



From God to Us:

The Four Links

1. **Inspiration**—From the mouth of God.
2. **Canonization**—Collected by the people of God.
3. **Transmission**—Copied by scribes of God.
4. **Translations**—Translated by the servants of God.



Which Books Belong in the Bible?

How Do We Know?

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Outline

I. Definition of Canonicity

II. Determination of Canonicity

III. Discovery of Canonicity

I. Definition of Canonicity

A. Biblical Description

1. Sacred Writings—Kept in the Tabernacle (Deut. 31:24-26) and later in the Temple (2 Kgs. 22:8).

2. Holy Scripture (2 Tim. 3:15)

B. Literal Meaning: “Canon” means rod, rule, or standard.

C. Formal Definition: The Canon is those writings considered the rule or standard for Christian doctrine and practice (2 Tim. 3:17).

The Church and the Canon

Church was not-- **Church was--**

Determiner

Discoverer

Creator

Custodian

Producer

Preserver

Master

Servant

Regulator

Recognizer

Judge

Jury



I. Definition of Canonicity

II. Determination of Canonicity

A. God determined the Canon

B. People of God discovered it.

Question 1: Why are there only 66 books in the Bible?

Answer: Because God only inspired 66 books.

Question 2: How do we know which 66 books God inspired?

Answer: They have the “fingerprints” of God on them.



Outline

I. Definition of Canonicity

II. Determination of Canonicity

III. Discovery of Canonicity

**Looking for the “fingerprints”
of God**



The Five “Fingerprints” of God

- 1. Was it written by a Prophet of God?**
- 2. Was he confirmed by acts of God?**
- 3. Did he tell the truth about God?**
- 4. Did it have the power of God?**
- 5. Was it accepted by the people of God?**

III. Discovery of Canonicity

A. The Principles

1. Was it written by a prophet of God?

- a. The most basic question is: *Is it prophetic?***
- b. Propheticity determined canonicity.**
- c. If a book was written by a spokesman for God, then it is the Word of God.**
- d. It comes with a “Thus saith the Lord.”**
- e. Paul used this argument in support of his epistle to the Galatians (Gal. 1:11-12).**
- f. It was used by Paul for rejecting a letter that was forged (2 Thess. 2:2).**
- g. Because of this principle, 2 Peter was unsuccessfully disputed by some in the later church.**
- h. Esther was questioned by some on this basis but also passed the test.**



III. Discovery of Canonicity

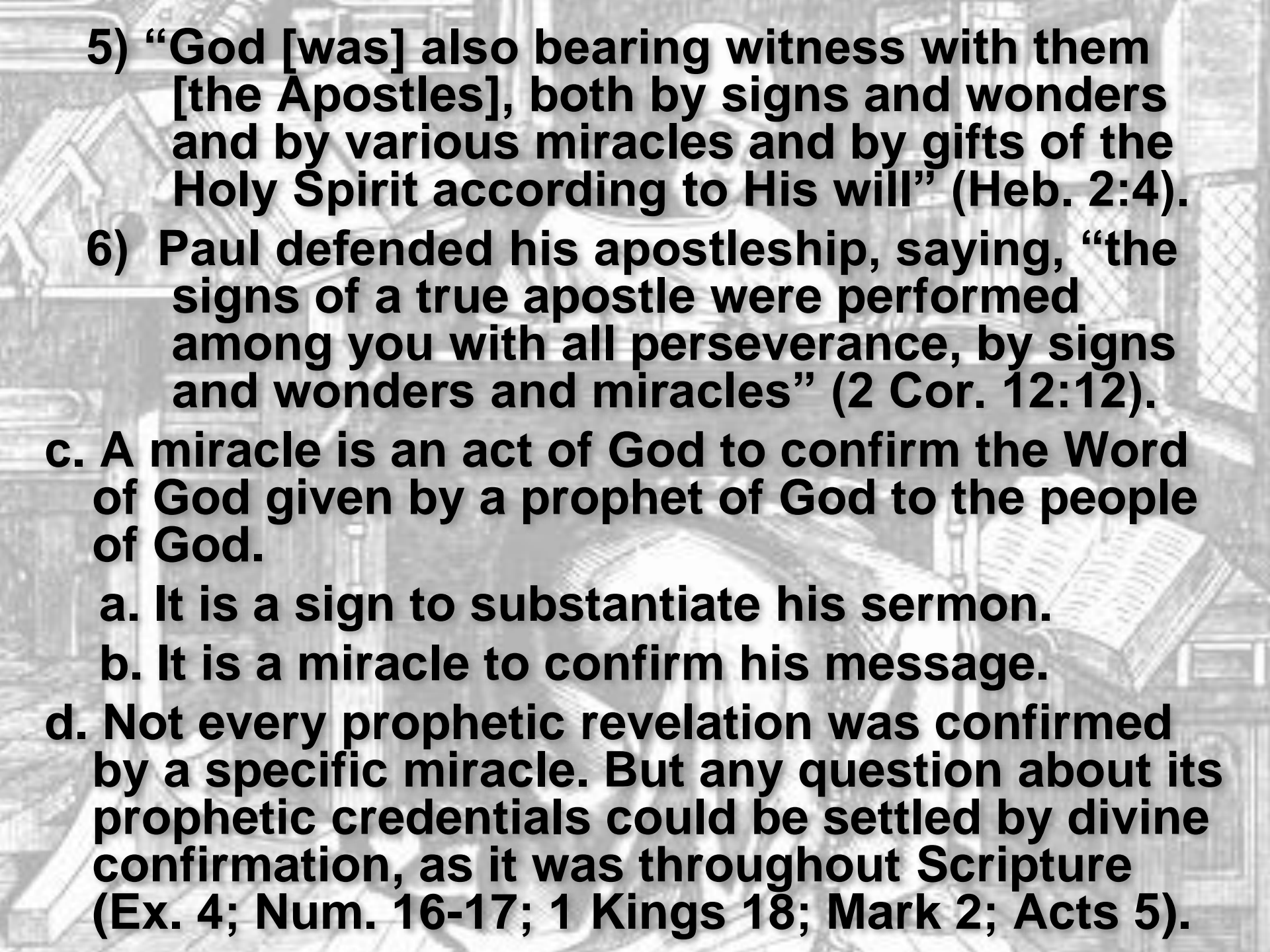
(Discovering the “fingerprints” of God)

