepted as authoritative by the beginning of the second century and were de facto canonized by the accepted practices and mutual consent of early church leaders. When we say “early” we are speaking of the late first century to the mid-second century A.D. This modified view of the canonization counterbalances the accepted and prevalent notion that there existed no generally accepted canon until the early Catholic Church declared so in the middle-to-end of the fourth century—nearly three hundred years after the death of the last apostle.

By the Early 2nd Century a Corpus of Authoritative Apostolic Scriptures Existed

Conservative Christian scholars admit that there was a body of Apostolic Scriptures extant by the end of the first century that was being used and regarded as authoritative by the earliest church fathers.

In the period of A.D. 100–170 “[W]e ... find in the writings of the so-called Apostolic Fathers (Clement of Rome, the Epistle of Barnabas, Ignatius, Polycarp, Hermas, the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles)... first, a witness to the fact that the books destined to become the New Testament canon are there, at work in the church from the first. The books are quoted and alluded to, more often without mention of author or title than by way of formal quotation. Secondly, we find a witness to the fact that the thought and life of the church were being shaped by the content of the New Testament writings from the first, and moreover by the contents of all types of New Testament writings” (Franzmann, p. 287–288).

“The first Christian writers to comment on which books were regarded as authoritative described them as having been ‘handed down’ or ‘received.’ This standard language for tradition was used about the canonical books. Irenaeus spoke of ‘The gospels handed down to us from the apostles’ (*Haer.* 3.11.9), and, ‘The gospel handed down to us by the will of God in scriptures’ (*Ibid.*, 3.1.1). Clement of Alexandria specified ‘The four gospels that have been handed down to us’ (*Strom.* 3.13.93) ... The early ecclesiastical writers did not regard themselves as deciding which books to accept or reject. Rather, they saw themselves as acknowledging which books had been handed down.” (A footnote states, “This was still the usage of Athanasius (*Ep. fest.* 39), ‘handed down to our ancestors.’”) (*The Canon Debate*, “Factors Leading to the Selection and Closure of the New Testament Canon,” by Everett Ferguson, p. 295)

First Century Canonization Affirmed by the Aramaic *Peshitta*—

The Scriptures of the Church of the East, Which It Claims Date from the First Century

Prof. Louis Gaussen identifies the Syriac New Testament, called the *Peshito* (or *Peshitta*). According to Gaussen, the *Peshitta* version of the New Testament is the most ancient, the most celebrated, and the most respected of all. Interestingly, we can find little if any mention of the *Peshitta* in any of our research we have done on the canonization of the New Testament based on the works of modern Christian theologians. Gaussen says that the *Peshitta* “was not known in Europe until the mission of Moses Mardin, deputed in 1552 by the patriarch of the Maronites to Pope Julius 3. Michaelis, who, in accordance with many of the most eminent philologists, attributes it to the first or second century, declares it to be the best version known to him, whether in regard to its freedom, elegance, or fidelity as a translation” (Gaussen, pp. 31–32).

“... [W]e find toward the first half of the second century, in the history of Eusebius, an interesting trace of the usage already established in those countries of reading and quoting the Syriac Scriptures of the New Testament. In speaking of the celebrated Hegesippus, who was the earliest ecclesiastical historian, Eusebius, to show that his author was unquestionably a Jewish Christian, remarks that he takes his quotations either from the Hebrew or the Syriac version ... These facts then give us the evidence of the high antiquity of the *Peshito* version” (*Ibid.*, p. 33).

“But more than this, we have additional testimony to its remote origin. Universal opinion has always assigned it that; and even to our day the Syrian Christians regard the *Peshito* as the original of the New Testament. They believe this, because their language was that of the apostles and primitive Christians of Jerusalem, whose churches, as soon as they were formed, divided themselves into Hellenists and Hebrews, or Aramaeans (*Acts* 6:1);

that, also, of the greater part of the churches founded among the Oriental Jews, especially in Babylon and Orsoene, where the Syriac Old Testament had existed for ages. We know that, according to the testimony of all the Fathers, it was in Aramean that Matthew first wrote his Gospel; but it is more probable that he issued an edition of his book in Greek, and another in Aramaen at the same time” (Ibid., p. 33).

