

## FOUR TYPES OF ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS

Ancient manuscripts are classified into four groups. The oldest of these are the uncial manuscripts on vellum or parchment. They are written in all capital letters with no punctuation or spaces between words or sentences, or even paragraphs. The syntax (sentence structure) alone is the basis of all punctuation. An Anglicized version of an uncial manuscript would look like this: FORGODSOLOVEDTHEWORLDTHATHE GAVE, etc.

The second type of manuscript is called the minuscule. It dates back to the tenth century A.D. You can always tell a minuscule manuscript by its semi-uncial script. This script was developed by monks during the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries and consisted of lower case cursive letters, which now form the basis of our modern small Roman or Greek letters.

Thirdly, we have the Lectionaries. They are so named because of the Bible passages they contain and the purpose they served. For example, suppose a pastor in one of the early churches wanted to read Romans 5:1-12. He would copy that portion of the Word from either the original text, or a Latin copy, or some other ancient language. He would then insert this passage in his order of service. Maybe in the middle of his message he wanted to cover Hebrew 4:1-3; he would have copied that down, too. Perhaps he wished to close with still another verse, so that verse also went into his lesson. The grouping of such Bible passages appointed for reading in worship services became known as lectionaries. Since many of these lectionaries are by far more ancient than the Manuscripts which are presently available to us, they are of great help in determining the text of the original wording of Scripture.

The fourth type of manuscript was simply called the papyri. This very delicate paper was too brittle to be folded but could be rolled into scrolls. Fortunately, little deterioration occurred when this material was stored in very hot and dry climates; well-preserved papyri has been found dating prior to A.D. 200

### CODEX SINAITICUS

We owe much of our knowledge of the Scriptures to a brilliant nineteenth century German scholar, who spent his life piecing together the original New Testament. At the age of nineteen, young Count Konstantin von Tischendorf amazed his professors with his fluent knowledge of the classical languages and dialects of antiquity. Seven years later, he was appointed lecturer at the University of Leipzig. The following year, he published a new edition of the Greek New Testament.

In the Spring of 1844, Tischendorf took a trip to the Near East. In the course of his travels, he journeyed to the Sinaitic Peninsula in search of an old monastery that had been hewn from the rock on the side of Mount Sinai. Since there were no hotels or

motels in those days, travelers often spent the night in monasterys. When Tischendorf arrived at the Greek Orthodox monastery of St. Catherin's, he was welcomed warmly by the Russian monks.

After a pleasant meal and a visit with the prior, Tischendorf presented his letter of introduction. He was then given a grand tour of the grounds and buildings and taken to the library. Tischenforf was disappointed by what he saw, but he kept on digging through piles of dusty parchments. Then in a small room near the library he saw a large wastebasket filled to th rim with what looked like ancient vellum. The contents of the wastebasket had been consigned to the fireplace—some of which would contribute to the warmth of his room for that night. Tischendorf was aghast at the thought. Here, if his eyes did not deceive him, was something of real value. Quickly he started going through the papers. Was there more of this kind of material around? If so, would they bring it to him that he might examine it? This is how Tichendorf discovered the 129 pages of what is today known as the Codex Sinaiticus, or the Codex Aleph.

Unhappily, Tischendorf did not 'play poker' well. His face lit up in such a way that the monks knew he had found knew he had found something priceless in those wastebaskets. So he had to tell them of his discovery of a manuscript that possibly dated back to the second century. Would they let him have it? Immediately the attitude of the monks changed; the answer was no. Tischendor could not take the papers with him, but he would be permitted to stay on and take some notes. Tischenfdorf did more than that; he copied the manuscript. In the end, after prolonged bargaining., he was allowed to take 43 of the 129 pages he had found.

Almost fourteen years would pass before all the negotiations for the transfer of this and other priceless ancient documents—among them the Epistle of Barnabas—were concluded. England's interest in the manuscripts was made known. The monks were shocked. What, sell their precious papers to English heretics? They would rather give them to Russia—on loan, of course. Triumphantly, and with the full backing of Russia, Tischendorf carried off his prize for further study. He published his findings in 1862. Codex Sinaiticus is still one of the finest and most accurate texts available to us today, and it became the basis of many revisions and corrections of earlier editions of the Bible.

