**How We Got the Bible:** *A Journey Through History*

**D. Gene Williams Jr., PhD**
**Defend the Word Ministries**
**NorthPointe Church**

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## INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wondered how the Bible came to be? It's not as if one day, the Bible just fell from the sky, leather-bound and chaptered! The process of recognizing which books belong in the Bible—the *canon*—was a long journey, filled with debates, councils, and decisions that shaped Christianity. This article explores the story of how early Christians recognized the books of the Bible, why some books made the cut while others didn't, and how different Christian traditions (like Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox) came to have slightly different versions of the Bible.

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## WHAT DOES "CANON" MEAN?

The word *canon* comes from a Greek word that means "rule" or "measuring stick." It's like saying these books are the "gold standard" for faith and practice. A book is considered *canonical* if it's inspired by God and serves as a guide for believers.

But figuring out which books met that standard wasn't straightforward. Early Christians had to rely on several questions: Was the book written by an apostle or someone close to them? Was it widely accepted by Christians? Did it align with the teachings of Jesus? These questions helped shape the Bible we know today.

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## THE OLD TESTAMENT: WHAT ABOUT THE SEPTUAGINT?

The Old Testament (OT) is shared by both Jews and Christians, but there are differences in the versions each group uses. Early Christians, including Jesus and the apostles, often quoted from the *Septuagint*—a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. For Christians, the Septuagint was important because it pointed to Jesus as the promised Messiah.

However, after Jesus' time, Jewish leaders moved away from the Septuagint, partly because it was so popular with Christians. Over time, Christians also started debating which Old Testament books to include, especially the additional writings found in the Septuagint, like *Tobit* and *Judith*. That's why Catholic and Orthodox Bibles include some of these books, while most Protestant Bibles don't.

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## THE NEW TESTAMENT: SORTING THE LETTERS AND GOSPELS

When it comes to the New Testament (NT), early Christians had a lot of writings to sort through. Letters from apostles like Paul and Peter were passed around churches, and four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—stood out as central to the Christian faith. But there were also other writings, like the *Gospel of Thomas* or the *Shepherd of Hermas*, that some Christians thought might be scripture.

**Early church used four basic rules determining which books belonged in the NT:**

1. **Apostolic Origin**: Was it written by an apostle or someone close to them?
2. **Universal Acceptance**: Was it widely recognized by churches?
3. **Consistency**: Did it agree with the core teachings of Christianity?
4. **Spiritual Impact**: Did it change lives and reflect God's truth?

By the late 300s AD, church councils like the Synod of Hippo (393 AD) and the Councils of Carthage (397 and 419 AD) affirmed the 27 books we now know as the New Testament.

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**CHALLENGES AND CONTROVERSIES**

One of the biggest challenges came from people like Marcion, a teacher in the 2nd century who created his own Bible. Marcion didn't like the Old Testament, so he threw it out and kept only parts of Luke and some of Paul's letters. His ideas forced the church to draw a line: they needed to officially recognize which books truly reflected the faith.

Other writings, like the *Gospel of Peter* or the *Apocalypse of Peter*, were eventually left out because they didn't meet the church's criteria. For example, they were written too late to be connected to the apostles, or they didn't line up with Christian teachings.

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**WHY DO SOME BIBLES HAVE MORE BOOKS?**

If you've ever seen a Catholic Bible, you might have noticed it has more books in the Old Testament than a Protestant Bible. This difference comes down to history. During the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s, Martin Luther questioned whether some books in the Old Testament, like *Tobit* and *Wisdom of Solomon*, should be included. Eventually, Protestant Bibles settled on 66 books, while Catholic Bibles kept 73. Orthodox Christians, on the other hand, have a few more books, depending on their tradition.

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## WHY THIS MATTERS

Understanding how the Bible came together helps us appreciate the faith of the early church and the careful thought they put into recognizing God's Word. They weren't just picking books at random; they were safeguarding what they believed to be the truth about God and His plan for humanity.