A. The Principles

- 1. Was it written by a prophet of God?**
- 2. Was he confirmed by acts of God?**

2. Was he confirmed by acts of God?

- a. True prophets must be distinguished from false ones (Matt. 7:15; 1 Jn. 4:1).**
- b. Miracles were used for this purpose.**
 - 1) Moses was given miraculous powers to prove his call of God (Ex. 4:1-9).**
 - 2) Elijah triumphed over the false prophets of Baal by a supernatural act (1 Kings 18).**
 - 3) Jesus was “attested...by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him” (Acts 2:22).**
 - 4) Nicodemus said, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (John 3:2).**

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- 5) “God [was] also bearing witness with them [the Apostles], both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His will” (Heb. 2:4).**
- 6) Paul defended his apostleship, saying, “the signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles” (2 Cor. 12:12).**
- c. A miracle is an act of God to confirm the Word of God given by a prophet of God to the people of God.**
- a. It is a sign to substantiate his sermon.**
 - b. It is a miracle to confirm his message.**
- d. Not every prophetic revelation was confirmed by a specific miracle. But any question about its prophetic credentials could be settled by divine confirmation, as it was throughout Scripture (Ex. 4; Num. 16-17; 1 Kings 18; Mark 2; Acts 5).**



III. Discovery of Canonicity

(Discovering the “fingerprints” of God)

A. The Principles

- 1. Was it written by a prophet of God?**
- 2. Was he confirmed by acts of God?**
- 3. Does it tell the truth about God?**