Years passed. Then in 1933, the Russian Communists decided they had no need of Bibles, old or new, so they sold Codex Sinaiticus to Great Britian for 100,000 pounds sterling. The crumpled pages were restored and bound in two volumes and placed in the British Museum. Later they were photostatically reproduced and the copies sent to libraries throughout the world.

CODEX VATICANUS

With Tischendorf's findings made available to the scholars of the world, a new interest in ancient manuscripts was kindled. Someone remembered his history and wondered what had become of the old manuscripts which Napoleon's scholars had discovered in the Vatican library when the Pope had been captured.

Actually, Codex Vaticanus, also known as Codex B, was known to be some fifteen years older than Codex Sinaiticus (Codex Aleph). Vaticanus dated back to A.D. 325 or 350, and had probably been brought from the East by Pope Nicholas in 1448. Until the Napoleonic Wars, the manuscript had been hidden from the outside world. In 1809, when Napoleon exiled the Pope to Avignon (later to Savona), it took about fifty wagons to transport the Pope's library. With the fall of Napoleon in 1815, the papers were returned to the Vatican before anyone had a chance to examine them carefully. Once more in the Vatican library, they were jealously guarded by the Roman Catholics.

Tregelles, another great scholar and friend of Tischendorf's, decided to investigate the Codex Vaticanus in the Vatican library. He applied to the Pope for permission to examine the manuscript and was promptly refused. When he explained that he was a professor of New Testament literature at Leipzig University the Pope gave permission for Tregelles to study the manuscript for six hours only. That was in the year 1843. Twenty years later, Tischendorf was permitted to examine the manuscript for some days, six hours at a time. Of course, he had to submit to stringent security measures. He was searched on his way in and on his way out. He could bring no writing materials and could take no notes. The manuscript was laid out on a large table and he could read it for no longer than the time specified. Furthermore, there would be guards watching him all the time he was reading.

Tischendorf memorized a portion of the text each day, not only in the Greek but also in Hebrew and Aramaic! Since he was a genius in all three languages, this presented no problem. When he returned home, he would sit down and write out that part of Scripture which he had memorized. The next day he would go back to the Vatican to master the next portion of the Word. This went on for the summer holidays, and in three months Tischendorf had memorized the entire text of Codex Vaticanus. This was one of the greatest memory feats of all time!

Upon his return to Leipzig, Tischendorf published the results of his findings. So close was his text to the original, that Pope Pius IX ordered the Vatican manuscript photographed in 1859. In that way it became public property for the world at large. Codex Vaticanus is still one of our most valuable manuscripts of the Word of God.

### CODEX ALEXANDRINUS

A third very interesting manuscript, which very few people knew about, is the Codex Alexandrinus. This Greek language manuscript had been written about A.D. 450 in

Alexandria, Egypt. Apparently no one paid any attention to it in the years that followed. In 1621, when Cyril Lucar became the patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church, he transferred the manuscript to Constantinople.

He had succumbed to the influence of Calvinistic reaching, and was corresponding with leading churchmen in the Western world. That's how he learned of England's keen interest in ancient Biblical manuscripts. So, when the British ambassador, Thomas Roe, was scheduled to return home, Lucar sent with him the manuscripts as a gift to King Charles I. The beautiful document, Codex Alexandrinus, was presented at court in 1627, just fifteen years after the King James Version of the Bible had been completed. What a pity that it came so late, because this very ancient manuscript would have helped immensely in the correct rendition of the English text.

### EPHRAEMI RESCRIPTUS

It is fascinating to learn what happened to some of the great libraries of the past and to trace their disposition throughout history, for example, we know that Cleopatra was very fond of reading and that Marc Antony was extraordinarily fond of Cleopatra. When he heard of her love for books, Marc Antony took his army to one of the great libraries of Asia Minor. There he 'liberated' 400,000 volumes of literature and took them down to Egypt as a gift for Cleopatra. An act like this would be tantamount to the Library of Congress being stolen and moved to another country. Many of the great libraries of the ancient world have disappeared, and we know of their existence only because history has recorded it for us.