“Now this ancient version already contained our canon complete, with the single exception of Revelation and the four shorter and later Epistles of Jude, Peter, and John. Such then, at the beginning of the second century, or rather at the end of the first, was the canon of the Syriac churches” (Ibid., p. 34).

Concerning the Aramaic *Peshitta*, Gaussen states, “The Scriptures of the New Testament must, therefore, have been translated very early in the midst of them in the very language spoken by the primitive churches and by [Yeshua the Messiah] (*Hist. Eccl.* book 4, chap. 22). Thus we find toward the first half of the second century, in the history of Eusebius, an interesting trace of the usage already established in those countries, of reading and quoting the Syriac Scriptures of the New Testament” (Ibid., p. 33).

George Lamsa, the translator of the Aramaic Bible into English from Aramaic and Church of the East scholar, states that the Christian Church of the East still uses the Aramaic Bible and attests to the originality of the *Peshitta* when one of its notable leaders stated in 1957 in the preface to George Lamsa’s Aramaic Bible, “... [T]he Church of the East received the scriptures from the hands of the blessed Apostles themselves in the Aramaic original, the language spoken by our Lord [Yeshua] himself, and that the *Peshitta* is the text of the Church of the East which has come down from the Biblical times without any change or revision.”

“The Scriptures in the Church of the East, from the inception of Christianity to the present day, are in Aramaic and have never been tampered with or revised, as attested by the present Patriarch of the Church of the East” (Introduction to Lamsa’s Bible, p. v).

Lamsa states that the original *Peshitta* New Testament—which those of the Church of the East maintain is from the first century—contains all the books of the Greek New Testament canon except 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation. Lamsa adds, “[T]hese books are included in later Aramaic texts. The *Peshitta* canon was set before the discovery of these books” (Introduction to Lamsa’s Bible, p. viii).

A Divergence of Opinion, Same Conclusion: Hebrews Is In the Canon

A discussion of the subject of the canonization of the Apostolic Scriptures would not be complete without addressing the issue of the so-called “disputed books.” Why? Because there are Bible teachers who wave the red flag of the “disputed books,” it seems, in an effort to cast a shadow of doubt on either certain books contained in the accepted New Testament canon, or to call into question the entire corpus of Apostolic Scriptures. Only Elohim knows their true motives for doing this. Some may do so in search of “truth.” Others, do it as a way to undermine the veracity of the Apostolic Scriptures, and to eventually question the Gospel message itself—especially the deity, incarnation and salvific work of Messiah Yeshua. How sad and tragic that, ostensibly, in search of the truth, the very truth they seek alludes them and they often end up believing the bigger and more damning lie that certain (or all) of the New Testament books do not belong in the canon of Scripture!

Unlike those Messianic authors we have quoted at the beginning of this work who give no shred of supporting documentation for their stand against the canon of Scripture, we will not ask you to believe what we say *just because we said it*. Again, any valid study of the canon of Scripture *must* be grounded in the facts, otherwise we are simply presenting hearsay evidence and the unfounded opinions of men, and we have failed to “do our homework.” On this basis, let us proceed with this study.

This author could find no evidence to support the notion presented by some Bible teachers as “indisputable fact” that “the Book of Hebrews is one of the last books put in the New Testament. It was included in the New Testament by Jerome, the Bishop of Rome (the Pope) in the fourth century.” If such evidence exists, then scholarly and historical sources need to be referenced. For Bible teachers to put out as fact information that is not fact, and then to expect their constituents to believe it as fact “just because they said so” is reckless, irresponsible and is poor leadership. To eviscerate the canon of Scripture and then to expect others to believe them just because they said it is unacceptable! Such an approach does not serve to advance the cause of truth, nor does it improve the credibility of the Messianic Movement in the least.

Below, we provide the reader with many quotes from scholarly sources based on their studies of history

regarding the Book of Hebrews and other disputed books, which are part of the Apostolic Scriptures. There is a divergence of opinions presented here, but none of them question the Books of Hebrews' placement in the canon or its early authorship. In fact, there are many scholars who believe it to be a product of the first century and that it was accepted as authoritative in the beginning of the second century.