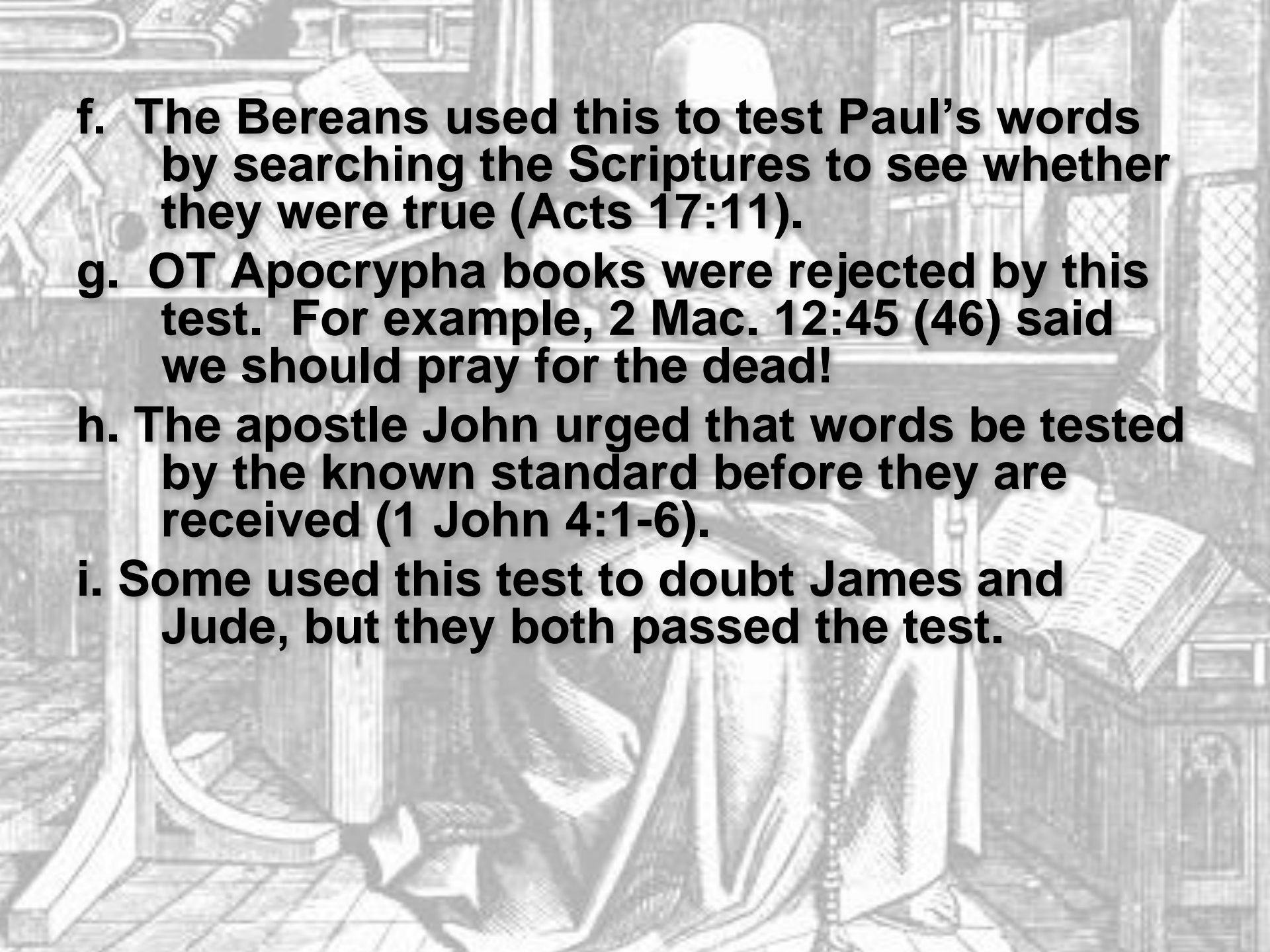
3. Does the message tell the truth about God?

- a. God cannot contradict Himself (2 Cor. 1:17-18), nor can He utter what is false (Heb. 6:18).**
- b. So, no book with false claims can be the Word of God. Paul said, “Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8).**
- c. Moses used this principle, saying, “If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams” (Deut. 13:1-3).**

d. A failed prediction made the prophecy false.

“How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken? When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him” (Deut.18:21-22).

e. All books with errors are not inspired. But not all books without error are inspired. It is more a test for the *inauthenticity* of a book than for its canonicity. That is, it is a negative test to eliminate books, not a positive one by which to accept books.

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- f. The Bereans used this to test Paul's words by searching the Scriptures to see whether they were true (Acts 17:11).**
 - g. OT Apocrypha books were rejected by this test. For example, 2 Mac. 12:45 (46) said we should pray for the dead!**
 - h. The apostle John urged that words be tested by the known standard before they are received (1 John 4:1-6).**
 - i. Some used this test to doubt James and Jude, but they both passed the test.**



III. Discovery of Canonicity

(Discovering the “fingerprints” of God)

- 1. Was it written by a prophet of God?**
- 2. Was he confirmed by acts of God?**
- 3. Does it tell the truth about God?**
- 4. Does it have the power of God?**

4. Does it come with the power of God?

- a. The Word of God is “living and active” (Heb. 4:12).
- b. The Word of God has the power of God.
A *message* of God has the *might* of God.
- c. It has the power for evangelization (1 Peter 1:23) and for edification (2 Tim. 3:17).
- d. God’s word never returns void (Isa. 55:11).
- e. Paul applied this to the OT: “You have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15).
- f. Moses used this on predictions (Deut. 18:20 ff.).
- g. This was employed to reject apocryphal books.
- h. Some used it on Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon, but they passed the test.