It is equally interesting to discover that some ancient manuscripts, thought to be lost, were eventually recovered. One of these is known to us as the Ephraemi Rescriptus, or Codex C. This recovery in the sixteenth century involved Catherine de Medici, who was as ambitious as she was clever. Catherine was a member of the colorful Italian family that had risen from obscurity to immense wealth and fame. Over a period of nearly three hundred years, the Medicis had made a name for themselves which ran the gamut from popes to poisoners to patrons of the arts. They had affiliated themselves with the great houses of Europe through marriage, and Catherine had become the wife of King Henry II of France. She bore him four sons who eventually, through her constant manipulations, became kings.

Catherine de Medici was an avid, if somewhat superficial reader, who treasured her books and took them wherever she went. Among her favorites were the sermons of a Syrian theologian, Father Ephraem. When Catherine died, her books went to the French National Library in Paris. They were stacked away and ignored for a long time—245 years to be exact.

In 1834, a student of theology decided to write a thesis on the sermons of Father Ephraem. He went to the French National Library and asked permission to check out some of the Medici books. He was told that they could not be removed from the premises, since the collection had great historic value; however, he was permitted to examine the books. While he was reading, the light fell on the page in such a way that indentations in the vellum were visible. What appeared to the student as so many indentations were, in fact, inscriptions made prior to those of Father Ephraem. What actually had happened was that in 1553, when Father Ephraem wanted to record his sermons, paper was very scarce and hard to obtain. He found some used vellum in an ancient Syrian monastery and simply erased the writing. True, the indentations were still there, but his own sermons could be written over them. Without realizing it Father Ephraem had erased one of the finest of all Bible manuscripts in order to write his own sermons!

Immediately, the alert student became far more interested in what Father Ephraem had erased than in what he had written. Through the use of chemicals, the original manuscript was restored. We call this type of manuscript a palimpsest, which means “erased and written over.” This particular one became known as Ephraemi Rescriptus; in other words, Ephraem wrote over it. Since its discovery, the manuscript has been removed from the Medici stacks of literature and placed where it belongs—in the Bible stacks at the library in Paris.

## THE POPYRI

### *The Oxyrhynchos Manuscripts*

Archaeological findings have provided us with additional priceless manuscripts of the past. About 1900, Oxford University professors, Dr. Grenfell and Dr. Hunt, went to Oxyrhynchos in Upper Egypt, west of the Nile. They were searching for ancient treasure and trinkets of silver and gold that lay buried in the tombs. During the course of their excavations of the one-time provincial capital, they came upon a tremendous hall filled with stuffed, mummified crocodiles. They were baffled and disappointed; they had expected to find priceless art treasures and jewels in the great chamber, not two thousand stuffed crocodiles! Possibly on the other side of the chamber they would find what they were looking for—and indeed they did. They recovered many valuable artifacts which are still in British museums today, estimated to be worth millions of dollars. This find can scarcely be compared, however, to their discovery of far greater riches—a discovery which came about quite by accident.

To reach the other side of the great chamber, the crocodiles had to be moved out of the way. It was a tedious job, but it paid off handsomely. When one of the native workers stumbled and fell, the crocodile he was carrying hit a sharp rock and broke open. Dr. Grenfell’s eyes widened in amazement at what he saw: Inside that crocodile were

papyri! Upon investigation, they found inside the crocodile mummies an entire library of the ancient world—not just one, but many different kinds of manuscripts. These included some Biblical manuscripts from the second century—practically the same time of the autograph of the New Testament Scriptures. Here also were grammar and etymology books which led to further discoveries of principles involved in the syntax and grammar of the *koine* Greek, which we still use today. The Oxyrhynchos Papyri can be seen in museums in both Egypt and Britain. However, all the studies concerned with those papyri have never really been completed.

### *The Chester Beatty Papyri*

There was increasing excitement over the discovery of papyri and everyone began searching for them. Countless small hills and sand dunes were dug up, and many turned out to be only rubbish heaps of the past, which contained bits of slates, vases, broken pottery—reminders of a life long ago. The Arabs, not to be outdone, began their own treasure hunt. They carried off many valuable treasures and peddled these to any and all buyers. So, here and there, fragment of Biblical writings turned up. Among these was an ancient Jewish temple library of the seventh century B.C., discovered at Elephantine, Egypt, during the years 1906 to 1908.