British theologian, Dr. E. F. Scott, believes that, though Hebrews and Revelation were disputed books, and were eventually accepted, other New Testament books were disputed after Hebrews. "Hebrews and Revelation eventually won their place, in spite of their failure to meet the required tests; but there were five writings which were long kept outside the New Testament, or remained only on the outer fringe of it—Second Peter, Jude, James, Second and Third John. The Epistle of James was highly esteemed, but its authorship by a great Apostle was acknowledged to be uncertain. Still more dubious was the origin of Jude and Second Peter. Against the two Epistles of John, there seems to have been no objection except that they were so short and theologically so unimportant. If books that taught unsound doctrine were to be excluded, must the rule be also enforced against writings which taught no doctrine at all?" (Scott, pp. 290–291).

The first instance where Hebrews is quoted by early church fathers is in Clement of Rome's epistle "who quotes [Hebrews] tacitly and with his usual freedom" (Clement, 34.2-5). Other early church writers who quoted or referenced Hebrews (going from early second century onward) were Barnabas, Ignatius, Hermas, Justin Martyr, Clement of Rome, probably Irenaeus, Tertullian, Pinytus and Theophilus of Antioch. It was omitted in Marcion's and the Muratorian Canon (along with 1 Peter and James) (Moffatt, pp. 430–431). "The circulation of [Hebrews] as an edifying treatise, however, was wider than its recognition as a canonical Scripture, which was slow and fitful, especially in the West. It was eventually included in the Syrian canon of Paul's epistles, and accepted even at Rome as Pauline and therefore canonical (or, as canonical and therefore Pauline)" (Moffatt, p. 431).

Zahn admits that Hebrews was slow to gain acceptance in many areas, but that this was due to its uncertain authorship. "Regarding the opinion which prevailed among the Greek Churches in Syria, Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece in the time of Clement and Origen with reference to the origin of Hebrews we have no direct information. In the West, Hebrews was not unknown from early times, but until after the middle of the fourth century it was excluded from the collection of Paul's letters and from the New Testament in general" (Zahn, vol. 2, p. 301). Zahn's belief that Hebrews was excluded from the New Testament canon prior to the fourth century is significant, in Zahn's mind, in light of the fact that it was considered to be "an important didactic writing by Clement of Rome, Justin, who wrote in Rome, the younger Theodotus ... Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Tertullian, but which nevertheless was persistently excluded from the New Testament canon in Italy, North Africa, and Gaul" on the basis that it was intended for the Hebrews (Jews) rather than for the Gentile Christian church. But since it was purported by many to have been authored by Paul, and due to his great acceptance in the Christian churches, it was finally accepted. The fact that the Gospel of Matthew, which was originally designed for the Jews and Jewish Christians, was accepted into the canon of the entire Gentile Christian church made justifiable the acceptance of Hebrews (Ibid.). Zahn agrees with Moffatt in his assessment that much of the debate over the acceptance of Hebrews into the New Testament canon was not over the contents of the Epistle to the Hebrews, but on the basis of the unresolved issue as to its authorship (Zahn, vol. 2, pp. 301–302).

A modern theologian who does not agree with Scott and Zahn is Dr. Franzmann. With regard to the period A.D. 170–20 Franzmann writes, "Three fathers of this period have in their writings left us a fairly complete picture of the situation in various parts of the church; they are Irenaeus of Lyons in Gaul ..., Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian of Carthage. Their writings indicate that all but one of the 27 books were somewhere known and accepted in the Christian church; the exception is the Second Letter of Peter. They also show that there was practical unanimity in the churches on all except seven of the New Testament books. The seven are the Letter to the Hebrews, the Letter of James, the Second Letter of Peter, the Second and Third Letters of John, the Letter of Jude,

There is divergence of opinion among scholars pertaining to the process by which the early church recognized the canonicity of certain books; but all these scholars come to the same conclusion: Hebrews is in the canon

and Revelation” (Franzmann, p. 290).