For Christians today, this history reminds us of the unity and diversity in the body of Christ. While we may use slightly different Bibles, the heart of the message remains the same: God loves us, and He has revealed Himself to us through His Word.

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## THE SEPTUAGINT: A BRIDGE BETWEEN HEBREW AND GREEK WORLDS

One fascinating part of the Bible's history is how the Old Testament was translated into Greek. This translation, called the Septuagint (LXX), was made around 250 B.C. in Alexandria, Egypt, for Jewish communities who no longer spoke Hebrew. But it became much more than just a translation; it played a key role in spreading God's Word to a much wider audience.

The Septuagint made the Hebrew Scriptures accessible to the Greek-speaking world, which was the common language of the time. This wasn't a coincidence but a part of God's plan to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus and the spread of the gospel. Early Christians, including Jesus and the apostles, often quoted from the Septuagint. For example, Matthew's Gospel cites the Greek translation of Isaiah 7:14, where the word *parthenos* (virgin) is used, pointing to the virgin birth of Christ.

By translating Hebrew truths into Greek, the Septuagint allowed key concepts like justice (*dikaiosynē*), grace (*charis*), and covenant (*diathēkē*) to be expressed with clarity

and precision. These ideas became understandable not just to Jews but also to Gentiles, paving the way for the gospel to spread throughout the Roman Empire.

**God's Plan in Action**

The Apostle Paul is a perfect example of how God used this cultural and linguistic blending. Paul was a Jewish Pharisee who understood Hebrew theology but also spoke Greek and was familiar with Greek culture. This unique background made him the ideal person to share the message of Christ with both Jews and Gentiles. His writings often quoted the Septuagint, showing how the Greek translation helped him connect with his audience.

If the Scriptures had remained only in Hebrew, they would have been limited to a small group of people. But because Greek was the common language of the ancient world, the Septuagint became a bridge that carried God's message to everyone. This shows how God works through history, language, and culture to make His truth known.

**Why It Matters**

Understanding the role of the Septuagint reminds us of God's sovereignty in preparing the world for the gospel. It also shows how the Bible we have today is the result of His careful planning. Whether it's the Hebrew Scriptures, the Greek translation, or the New Testament, every part of the Bible is a testament to God's desire to reveal Himself to all people.

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## CONCLUSION

The Bible didn't come to us all at once, but its story shows the faithfulness of God and His people throughout history. Whether you're holding a 66-book Protestant Bible, a

Catholic Bible with the Deuterocanonical books, or an Orthodox Bible with even more, you're holding the result of centuries of prayerful decisions and the work of the Holy Spirit.

So next time you open your Bible, take a moment to marvel at the incredible journey that brought it into your hands.

## APPENDIX A: KEY MOMENTS IN CANON FORMATION

1. **AD 96**: Clement of Rome, a disciple of the Apostle John, quotes Christ three times—two from Scripture and one from oral tradition. He quotes from Apostle Paul's writings as well.

2. **c. AD 96**: *Didache* seems to call Matthew's Gospel *"Scripture"* and places a curse on those who change it.

3. **AD 107**: Ignatius of Antioch, a disciple of the Apostle John, quotes Matthew, Luke, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Thessalonians.

4. **AD 110**: Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John, quotes the New Testament over 100 times and the Old Testament 12 times. He quotes three Gospels (excluding John), Acts, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philemon, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, 1 Peter, and 1 & 3 John.

5. **c. AD 125**: Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis, was said by Irenaeus to be a friend of Polycarp and possibly heard the Apostle John preach. He quoted from all four Gospels, Revelation, 1 John, 1 Peter, and some of Paul's epistles.

6. **AD 144**: Marcion, an anti-Semite, removed all scriptures with Jewish elements, leaving only parts of Luke and Paul's epistles (excluding Hebrews).