Another great discovery came on November 19, 1931, when the Chester Beatty Papyri were found. Chester Beatty was a millionaire from Philadelphia who made a tour of Palestine and Egypt. He had heard that some Old Testament papyri in Greek were being offered for sale. Even though the price was exorbitant, Beatty paid it immediately. He then turned the entire collection of documents over to two scholars, F.G. Kenyon and H.A. Sanders. A detailed study of these second and third century papyri revealed some of the missing papers of the Codex Sinaiticus, portions of Paul's Epistles and the four Gospels. The 'haul' was well worth the price he had paid. This collection is now housed at the University of Pennsylvania.

### *The Work of Deissmann*

The ever-increasing supply of newly recovered papyri furnished abundant material for research and evaluation by knowledgeable philologists. We owe much to a group of very famous German scholars who, under the leadership of Adolph Deissmann, shed new light on the language of the New Testament. His studies clarified the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of the *koine* Greek. *Light from the Ancient East*, translated from the German, is a fascinating book on this subject and contains some of Deissmann's findings.

### *The Dead Sea Scrolls*

In 1947, a fifteen-year-old Bedouin boy followed a goat which had strayed. When he casually threw a pebble into the cleft of a rock, he was startled at the sound of breaking pottery. Later he returned with a friend to explore the cave. Here they stumbled upon several earthenware jars that contained dirty, musty-smelling parchment. What seemed like an accidental find turned out to be Biblical manuscripts antedating the oldest known Old Testament manuscripts by one thousand years. This included the complete book of Isaiah. It would take many years and a small fortune to acquire these scrolls from the Arab black market, and even more patience to piece them together and to decipher. There could be no doubt, however, the scrolls were genuine. In the following years many additional caches were located, including the main library of the Essenes, a Jewish sect. The Dead Sea Scrolls were named after the area in which they had been found.

What do these discoveries prove to us? That God provided for the preservation and the recovery of His written message, the canon of Scripture.

#### THE NEED FOR THE CANON

Why does the believer need a canon of Scripture? Why were the various portions of the divinely inspired Word of God collected and bound into a book called the Holy Bible? Let's consider four reasons why there was a very definite need for the Canon.

First, so that believers in every generation might have complete revelation from God, the dispensation in which they live, their relationship to the angelic conflict, as well as many other principles of doctrine. To operate in the devil's world believers must have a norm or standard of absolute authority.

When it comes to absolutes, no ordinary human being can speak with authority—no matter what title or office you may give him. Every human being has some area of limitation because he possesses a sin nature. No matter how capable he may be or how excellent his judgment, there cannot be absolute authority vested in any individual. Absolute authority is a divine prerogative.

There has been only one member of the human race to whom absolute authority was given—the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18). Because He is absent from the earth and at the right hand of the Father. He must leave behind a standard which carries the same authority with which He spoke during His incarnation. That absolute standard of authority is found only in the Word of God (1 Cor. 2:16).

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth. (John 16:12-13a)

The entire Bible is the Word of God! Just remember that our Lord said to His disciples, so rest assured that the New Testament Epistles carry the same weight as those words which the Lord spoke in person. They are addressed to you and to me.

Second, a Canon was necessary so that people might have God's Word in writing. Whether you realize it or not, you happen to be one of the generations of believers who has in your possession the greatest treasure of all time—the completed canon of Scripture! There is nothing more rewarding and profitable than to go 'prospecting' in the Word of God. In addition to Bible doctrine, the Word contains thousands of promises to which God has put His signature. All are guaranteed by the very essence of God, and you and I have them in writing.

This has not always been the case, since revelation from God in the past dispensations came to man in other ways. Since the completion of the canon of Scripture in A.D. 96, all extra-Biblical revelation has ceased. Today, if anyone claims that God speaks to him in a dream or trance, he is out of line; God speaks to us only through His Word. Therefore, in order to learn, understand, and apply God's Word. Therefore, in order to learn, understand, and apply God's Word, Bible doctrine must be taught exegetically, categorically, and isagogically. God made every provision necessary for our assimilation of the content of the divine textbook. Once you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, that Book should become your manual for living. So you see, there should become your manual for living. So you see, there should be no such thing as a drab, depressing, miserable existence for any believer. Life should have meaning, purpose, and definition; God has a special plan for you. Everything that you will ever need in life for inner peace and happiness, for blessing and strength and stability is found in the completed canon of Scripture. There is no substitute for Bible doctrine or for positive volition toward it on your part.