Prof. Gaussen’s writings in the mid-nineteenth century agrees with Franzmann. “[Hebrews and Revelation] were both recognized universally and without dissent during the first two centuries of the church, ... [which is why] Eusebius places them ... among the books which he calls homologomens, or undisputed” (Gaussen, p. 30).

Next we look at Fisher’s testimony. Though he does not specifically mention Hebrews, this book was considered to be of Pauline authorship by many in the early church, so we could infer that Hebrews is implied in this quotation. “There is evidence that within thirty years of the apostle’s [John] death all the Gospels and Pauline letters were known and used in all those centers from which any evidence has come down to us. It is true that some of the smaller letters were being questioned as to their authority in some quarters for perhaps another fifty years, but this was due only to uncertainty about their authorship in those particular locales. This demonstrates that acceptance was not being imposed by the actions of councils but was rather happening spontaneously through a normal response on the part of those who had learned the facts about authorship. In those places where the churches were uncertain about the authorship or apostolic approval of certain books, acceptance was slower” (*The Origin of the Bible, Fisher*, p. 70). He then goes on to note that “... Clement, Barnabas, and Ignatius all draw a clear distinction between their own and the inspired, authoritative New Testament” (Ibid. p. 71). This shows that there were two classifications of writings by the end of the first and beginning of the second centuries: inspired and authoritative (apostolic) and everything else.

Prof. Harris offers some expert testimony on Revelation’s slow acceptance, which gives insights into the reasons why some books were slow to be accepted in the early church as authoritative and canonical. The Book of Revelation was “[w]idely accepted in the early days, [but] was later questioned, but soon regained its place and has been secure in orthodox circles since 400. The earliest writers, Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp, do not mention it. This is not too surprising, ... for in Clement’s day it had scarcely been written, and in Ignatius’ time it was perhaps not yet well known in Antioch. ... Justin mentions the book by name... The Muratorian Canon includes the Apocalypse and ascribes it to John. ... Irenaeus clearly accepts the book as from John the apostle and ascribes it to the end of Domitian’s reign (A.D. 96). Tertullian also quotes it frequently, saying it is by John the apostle. Clement of Alexandria does the same” (Harris, p. 258).

With regard to the Book of Hebrews, Harris writes that “[t]his Epistle can claim an ancient pedigree, as it was referred to numerous times by Clement of Rome in A.D. 95, but not by name. Justin Martyr does the same as do various heretic writers” (p. 264).

We find Prof. Trobisch agreeing with Franzmann and Gaussen, but he comes at the argument from a different and novel angle. He remarks that if Zahn, Moffatt and others had had access to the ancient biblical manuscripts that have since their day been discovered, their conclusions about Hebrews probably would have been different. He writes, “There is no need to speculate about whether the Letter to the Hebrews was part of a collection of Letters of Paul in the second century, because a second-century exemplar [copy of a book or writing] of the Pauline letter collection (document Papyrus 46*) containing the letter at issue, actually exists.” [Chester Beatty discovered them in 1930 and his collection is currently on display in Dublin, Ireland and at the University of Michigan.] In light of these facts, Trobisch continues, “Are we not forced by the evidence to interpret the discussion in the early church about the authenticity of certain biblical writings as a reaction to an already published book? From this perspective, the same documented debates that are usually evaluated to demonstrate a gradual growth process of the canon serve instead as proof that the Canonical Edition of the Christian Bible [a first century published version of the Apostolic Scriptures] was finished, published, and widely used” (Trobisch, p. 37). Commenting on Zahn’s evaluation of the Book of Hebrews’ questioned place in the canon of the early church Trobisch states, “It is not Theodor Zahn’s fault that he did not appropriately evaluate the manuscript evidence. The Codex Sinaiticus had just been discovered when Zahn published his work, and a reliable transcript of the Codex