7. **AD 180**: Justin Martyr quotes all four Gospels and Revelation. He refers to the Gospels as *"memoirs of the Apostles."*

8. **AD 180**: Irenaeus declared there are four—and only four—Gospels. He quoted from 23 of the 27 New Testament books, excluding Philemon, James, 2 Peter, and 3 John.

9. **AD 180–200**: Clement of Alexandria quoted 22 of the 27 New Testament books. He did not quote Philemon, James, 2 Peter, or 3 John. He also accepted as divine the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Gospel of the Hebrews*, *Traditions of Matthias*, *Preaching of Peter*, *1 Clement*, *Epistle of Barnabas*, *Didache*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, and *Apocalypse of Peter*.

10. **c. AD 200**: The Muratorian Fragment lists 22 of the 27 New Testament books. It does not quote Hebrews, 1 & 2 Peter, or James, and mentions one Epistle of John as divine without specifying which one. It also accepts the *Wisdom of Solomon* (from the Apocrypha), *Apocalypse of Peter*, and *Shepherd of Hermas* (stating it is good for reading but not Scripture). It quotes Revelation but notes that some do not want it read in churches.

11. **c. AD 200**: P46 Codex contains 86 leaves, with only Pauline letters—Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians—but omits the pastoral epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus).

12. **AD 210–220**: Tertullian of Carthage quoted 23 of the 27 New Testament books but did not quote 2 Peter, James, or 2 & 3 John. He credited Hebrews to Barnabas, cited Jude to support the *Book of Enoch*, and accepted *Shepherd of Hermas* as Scripture. He explicitly rejected the *Acts of Paul*.

13. **AD 250**: Origen of Alexandria quoted all 27 New Testament books but expressed doubts about James, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, and 2 Timothy. He also accepted the *Gospel of Peter*, *Gospel of the Hebrews*, *Acts of Paul*, *1 Clement*, *Epistle of Barnabas*, *Didache*, and *Shepherd of Hermas*. He credited Hebrews to Luke or Clement of Rome instead of Paul, although he believed it reflected Paul's thoughts. Origen rejected the *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of the Twelve*, *Gospel of Basilides*, *Gospel of Matthias*, *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and *Preaching of Peter*.

14. **AD 300**: Codex Claramontanus lists 23 of the 27 New Testament books. Philemon, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, and Hebrews are omitted. It includes *Epistle of Barnabas*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Acts of Paul*, and *Apocalypse of Peter*.

15. **AD 320**: Eusebius of Caesarea developed a voting system for ancient scriptures, categorizing them into four groups.

16. **Recognized by all churches**: The four Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Paul's Epistles, 1 John, 1 Peter, and, with some doubt, Revelation.

17. **Disputed but accepted by most**: James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John.

18. **Spurious but accepted by some**: *Acts of Paul*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Apocalypse of Peter*, *Epistle of Barnabas*, *Didache*, Hebrews (and possibly Revelation).

19. **Heretical—rejected by all**: Works such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Peter*, *Gospel of Matthias*, *Acts of Andrew*, and *Acts of John*.

20. **AD 331**: Constantine the Great commissioned Eusebius to produce 50 identical Bibles for the churches in Constantinople. It is unknown which books these Bibles contained.

21. **AD 325–350**: Codex Vaticanus contains 22 of the 27 New Testament books. It omits 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Revelation, though the missing pages suggest they may have been included. The codex also contains a full copy of the Septuagint.

22. **AD 330–360**: Codex Sinaiticus contains all 27 New Testament books and includes the *Epistle of Barnabas* and *Shepherd of Hermas* as Scripture.

23. **AD 350**: Cyril of Jerusalem listed 26 of the 27 New Testament books, omitting Revelation. He explicitly rejected the *Gospel of Thomas* and warned, *"Whatever books are not read in the churches, do not read even by yourself."*

24. **AD 363**: The Synod of Laodicea accepted 26 of the 27 New Testament books, omitting Revelation, and approved the Apocrypha with the Old Testament.

