

SESSION ONE

CANONICITY OF THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Session Objectives: By the end of this session, the student should . . .

1. Understand the historical developments that led to the acceptance of the Book of Hebrews in the New Testament canon of Scripture.
2. Be able to identify the primary Greek manuscripts for the study of Hebrews.

I. THE ACCEPTANCE OF HEBREWS IN THE NT CANON¹**A. Background**

In the Western part of the Roman Empire, there was a slower acceptance of Hebrews for the canon of Scripture in comparison with the East. There was also uncertainty and debate about the authorship of the book (in the West, Paul was not generally recognized as the author of Hebrews until the 4th century). Consequently, some churches did not accept it as canonical, and at times it was included among the *disputed books*.

B. Developments**1. Clement of Rome (AD 95-96)**

Clement was an early *presbyter-bishop* of Rome, and made clear reference to Hebrews in an epistle to the Corinthians.² Certainly, the Book of Hebrews has early attestation.

2. Marcion's Canon

Marcion came to Rome shortly before 140. He did not include Hebrews in his canonical list, but caution must be taken because he rejected most of the Old Testament as well. He was excommunicated ca. AD 144 as a heretic.

3. Muratorian Canon (ca. AD 200)

This is a fragmentary list of NT books known at Rome around the year 200, which commended those books which were received by the Church in Rome and which were approved to be read out in public. Hebrews is not mentioned, which is not too

¹For further help, the work of F. F. Bruce is commended: *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1988).

²A couple of the remarkable parallels of Hebrews with Clement's epistle to the Corinthians include: (1) Heb 11:7 with 1 Clem. 9:4 and 12:1; and (2) Heb 1:3ff. with 1 Clem. 36:1ff.

surprising at Rome at this period since it was not regarded as one of the Pauline epistles (which held great authority).

4. Chester Beatty papyrus \mathfrak{P}^{46}

This is an important NT manuscript dated in the first half of the 3rd century (F. F. Bruce and B. Metzger would date it at AD 200). The Book of Hebrews occurs with the Pauline epistles, being placed immediately after Romans. [The codex originally had 10 NT books, Hebrews plus 9 of the Pauline epistles].

5. The List of Cyprian of Carthage (3rd cent.)

Intro: Cyprian was converted around 246 and became bishop of Carthage (N. Africa) in 248. He appears to have used an Old Latin version of the NT, though he does not cite Hebrews (but for that matter, he does not cite the other catholic epistles of James, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, and Jude).

However, he must have known of Hebrews, for he made a clear allusion to Heb 1:1 in one of his writings:

"God willed many things to be said and heard through his servants the prophets, but how much greater are those spoken by the Son."³

6. Origen (AD 185-254)

Origen knew that some churches did not accept Hebrews as canonical, and classed the book as "disputed."

7. Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 265 - c. 339)

Eusebius is the famous *church historian*, who also served as bishop of Caesarea. He had a list of books in three classes (universally acknowledged, disputed, and spurious), but seems to have included Hebrews among the Pauline epistles (mentions 14 epistles of Paul).

8. Council of Hippo (AD 393)

This was the first church council to lay down the limits of the canon (the list was reiterated by the 3rd Council of Carthage in 397). Hebrews was included as canonical. It was ascribed to Paul, although there must have been some hesitation since it was listed separately than the 13.

9. Manuscripts

The Book of Hebrews does appear in the three great uncial manuscripts:

\aleph (Sinaiticus), A (Alexandrinus), and B (Vaticanus).

³From *On the Lord's Prayer*, 1 (cited in F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 185).

II. PRIMARY GREEK MANUSCRIPTS

For a brief description and summary of the following manuscripts, see Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 3rd ed., 1992; and *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible: An Introduction to Palaeography*, 1991.

A. Manuscripts esteemed by the critical text

1. \mathfrak{P}^{46} - Chester Beatty Papyrus (c. 200)
2. \aleph - Codex Sinaiticus (4th cent.)
3. A - Codex Alexandrinus (5th cent.)
4. B - Codex Vaticanus (4th cent.)
5. C - Codex Ephraimi Syri rescriptus (5th cent.)

B. Byzantine type uncials

1. K - Codex Mosquensis (9th cent.)
2. L - Codex Angelicus (8th cent.; Ellingworth dates as 9th)
3. P - Codex Porphyrianus (6th cent.—so UBS⁴; Ellingworth dates as 9th)

Note: Mss K and L tend to be of the Byz type in Hebrews. Quite often P is also, but not as consistent as K and L.