III. Discovery of Canonicity

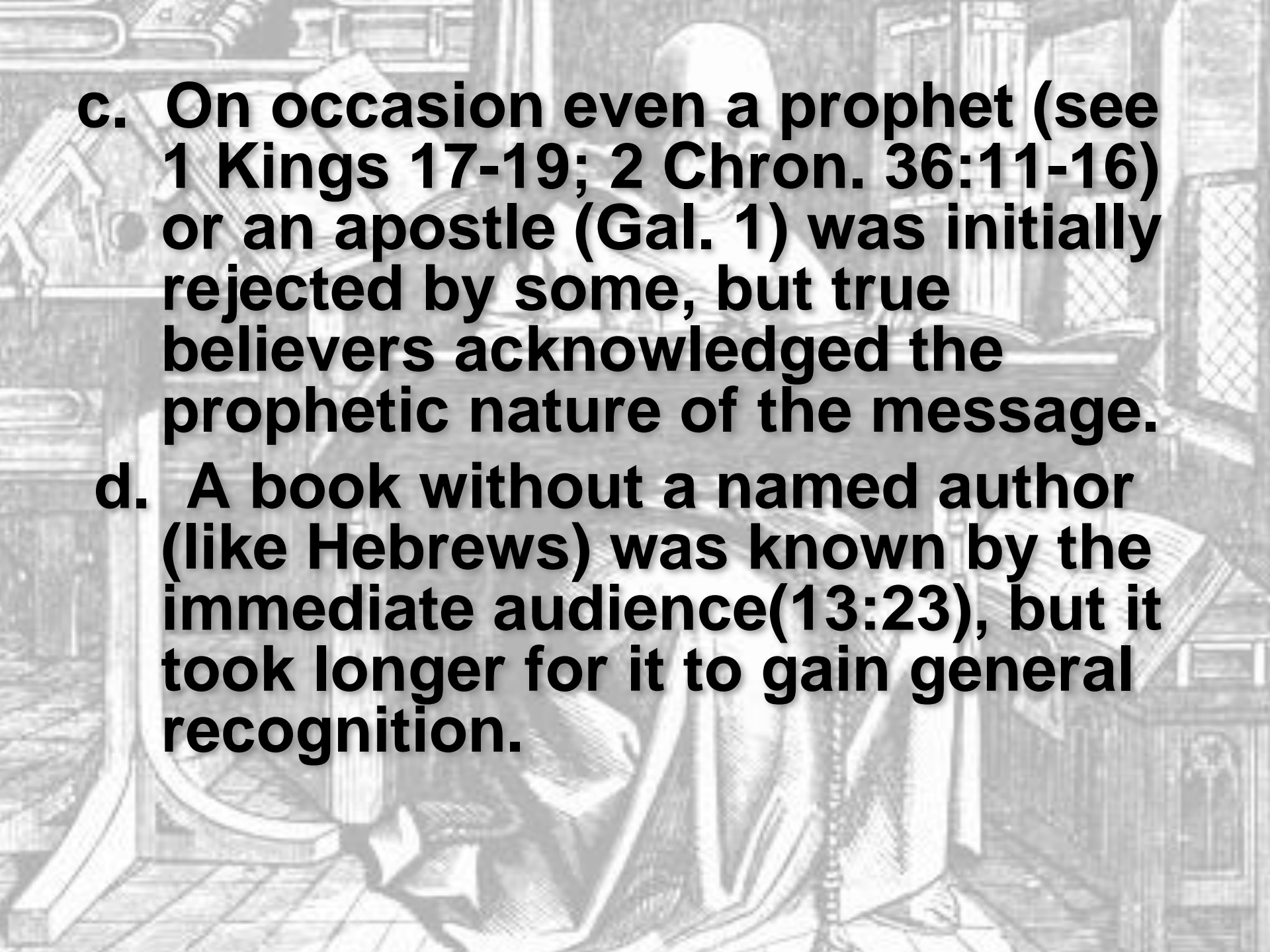
(Discovering the “fingerprints” of God)

A. The Principles

- 1. Was it written by a prophet of God?**
- 2. Was he confirmed by acts of God?**
- 3. Does it tell the truth about God?**
- 4. Does it have the power of God?**
- 5. Was it accepted by the people of God?**
 - a. Initially**
 - b. Subsequently**

This acceptance by the people of God occurred in two stages: *initial acceptance* and *subsequent recognition*.