25. **AD 367**: Athanasius of Alexandria was the first to list all 27 New Testament books without comment. He acknowledged the *Didache* and *Shepherd of Hermas* as good for Christian reading but not as Scripture.

26. **AD 389**: St. Gregory Nazianzus accepted 26 of the 27 New Testament books, omitting Revelation.

27. **AD 380**: The Apostolic Canons accepted 26 of the 27 New Testament books, omitting Revelation.

28. **AD 393**: The Council of Hippo confirmed all 27 New Testament books.

29. **AD 394**: Amphilochius of Iconium raised concerns about Hebrews and the Catholic epistles. He rejected 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude, and Revelation.

30. **AD 397**: The Council of Carthage confirmed all 27 New Testament books.

31. **AD 400–440**: Codex Alexandrinus lists all 27 New Testament books and includes *1 & 2 Clement*.

32. **AD 492**: The *Decretum Gelasianum* confirmed the 27-book New Testament and included the Apocrypha.

33. **AD 546**: Codex Fuldensis, a Latin Vulgate manuscript, includes all 27 New Testament books and adds Paul's *Epistle to the Laodiceans*. It is the oldest manuscript to follow the Diatessaron's order.

34. **AD 616**: The Peshitta, originally excluding 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude, and Revelation, became the standard Syriac Bible. These books were later added in the Harklean Version by Thomas of Harqel.

35. **AD 692**: The Synod of Trullo accepted 26 of the 27 New Testament books, omitting Revelation.

36. **AD 810**: St. Nikephoros I of Constantinople accepted 26 of the 27 New Testament books, omitting Revelation. He placed Revelation alongside the *Epistle of Barnabas*, *Apocalypse of Peter*, and *Gospel of the Hebrews* in his Stichometry.

37. **AD 1534**: Martin Luther attempted to move the Book of Esther to the Apocrypha and to exclude Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation from the canon, as they conflicted with Protestant doctrines. While his attempt failed, these books are still placed last in the Luther Bible.

38. **AD 1546**: The Council of Trent (fourth session) confirmed the Roman Catholic canon, including the Apocrypha, for a total of 72 books.

39. **AD 1647**: The Synod of Jerusalem confirmed the Greek Orthodox canon, including the Apocrypha, for a total of 76 books.

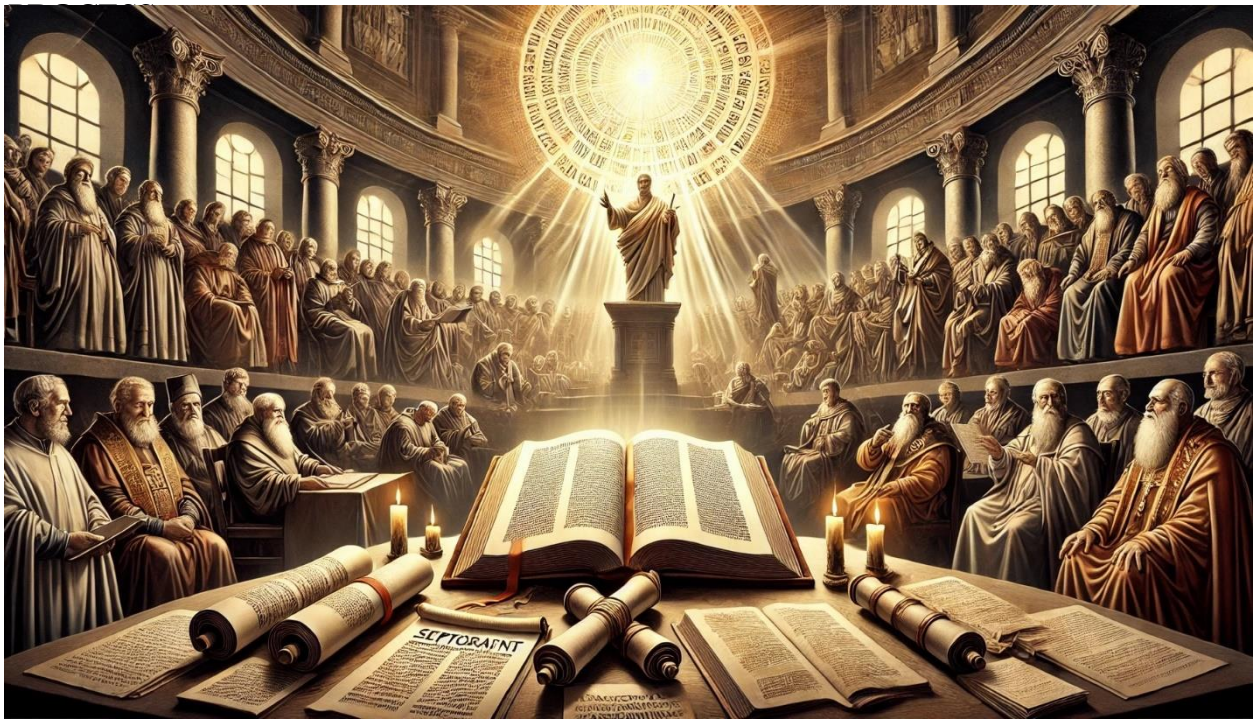
40. **AD 1825**: The British and Foreign Bible Society, also known as the Bible Society, officially closed the Protestant canon at 66 books, excluding the Apocrypha.