*“The earliest substantial New Testament manuscript known to exist is a slightly mutilated codex of Paul’s epistles from about the year 200. It consists of eighty-six leaves, measuring originally about 11 by 6½ inches. It is thought originally to have contained 104 leaves, with eighteen leaves now missing from the front and back. The existing leaves contain (in this order) the last eight chapters of Romans; all of Hebrews; virtually all of 1–2 Corinthians; all of Ephesians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians; and two chapters of 1 Thessalonians. All of the leaves have lost some lines at the bottom through deterioration. Leaves of the manuscript first came to light in 1930 among the wares of a native antiquities vendor in Cairo, and these were immediately purchased by a private collector, Mr. Chester Beatty of London. Soon afterwards the rest of the manuscript was acquired from the same dealer by Beatty and by representatives of the University of Michigan. Thirty of the leaves are now at the University of Michigan and 56 are in the Chester Beatty Collection in Dublin, Ireland” (Quoted from <http://www.bible-researcher.com/papy46.html>; see also the University of Michigan’s web site on this document: <http://www.lib.umich.edu/pap/k12/reading/Paul/about.html>).

Vaticanus was not yet available. The high value of both witnesses for the reconstruction of the original text was not yet established among scholars. The impressive number of papyri accessible to us today had not yet been discovered. Zahn certainly is not to be blamed. Today, however, New Testament research has to deal with and evaluate the rich new manuscript evidence” (Ibid.).

Those who presently question the place of Hebrews in the canon, according to modern New Testament literary scholar, Prof. David Trobisch, are operating on outdated information based on the opinions of nineteenth-century scholarship. Since that time, many new ancient manuscripts have been discovered that lay to rest the notion that Hebrews was disputed and lay outside the recognized canon until late in the fourth century. Otherwise stated, in analyzing all the facts and evidence currently available on the subject, the conclusion is inescapable that Hebrews belongs in the canon, and that the apostles placed it there themselves in the first century. We will discuss this issue further below.

In review, we see that prior to the fourth century A.D. in certain quarters there was a debate as to the veracity of several New Testament books. That debate was due in part to the lack of instant and mass communications we enjoy in our modern world. News traveled slowly. Some books were not accepted because there was no quick way to determine their authority. Keep in mind that the heretics were also very active at this time writing many books of their own claiming that they were written by the apostles or ancient biblical writers. Furthermore, in the early years of the Common Era, the Christian church did not resemble modern denominational Christianity. There was, as of yet, no over-arching governing body or council to which all churches in all cities could look for final authority on any matter. The final authority was still the bishop or overseer over each local congregation. Therefore, it was up to each local shepherd to watch over his local flock and to not allow spurious or heretical materials to come into his assembly. (Interestingly, this is currently the exact state of affairs in the modern day Messianic/Hebrew Roots Movement.) This fact accounts for much of the debate over several of the disputed books of the canon.

The Epistle to the Hebrews was but one of several such disputed books. In fact, as we have seen, long after Hebrews was accepted by the majority of churches there was still much debate as to whether 2 Peter, Jude, James, 2 and 3 John should be accepted. If one can reason that there are grounds for tossing Hebrews out of the canon, then one can reason that there are even more grounds for removing the other five. This is dangerous ground to tread. Woe be to the man that ventures down this path!

While the above-quoted scholars debate the disputed books and attempt to prove their acceptance on the basis of quotes from the writings of the early church fathers, Trobisch, in analyzing the same historical document comes to an entirely different conclusion, thus challenging the conventional wisdom as to the time frame of the canonization of the Apostolic Scriptures. He says, “The authority of specific writings was questioned as early as the second half of the second century. Many older studies of the history of the canon, in my opinion, have drawn the wrong conclusion from this observation. The traditional interpretations assert that these discussions reflect a debate about which writings should be included in the Christian Bible. But with the uniform manuscript evidence in mind, the critical remarks of the church fathers can be better interpreted as a historical critical reaction to an existing publication.” He says that this debate as to the authorship and authority of individual writings continues among biblical scholars to this very day, but the publication to which the early church fathers were referring was what Trobisch calls *The Canonical Edition of the Christian Bible*—a version of the New Testament that was both canonized by the apostles and their assistants and published in the first century! This version included all the current books of the New Testament including the so-called disputed books (Trobisch, p. 35).

In the Writings of the Early Church Fathers All the Books of the Canon are Mentioned

In this section we provide evidence from the historical record itself showing how the early church fathers themselves used and quoted the Apostolic Scriptures—specifically which books. In the very early part of the second century nearly all the books are referenced. Certainly by the late second century all the books of the present New Testament canon are accounted.