- a. The *initial acceptance* of a book by the people to whom it was addressed is crucial. Paul said of the Thessalonians, “We also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God” (1 Thess. 2:13).**
- b. Some books were comprised of sections written over long periods of time (like Psalms) or by several authors (see Prov. 30:1; 31:1), but each was accepted as it was written.**



c. On occasion even a prophet (see 1 Kings 17-19; 2 Chron. 36:11-16) or an apostle (Gal. 1) was initially rejected by some, but true believers acknowledged the prophetic nature of the message.

d. A book without a named author (like Hebrews) was known by the immediate audience(13:23), but it took longer for it to gain general recognition.

e. Evidence for immediate acceptance of books.

- 1. Moses's books were immediately put in a holy place (Deut. 31:26).**
- 2. Joshua's writing was added to it (Josh. 24:26).**
- 3. So were Samuel's and others (1 Sam. 10:25).**
- 4. Daniel even had a copy of Moses and the Prophets with Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2, 10–11).**
- 5. Paul quoted Luke as "Scripture" (1 Tim. 5:18).**
- 6. Peter had Paul's "letters" (2 Peter 3:15).**
- 7. Apostles exhorted that their letters be read and circulated among the churches (1 Thess. 5:27; Col. 4:16; Rev. 1:3).**
- 8. Succeeding sections cite prior ones (Zech. 7:12; Lk. 24:27; 1 Tim. 5:18).**
- 9. All NT books are cited by early church Fathers.**

The New Testament Canon During the First Four Centuries

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BOOK	Mt	Mk	Lk	Jn	Acts	Rom	1Cor	2Cor	Gal	Eph	Phil	Col	1Thes	2Thes	1Tm	2Tm	Ti	Phe	Heb	Js	1Pet	2Pet	1Jn	2Jn	3 Jn	Jd	Rv
Pseudo-Barnabas (c. 70-130)	x	x	x							x						x	x		x		x	x					
Clement of Rome (c. 95-97)	x	x	x			x	x			x				x		x			x	x	x	x					
Ignatius (c. 110)	x			x	x	x	x		x	x		x								x	x						
Polycarp (c. 110-50)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x						x		x	x			
Hermas (c. 115-40)	x	x			x		x	x			x		x		x	x			x	x	x		x				x
Didache (c. 120-50)	x		x			x	x						x		x												x
Papias (c. 130-40)				x																							x
Marcion (c. 140)			x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x									
Irenaeus (c. 130-202)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Justin Martyr (c. 150-55)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x							x						x
Muratorian (c. 170)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x					x	x	x	x	x
Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x		x		x			x	x
Tertullian (c. 150-220)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Origen (c.185-254)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x			x	x
Old Latin (c. 200)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x					x	x	x	x	x
Cyprian (d. 258)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Apostolic (c. 300)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315-86)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Eusebius (c. 325-40)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	?	x	?	x	?	?	?	x
Athanasius (367)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Jerome (c. 340-420)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Hippo (393)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Carthage (397)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Augustine (c. 400)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Main source: Philip Schaff, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Indexes*.