Third, there was a need for the preservation and circulation of the sacred writings. For example, in A.D. 320, the Roman Emperor Diocletian ordered the destruction of all sacred books of the Christians. Although Diocletian was not aware of it, his persecutions acted as a catalyst to precipitate the necessary settlement of a grave dispute. Theologians had been arguing over the inclusion of James, Hebrews and Second and Third John into the Canon; but now that controversy had to be resolved in a hurry. The Roman soldiers were on their way to carry out the order, so Christians attempted to determine what was sacred and what was not.

Fourth, there had to be some norm or criteria for canonicity so that people might know which writings were canonical. The inspired writing had to be protected from the infiltration of non-canonical books. A tremendous mass of literature had appeared in the first three or four centuries, all of which claimed to be authoritative and inspired. Much of this literature was promoted by various cults in an attempt to prove their false



theology or heretical ideas. They even went so far as to maintain that some of these were Paul's lost messages. Something had to be done to determine which books were canonical and which were not canonical.

After the Roman Emperor Constantine became a Christian, he was so eager for doctrine that he ordered fifty copies of the Scriptures for the churches of his new capitol—Constantinople. Again the question: What is Scripture and what is not? This had to be settled once and for all. The scribes began their mammoth task of writing out by hand the fifty copies that the emperor had ordered. The job was completed before Constantine's death.

### THE CRITERIA FOR OLD TESTAMENT CANONICITY

With the awareness of the need for a Canon, five criteria were agreed upon. On this basis, the inclusion or exclusion of certain books into the Canon was eventually determined.

#### *The Question of Inspiration*

Was the book of divine origin (2 Pet. 1:21)? Every extant book of an acknowledged messenger of God, commissioned by God to make known His will, was immediately accepted as the Word of God.

#### *The Principle of Internal Evidence*

Was its claim to inspiration adequately sustained by the awareness of the writers that this was indeed sacred Scripture? There are certain passages of Scripture which explain this principle of canonicity. For example: Deuteronomy 31:24-26; Joshua 1:8; Judges 3:4; Jeremiah 36.

Nehemiah 8:1-8 is a critical passage, which presents the facts that the people were taught the Word of God. When Daniel went into captivity, he took with him a copy of the Old Testament as it then existed. By reading the prophecies of Jeremiah 25:11-12 and 29:10, he discovered that Israel had a future. This is brought out by Daniel 9:2, 5-6. Another passage which is especially clear on the first two criteria for canonicity is Zechariah 7:12.

Yes, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts.

#### *Documentation by Quotation*

The New Testament contains quotations from the Old Testament made by Jesus Christ and others who declared it to be the Word of God. We have many such passages, among them Matthew 22:29, and John 5:39 and 10:35.

### *The Law of Public Official Action*

This is an historical law which required that public action be taken immediately to solemnly declare a portion of Scripture to be the Word of God. We have an illustration of this in Nehemiah 8:5.

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people;  
(for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it  
all the people stood up.

When liberalism, socialism, religiosity, and legalism gain a foothold in a nation, that national entity invariably declines. This pattern of apostasy was followed by the Jews many times, with resultant discipline from God (Lev. 26:14-39). Often military defeat (Deut. 28:25) served to awaken the Jews to a realization of their spiritual status and an awareness of their need for Bible doctrine. The prophets or priests would publicly read and teach the Word of God. To do so, they had to know which books to read on such occasions.

### *The Law of Cause and Effect*

The cause is the existence of the Canon, and the effect is the recognition of the Canon. The Old Testament books are not canonical because Israel recognized them as such but because they were of divine origin. Inspiration was the mechanics by which they had come into existence, and that is what made certain books canonical. So we might say that canonicity is a recognition of what God has done in the field of communication. Passages like 2Kings 22—23:2; and Nehemiah 8 are *not* historical accounts of the ratification of the Canon but the result of the existence of the Canon. In other words, the Canon existed: therefore, it was recognized.