## APPENDIX B: DEUTEROCANONICAL / APOCRYPHAL TEXTS[1]

| Book | Protestant's Bible | Roman Catholic Bible | Greek Orthodox Bible |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 Esdras | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| Tobit | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Judith | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Additions to Esther | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Wisdom of Solomon | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Baruch | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Epistle of Jeremiah | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Song of the Three Children | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Story of Susanna | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Bel and the Dragon | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Prayer of Manasseh | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| 1 Maccabees | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 2 Maccabees | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 3 Maccabees | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| 4 Maccabees | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| Psalm 151 | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |

[1] This table is not an exhaustive list but represents a selection of the most widely recognized deuterocanonical/apocryphal books. The inclusion of specific books varies across traditions and manuscripts.

## APPENDIX C: THE RECOGNITION OF THE BIBLICAL CANON: A HISTORICAL




This image visually represents the scholarly and spiritual journey of canon formation. At its center is an open Bible radiating divine light, symbolizing the authority and inspiration of Scripture. Surrounding it are ancient scrolls and manuscripts, highlighting the textual traditions of the Septuagint and Masoretic Text.

In the background, key figures such as Origen, Jerome, and Augustine are depicted engaging in theological debate, reflecting their contributions to the recognition of the canon. The scene also includes a representation of the Synod of Hippo and the Council of Carthage, with clergy deliberating under the soft glow of lit candles. This composition captures the complexity and reverence of the historical process, emphasizing the enduring significance of Scripture in the Christian faith.

## APPENDIX D: BIBLICAL AUTHORS WITH APPROX. DATES OF COMPOSITION

The dating provided in this appendix applies specifically to the Protestant canon of 66 books. Books from other Christian traditions, such as those included in the Deuterocanon, may reflect different timeframes and authorship assumptions, as they follow distinct canonical traditions.

Interestingly, while later Christian writers, including early church fathers, often interpreted the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 as divine judgment for rejecting Christ, the New Testament itself remains silent on this monumental event. This absence may reflect the priorities of its authors, who focused on proclaiming the Gospel, addressing theological issues, and nurturing the early church. Furthermore, the dating of many New Testament books to a pre-AD 70 context supports the conclusion that the destruction had not yet occurred when these texts were written.

This appendix highlights the diversity of authors and contexts that contributed to the formation of the biblical canon, offering insights into the historical and theological landscape in which these texts emerged.

Author & Timeline:
Old Testament[2]

1. **Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy (Pentateuch)**
   - Moses (traditional attribution): c. 1400–1200 BC.
2. **Joshua**
   - Joshua, with possible contributions by later writers: c. 1400–1200 BC.
3. **Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel**
   - Samuel, with later additions by other authors: c. 1050–930 BC.