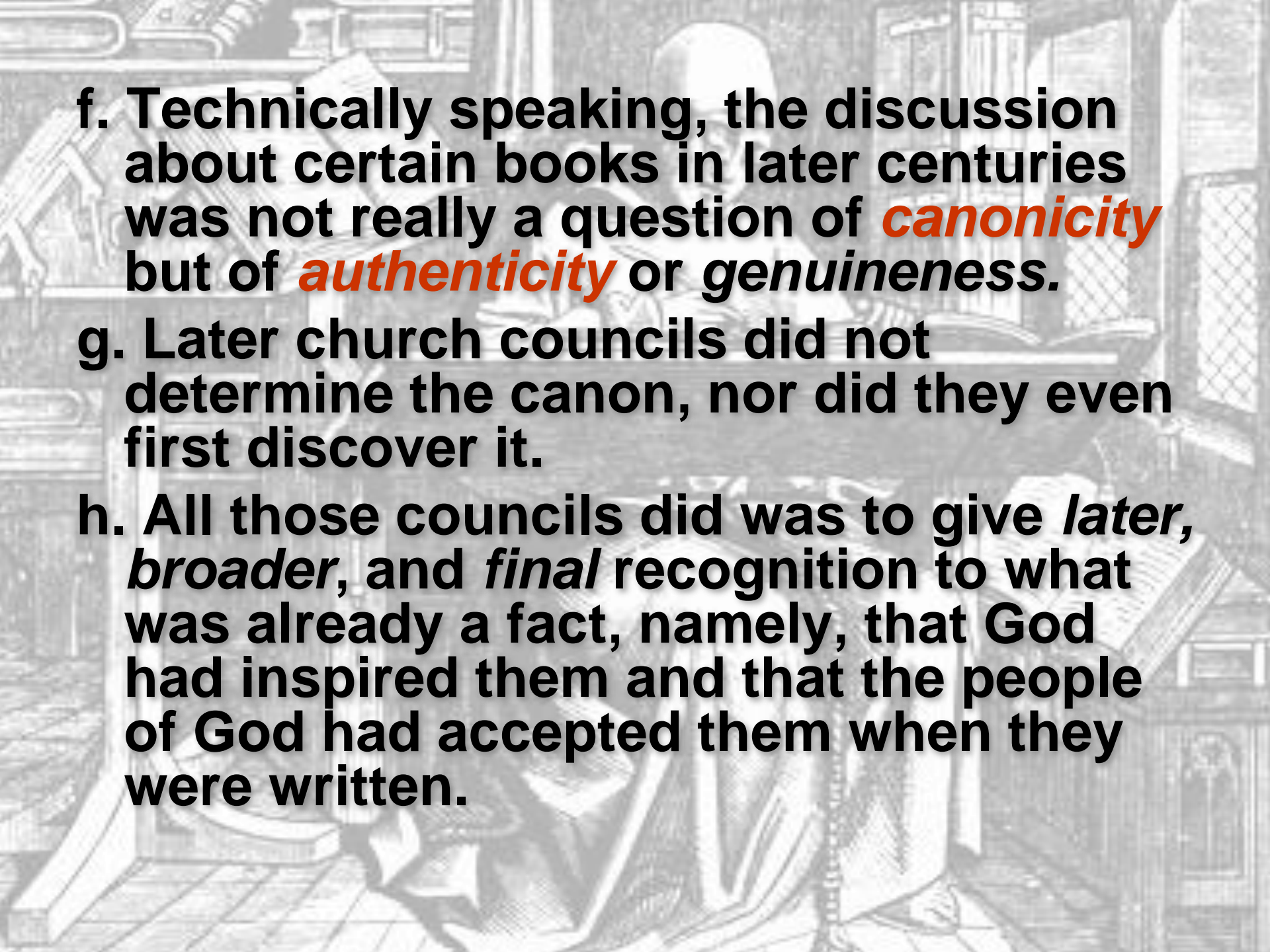
X = Citation or allusion

? = Named as disputed

Note: (1) All N.T. books but 3 Jn. are cited by time of Irenaeus (130-202)

(2) All N.T. books are cited by time of Muratorian Canon (170)

(3) All N.T. books were accepted by the Church as a whole by 393.

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- f. Technically speaking, the discussion about certain books in later centuries was not really a question of **canonicity** but of **authenticity** or *genuineness*.
- g. Later church councils did not determine the canon, nor did they even first discover it.
- h. All those councils did was to give *later, broader, and final* recognition to what was already a fact, namely, that God had inspired them and that the people of God had accepted them when they were written.

i. The process was slow for many reasons.

- a. Communication and transportation were much slower then, so it took longer for believers in the West to get evidence for books from the East and vice versa.**
- b. The persecution of these early centuries (prior to A.D. 313) did not allow sufficient time for research and reflection to fix the canon.**
- c. Until the mid second century heretical challenge of the Gnostic Marcion (who had only Luke and 10 of Paul's books), there was no pressing need to make an official list of all the books.**
- d. By the fourth century this process was completed by the councils of Hippo (A.D. 393) and Carthage (397).**



I. Canonicity **Defined**

II. Canonicity **Determined** by God

II. Canonicity was **Discovered** by people of God

A. The Principles

1. Was it written by a prophet of God?
2. Was he confirmed by acts of God?
3. Did it tell the truth about God?
4. Did it have the power of God?
5. Was it accepted by the people of God?

B. The Practice

1. Books accepted by all (canonical)
2. Books doubted by some (questionable)
3. Books rejected by some or all:
 - a. **Apocrypha** (doubtful)—Accepted by some
 - b. **Pseudepigrapha** (false-writings)—Rejected by all