### *The Principle of External Evidence*

There are also some extra-Biblical evidences which led to the completion of the Canon. The year 586 B.C. saw God's administration of the fifth cycle of discipline of Judah. Jerusalem and the Temple had been destroyed, and the Jews had gone into the Babylonian captivity (2 Chron. 36:11-21). During their captivity (586-516 B.C.) the Jews realized why they had disintegrated as a nation. This led to a resurgence of the study of Bible doctrine. At last the Jews became aware of the importance of the written Word as a part of their spiritual heritage—so much so, that we have extra-Biblical evidence with regard to their consciousness of the Canon as it then existed. There were men like Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi who kept reminding the people of the

importance of the Scriptures. There were other outstanding leaders like Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel, who led the advance column out of captivity back to Jerusalem. They all recognized that they had the Canon. By the year 425 B.C. all the Old Testament books had been written, and the Old Testament Canon was collected and closed.

More than that, apparently these same Jewish leaders invented marvelous system for the preservation of the Canon. They counted every letter in every book. They knew the middle letter of the Canon. Now whenever copies were made of the Scriptures and a scribe arrived at the midpoint of the text, they would check him out by counting the exact number of letters. The same was done upon the completion of the text. As a result, we are assured that the Old Testament we have today is precisely the same as at the time of its original writing.

### THE ORGANIZATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

In content, the Hebrew Old Testament Canon is exactly the same as our Old Testament in the English, but the number of books and their arrangement in the Hebrew Canon is different. We have, first of all, a threefold division of the Canon: the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings.

We've already seen that every writer of the Old Testament had the gift of prophecy. Moses, for example, was the unique prophet—the greatest prophet who ever lived—until the coming of Jesus Christ. Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. They are called the Torah, or the Pentateuch and consist of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

The second group of books in the Old Testament Canon are the Nabhiim, or the Prophets. All of these men had the gift of prophecy, but some were called the former prophets and others the latter prophets. The latter prophets preached after Babylonian Captivity, and the former prophets preached before the Babylonian Captivity. In the Hebrew Canon, there are eight prophetic books, four in each category. Among the former prophets we have Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. There was no breakdown into First and Second Samuel or First and Second Kings as we have it in the English Bible. Joshua is the human author of the last chapter of Deuteronomy and of the book of Joshua (with the exception of the last five verses). Samuel wrote Judges and First and Second Samuel. The human author of Kings is anybody's guess. What matters is the principle of inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16).

The latter prophets are commonly known as the major and the minor prophets. They are not major or minor in content or importance, but only in length. The three major prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Isaiah wrote in classical Hebrew; Jeremiah wrote in everyday Hebrew; and Ezekiel struck a happy medium between the two; yet each one wrote under the principle of inspiration (2Pet. 1:21).

The minor prophets, which we divide into twelve separate books, are all one book in the Hebrew Bible, called The Twelve. Apart from the book of Daniel, The Twelve includes everything from Hosea to Malachi.

It is important that you have some understanding of the books of the Hebrew Canon for this reason: Occasionally Jesus would quote a passage from the Old Testament. He might then say, “As Jeremiah said” when in reality He was quoting Zechariah. Had Jesus made a mistake? No! Jesus knew what He was saying, He was quoting on the basis of a system that the Jews used for locating a passage. Remember that modern books did not exist in those days; they used scrolls instead. Often a scroll contained more than one book, but the entire scroll was identified by the name of the first book. In our example, it would be called the ‘Jeremiah Scroll.’

The third section of the Hebrew Old Testament is called the Kethubim or the Writings. Its writers had only the gift of prophecy but did not hold the office of Prophet. The Writings were divided into three sections: the Poetical Books, the Five Rolls (also called the Megilloth), and the Historical Books.

There are three books of poetry: Psalm, Proverbs, and Job. The Five Rolls or Megilloth are five separate books, each of which is read at a different feast. The first of these five books is Song of Solomon, always read on the Passover. The Book of Ruth is read on the day of Pentecost. After Ruth came Ecclesiastes, which is read at the Feast of the Tabernacles. Then Esther is read at the Feast of Purim because it contains the origin of that holiday. The last of the Megilloth is Lamentations, also known as the The Five Rules. Jeremiah wrote Lamentations in the form of a funeral dirge on the occasion of the destruction of Jerusalem by the besieging armies of Nebuchadnezzar. As one might expect, Lamentations is read annually on the anniversary of that sad day.