Harris referencing B. F. Westcott, the nineteenth century biblical scholar, says Westcott shows that in epistle of 1 Clement [the bishop of Rome writing about 95 A.D.] there are allusions to four of Paul’s epistles (1 Cor., Eph., 1 Tim., Titus) as well as to James, John’s Gospel and the Epistle to the Hebrews. “His clear reference to the Epistle to the Hebrews is of special interest, since that letter was later denied in some quarters” (p. 203). “Ignatius, the bishop

of Antioch, who was martyred before 117 A.D., has left us seven letters and is another very important witness which goes back virtually to the days of the apostles. Like Clement, Ignatius refers once to a Pauline epistle by name: Ephesians. Westcott shows reference also to 1 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon” (p. 204).

On Polycarp who had heard the Apostle John and was martyred in 155–156 A.D., Westcott says that Polycarp’s use of Scriptural language is so frequent that it is wholly unreasonable to doubt that he was acquainted with the chief parts of our canon. Westcott shows Polycarp referencing Matthew, Acts, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, 1 and 2 Peter, and 1 John (Harris, p. 206).

Harris then summarizes the writings of the first thirty years after the death of the last apostle with regard to their referencing the books of the New Testament. “[I]n a casual but revealing manner, the bulk of the writings of the New Testament were already, in this early age, known, and used, as profitable. Each of the three orthodox authors recommends at least one of the Pauline Epistles ... by name, and by Basilides, the heretic, two are specifically called ‘Scripture.’ Barnabas similarly refers to Matthew. All the Gospels except Mark (and this so closely parallels Matthew in material that it, too, may be included) are utilized, as are all of the Pauline Epistles and Hebrews (not to prejudge its authorship). In addition, James, 1 John, 1 Peter, and probably 2 Peter, and Revelation are witnessed to, leaving only the two small Epistles of John and the single chapter of Jude without attestation. ... Before the close of the first thirty years after the death of the apostle John, there are three quotations of different New Testament books (including a Gospel) as Scripture, and by twenty years after John’s death, three other Epistles of Paul are referred to by name in a manner implying the fullest authority—there is no contradictory voice” (Ibid., pp. 208–209).

In addition, Harris notes that Justin, writing about 148 A.D. references the four Gospels, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, Hebrews and Revelation (Ibid., pp. 212–213). Harris adds, “Tertullian [150–220 A.D.] ... is explicit and quite in accord with the views of the Fathers back to Clement, one hundred years earlier, in so far as these men have spoken. He has a corpus of Scripture of absolute authority equal to the Old Testament. He refers by name or number to the four Gospels, Acts, the thirteen Pauline Epistles, Hebrews, Jude and Revelation. He quotes also from 1 John, 1 Peter, but omits reference to James, 2 and 3 John, and 2 Peter” (Ibid., p. 253). Furthermore, “Eusebius [writing in the fourth century] says Clement of Alexandria [born about 150 A.D. and to be distinguished from Clement of Rome] used all the books of our New Testament except 2 Peter and 2 John. Clement uses the phrase ‘Law and Prophets, and Gospels and apostles.’ He ascribes full authority to the apostles” (Ibid., p. 254). And finally, Origen who died in 254 A.D., according to Westcott, was “acquainted with all the books which are received at present, and received as apostolic all those which were recognized by Clement. The others he used, but with a certain reserve and hesitation, arising from a want of information as to their history, rather than from any positive grounds of suspicion” (Ibid., p. 255).

Conclusion

[Please Note: This is the conclusion to the larger work entitled, “Can You Trust the New Testament Canon as YHVH’s Divine Word?” from which this present article is excerpted. The main article is available upon request and will be available on our web site: www.hoshanarabbah.org.]