[2] Old Testament Dates: Earlier books like Job and Genesis are difficult to date precisely, as they may have originated as oral traditions before being written.

4. **Kings, 2 Kings**
   - Traditionally attributed to Jeremiah or unknown prophets: c. 600–550 BC.

5. **Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah**
   - Ezra (chronicler) for Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah: c. 450–400 BC.

6. **Esther**
   - Possibly Mordecai or an unknown Jewish historian: c. 450–330 BC.

7. **Job**
   - Possibly Job, Moses, or an unknown author: c. 2000–1000 BC (debated; earliest speculative origin for poetic traditions).

8. **Psalms**
   - Multiple authors:
     - David: c. 1000–970 BC.
     - Asaph, Sons of Korah, Solomon, Moses (Psalm 90), and Anonymous authors: Various, c. 1000–400 BC.

9. **Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon**
   - Solomon (primary author), with possible later contributions for Proverbs: c. 970–930 BC.

10. **Isaiah**
    - Isaiah (traditional view, though some suggest multiple contributors): c. 740–680 BC.

11. **Jeremiah, Lamentations**
    - Jeremiah: c. 626–580 BC.

12. **Ezekiel**
    - Ezekiel: c. 593–571 BC.

13. **Daniel**
    - Daniel: c. 605–530 BC.

14. **Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi (Minor Prophets)**
    - Each book traditionally attributed to its named prophet: c. 850–430 BC (varies by prophet).

**New Testament**[3]

**15. Matthew**

- Matthew (Levi), a disciple of Jesus: c. AD 50–70.
  Possible pre-AD 70 date due to references to temple practices and Jesus' prophecy about its destruction.

**16. Mark**

- Mark (John Mark), based on Peter's account: c. AD 50–60.
  Likely written before AD 70, as it includes Jesus' prediction of the temple's destruction without reference to its fulfillment.

**17. Luke, Acts**

- Luke, a physician and companion of Paul: c. AD 60–85.
  Acts concludes with Paul in Rome and makes no mention of Jerusalem's destruction, suggesting a pre-AD 70 date for Luke and potentially Acts.

**18. John**

- **Gospel of John: c. AD 60–100.**
  - Some argue for a later theological development (c. AD 85–100), but the absence of explicit post-destruction references leaves open the possibility of pre-AD 70 composition, especially if written for a Jewish-Christian audience.
- **1 John, 2 John, 3 John**
  - Likely written between c. AD 70–90, addressing theological and pastoral concerns, such as combating early Gnostic heresies.
- **Revelation**
  - Traditionally dated to c. AD 95–96 during Domitian's reign, though a minority of scholars argue for a pre-AD 70 date (c. AD 65–68), interpreting its references to judgment as tied to the Jewish-Roman War and Nero's persecution.

**19. Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon**

- Paul (Saul of Tarsus): c. AD 48–67.
  Paul's epistles predate the destruction of Jerusalem, as his writings primarily address Gentile audiences and theological issues.

**20. Hebrews**

- Traditionally anonymous; possible authors include Paul, Apollos, Barnabas, or Luke: c. AD 60–90.
  Frequent references to temple rituals without mention of the destruction suggest a pre-AD 70 date.

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[3] New Testament Dates: Reflect scholarly consensus but may vary based on debates over dating specific letters and Gospels.

**21. James**

- James, the brother of Jesus: c. AD 45–60.
  Likely one of the earliest writings, addressing Jewish-Christian communities before the temple's destruction.

**22. Peter, 2 Peter**

- Peter, a disciple of Jesus: c. AD 60–68.
  Written during the early persecution of Christians, prior to Jerusalem’s fall.

**23. Jude**

- Jude, the brother of Jesus: c. AD 60–80.
  Dating is less certain, but no specific reference to the temple suggests flexibility in dating.

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