The three Historical Books are found at the end of the Hebrew Canon: Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah (one book), and Chronicles. As is the case with Samuel and Kings, there is no division of Chronicles into two books in the Hebrew. When we add the number of books in the Hebrew Old Testament, we have only twenty-four books compared to our thirty-nine. Their arrangement of the Canon is better than our in every way.

#### THE TESTIMONY OF JOSEPHUS

The generally accepted date for the completion of the Old Testament Canon is the year 425 or 424 B.C. The fact of its existence was recognized by the Jews but blatantly denied by a bombastic character by the name of Apion. He flatly declared that there was no such thing as the sacred Scriptures. I don't know what believers of his time did about this attack on the Word of God, but I do know what one unbeliever did—he came to the defense of Scripture promptly and in no uncertain terms.

Flavius Josephus was an unbeliever. By race he was a Jew; by mannerism, adoption, and citizenship he was a Roman; and by profession he was an outstanding soldier and eminent historian. From the time that Josephus had been promoted to the rank of a Roman general, he was pro-Roman all the way. Yet for all this, he simply could not let this scurrilous accusation against the validity of the Canon go without a formal objection. He sat down and refuted Apion's claim, point by point, in a book called *Contra Apion*.

Keep in mind that Josephus was an unbeliever; he was not emotionally involved and therefore could write clearly, objectively, and concisely on this matter. He had one passion in life—accurate presentation of history. He once said that an historian should record the facts of history without interpreting the facts, he must report accurately what was said, what was done, what was expressed. So, while Josephus had little or no love for his own people, the Jew, he could not let Apion get away with historical inaccuracy.

In *Contra Apion*, Josephus describes the sacred books of the Jews. He states that the time during which these books were written extended from Moses to Artaxerxes I, who reigned from 465 to 424 B.C. Furthermore, he demonstrates that there never was a time that the Jews did not accept this text as the Word of God. Canonicity was in fact, a definite part of Jewish history. He further states that nothing was ever added to the Canon after the death of Artaxerxes in 424 B.C.; the line of prophets had ceased to exist, and no one dared make any addition, subtraction, or alteration to the canon of Scripture.

But make no mistake, Josephus was not personally interested in defending the Canon, but only proving historically the existence of the Canon. And so, quite unintentionally, an unbeliever provided us with reliable extra-Biblical documentation of how the Canon was completed and recognized—hence, of its existence.

#### THE DEMAND FOR THE *SEPTUAGINT*

In the centuries which followed the Babylonian captivity, many changes took place for the Jews. The Persian Empire, which had been favorably inclined toward the Jews, collapsed. Alexander the Great extended his conquests. He, too, was pro-Semitic, and the Jews prospered during his reign and under his successors, the Ptolemies.

At that time the largest group of Jews in the world had settled at Alexandria in Egypt. The city had been founded by Alexander the Great, and the Ptolemies had made it their capital. They loved books and collected them. During their dynasty, they had built one of the finest universities of the ancient world in Alexandria, the Museum, which contained an immense library. Alexandria was the home of many brilliant Greek philosophers, scientists, mathematicians, and writers. No wonder the city became a

great center of learning and culture. It was here that the first translation of the Hebrew Canon was made.

By the year 280 B.C., the large Jewish community at Alexandria had been influenced by Greek culture to such an extent that its citizens had adopted the Hellenistic Greek of Alexander the Great as their own language. They could no longer read the Scriptures in the original Hebrew. (Hellenistic Greek was the transitional Greek between the classical Attic Greek and the *koine* Greek of the New Testament.) True, they still tried to adhere to the legal code and observe their holy days, but now they clamored for a translation of the Holy Scriptures into Greek.

This required real experts. Seventy-two Alexandrian Hebrew scholars gathered together and produced an amazingly accurate translation from the manuscripts in their possession. It was named their honor and memory the *Septuagint* of the Seventy after the number of translators. The *Septuagint* was then circulated among the Greek-speaking Jews. It was also widely used in Palestine during the incarnation of Jesus and in the time of the apostles. So the existence and acceptance of the *Septuagint* in the year 280 B.C. gives us yet another historical proof of canonicity.