

# *Biblical Studies #104*

## *How we got the Bible #2*

In the last lesson we talked about a King that did not exist. Let's talk about an edict that did not exist. We all know about the biblical account of the Roman census that sent Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, as recorded in Luke's Gospel. Well, until a papyrus was discovered which called for a census of Egypt in 104 AD, critics claimed that no emperor would ever call for such a ridiculous census that moved people all over the place. Guess what? The Roman census of Egypt in 104 AD called for... people to go to the town of their birth. Hmmm...sounds familiar. Since they can no longer dismiss the edict as impossible, they now are quibbling over the date being a few years off. Since scripture always seems to be proven correct when ancient discoveries are made, I will lean on the biblical dates—not my own understanding, or the understanding of any other fallible human critic of Holy Scripture.

As I stated earlier, Scripture itself is the most reliable witness to its authorship and time frame of its writing. However, let's look at some early historical witnesses and what they have to say about what we today call the Holy Bible. Let me first introduce to you an early church father by the name of Irenaeus of Lyons. This man studied under Polycarp, who was martyred in 155AD, and it is traditionally held that Polycarp was a student of the Apostle John. So, Irenaeus was only one generation from the original writers of Scripture. This makes him a very reliable witness. Irenaeus is one of the earliest and greatest defenders of Scripture's divine inspiration. In his writings from around 180 AD, he quoted over 1000 scripture passages from all but 5 books of the New Testament. (That he did not cite Philemon, 2nd Peter and others is no wonder as they are very small.) Irenaeus himself called them "the Scriptures" given by the Holy Spirit. Similar claims of divine inspiration can be cited in the 3rd century by the early church fathers, Clement and Origin of Alexandria. They too cite Scripture as a fixed number of writings with divine authorship. Origin is the first to mention all 27 books of the New Testament in 240 AD. Let's look at one more church father—Athanasius of Alexandria. He too cites 27 New Testament books in 367 AD, and he wrote the following words: "These are the fountains of salvation, that whoever thirsts, may be satisfied by the eloquence which is in them. In them alone is set forth the doctrine of piety. Let no one add to them nor take anything from them." You may think these witnesses are biased, and they probably were, but their bias does not invalidate their witness. Their credibility is not historically in question, so their witness is of great value.

But, if one must marginalize the church fathers, then maybe you might take the word of a Jewish historian, at least with regard to the Old Testament. Josephus is accepted world-wide as one of history's earliest historians. He refers to sacred scriptures divided into three parts: the five books of the Torah; thirteen books of the Nevi'im, and four other books of hymns and wisdom. Since there are 24 books in the current Jewish canon instead of the 22 mentioned by Josephus, some scholars have suggested that he considered Ruth to be part of Judges, and Lamentations part of Jeremiah. "The Jewish Canon has only 24 books because of the combination of books like Kings and Chronicles. Their 24 contain the same information as our 39. So, let's see what he had to say about our Old Testament. In about 90 AD, Josephus wrote the following words: "For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another [as the Greeks have] but only twenty-two books, which contain all the records of all the past times, and which are justly believed to be divine."

In Christ,  
Pastor Portier