In this work we have attempted to provide ample scholarly and historical evidence to demonstrate the following:

- The 27 books of the Apostolic Scriptures would not have been acknowledged as being “Canon” if they had not first been recognized by the apostles of Yeshua and the Body of Believers in the first and second centuries A.D. as having the same authority as the earlier Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). And the latter Christian church would not have accepted these books as canon, and subsequently affirmed their canonicity if they had not felt that these books carried the weight of apostolic authority. This is perhaps the most important point we have made in this work. Historical records from the first and early second-centuries show us that the early Believers had faith in the same Apostolic Scriptures that we have today, so why shouldn’t we?
- Not all New Testament scholars believe that the Apostolic Scriptures were canonized by the early Catholic Church in the fourth century.
- There are many scholars who, though holding to the fourth century canonization view, still admit that

- (a) the Apostolic Scriptures were written and accepted as authoritative by the end of the first century, and (b) a de facto canon was in place at that time, though no over-arching ecclesiastical body had yet recognized it, since no such body was to exist for another 250 years or so!
- ☞ There is substantial evidence from the earliest church fathers writing in the period from A.D. 95 to 120 that all the present books of the New Testament were used and recognized as authoritative.
 - ☞ Not only were all the writings of the apostles recognized and quoted from, but these same early church writers recognized them as Scripture.
 - ☞ There is substantial evidence within the Apostolic Scriptures themselves to give credence to the idea that some body of individuals under the auspices of the apostles themselves edited, then published, in effect, canonizing the Apostolic Scriptures by the end of the first century.
 - ☞ If the Book of Hebrews was later questioned by church leaders, it was not because Hebrews was not accepted as canonical by the earliest church leaders, but because of confusion by later church leaders over the authorship of Hebrews. We could find no record that Hebrews was added later by church leaders because it somehow substantiated their anti-nomian (anti-Torah) theologies. Those who assert this have yet to produce historical evidence to justify their claims. Therefore, until they do, their claims should be considered biased and bogus.
 - ☞ If it can be proven that the Book of Hebrews does not belong in the canon because of its being one of the “disputed” books, then we have even a greater justification, based on the historical record, to question, if not toss out, the books of 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, James and Jude.

These are the facts from the historical record and from the world’s leading authorities on the subject. Until new historical evidence and data comes to light these are the facts we currently have to work with. One can choose to ignore the facts or to accept them. That is a matter of personal choice. But whatever side of this debate you choose to agree with, you must live with the eternal consequences of your actions.

As a former shepherd and defender of sheep from predators for many years on the family farm, and now as a shepherd (pastor) of YHVH’s precious spiritual sheep, this author feels a great responsibility to be a watchman over YHVH’s sheep and to defend them from spiritual predators (false teachers). If you have fallen under the influence of teachings currently circulating that question the books of the New Testament, and if you are at all toying with the notion of eviscerating portions of the New Testament, you are strongly urged to reconsider. This is a very serious issue. Admittedly, in most of our English Bibles there are some anti-Torah translation-bias issues that need correction, but that does not justify removing books from the canon of Scripture.

What your responsibility is, therefore, in light of these issues is to roll your sleeves up, get to work as a good Berean, search out the Scriptures and study them to show yourself approved as a good workman learning to rightly interpret YHVH’s Word. Study the original languages. Pray for wisdom and discernment from the Father above. Then never forget one thing: If you do not understand a passage of Scripture, the problem is not with the Scripture (unless it has been poorly translated from the original language), it is with your understanding of it! Never, ever abdicate to someone else, no matter how anointed they may seem or how popular they may be, your responsibility before your Creator and Judge to study the issues yourself.

We conclude with these scriptural warnings about false teachers in the last days.

Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron. (1 Tim. 4:1-2)

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (2 Tim. 4:3-4)

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with

feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingers not, and their damnation slumbers not. (2 Pet. 2:1-3)

Please Note:

For a scholarly discussion on the controversies surrounding the contents of the Epistle to the Hebrews itself, we strongly encourage you to look at the following resources:

- A short and easy-to-understand article entitled, “Answering the Questions Regarding the Epistle of the Hebrews” from the First Fruits of Zion ministry. The article is available on their web site at <http://www.ffoz.org/>.
- The commentary on the book of Hebrews in Dr. David Stern’s *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., Clarksville, MD; Internet: <http://www.MessianicJewish.net>; Phone: (410) 358-6471;

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