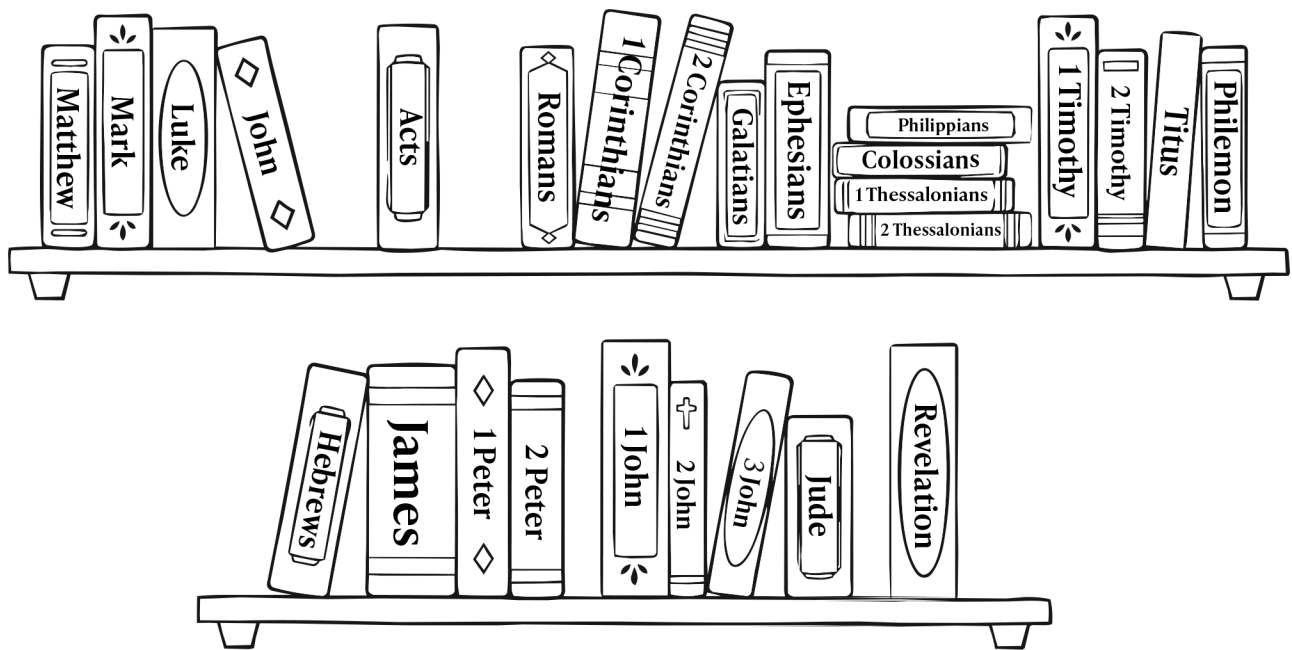


HOW THE New Testament Canon WAS RECOGNIZED



We should avoid the mistaken notion that men decided what would be the Word of God. Some skeptics argue that political leaders or church councils selected which books would be included in the Bible, but this idea does not reflect how the New Testament was formed. Most of the writings of the apostles were recognized as authoritative as they were written. The records of Jesus' ministry were written during the lifetime of many eyewitnesses who could verify the accuracy of the Gospel accounts. The apostle John lived until around the end of the first century, with his writings being the last of the New Testament writings to be completed.

Before the end of the second century most of the books of our New Testament were already recognized as Scripture. A document called the *Muratorian Fragment*, dated to around AD 170, listed the books viewed by Christians as authoritative Scripture, which included most of the current New Testament. Athanasius of Alexandria wrote a letter in AD 367 that included the complete list of New Testament books. The first church councils to discuss the list of New Testament books were the Synod of Hippo (AD 393) and the Council of Carthage (AD 397). These councils did not "decide" the list of books; they simply acknowledged the list of books that were being used by the church and affirmed their use.

As Dr. Robert Picirilli has stated, "It is more correct to say that the Christian church 'received' or 'accepted' or 'recognized' the inspired writings than to say that the church 'determined' or 'decided' which writings belonged in the Bible. . . . The providence of God preserved His inspired Word."