

1897

# Books of doubtful authorship and canonicity mentioned by Eusebius

---

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/47744>

*Downloaded from DSpace Repository, DSpace Institution's institutional repository*

## Books of Doubtful Authorship and Canonicity

Mentioned by Eusebius.

Jesus Christ and His Apostles used the Old Testament as the word of God. The early church for many years, followed their example. The origin of the New Testament was therefore relatively late and slow in its progress. Decades passed before the thought of collecting the sayings of Jesus and the writings of the Apostles occurred to their minds. It was still much later before they gave them Canonical authority. They trusted to verbal testimony for their knowledge of Christ. The time however came when it was thought necessary to see to the permanent preservation of these sayings and writings. They were accordingly collected and preserved as we now have them in the New Testament. Our task will be to discover and state the relative value of the various books found therein.

For such evidences as is needed we turn first of all, most naturally, to the Apostolic Fathers. Were we to present an exhaustive treatise, we should have to include a treatment of the writings of Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, <sup>and Origen with many others</sup> and the various versions and manuscripts now extant.

Our special purpose, however, is to gather the information preserved to us by Eusebius which will shed light on the Authors

and Canon of the New Testament. Eusebius was a man of wide learning and a writer of early ecclesiastical history. He was bishop of Caesarea in Palestine from the year 325 A. D. until 340. His Ecclesiastical History is one of the earliest, authentic and useful manuscripts extant. Especially is it valuable for its frequent references to N. T. books in the establishment of their Authorship and Canonicity. In a single paragraph, he gives us his general position as to the N. T. Canon. His catalogue of books is as follows.- "First must be placed the holy quartertion of the Gospels, which the book of Acts of the Apostles follows; after this are to be placed the Epistles of Paul; after which we are confidently to admit the reputed First Epistle of John and likewise that of Peter. After these, are to be placed, if it seem proper, the Apocalypse of John; concerning which we will state the opinions at the proper time. These are all acknowledged as genuine."

"Of the disputed books, yet well known to the most, is the so-called Epistle of James, the Epistle of Jude and the Second Epistle of Peter and those which are called the Second and Third of John, whether they belong to the Evangelist, or to some one of the same name." (Eccles. Hist. III-25)

He then subjoins the books held as spurious. Among these, he includes, "The Acts of Paul," that called "Pastor," "The Rev-

elation of Peter," "The Epistle of Barnabas" and "The Institutions of the Apostles."

"All these are to be ranked not only among the spurious writings but are to be rejected as altogether absurd and impious." This single paragraph gives us a clear statement of Eusebius' position as to the Canon as a whole. We turn now to study the doubtful books separately.

The first of these is the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the most ancient MSS. of the New Testament, the Epistle bears the simple title, "To Hebrews," and its contents show that it was addressed to Hebrew-Christians. In the XII Chapter and 22 Verse the Epistle is called "A Word of Exhortation." The Jewish Christians were suffering severe persecution as well as disappointment at the delay of Christ's return, and they were in danger of falling away and lapsing again into Judaism. (IV, 3-8) The purpose of the Epistle is clear. It was intended to set forth the temporary character of the priesthood and sacrificial institutions of the Mosaic law, and to prove that the ceremonial law was to end with the appearance of Christ. And furthermore, to establish the Jewish Christians in the faith of the Gospel and render them impregnable to the assaults of their unbelieving countrymen. However in the Authorship and authenticity of this wonderful book, we find the largest field for intellectu-

al activity,

Who wrote it? The Epistle itself does not tell us; nor can any trace of an author be found in the most ancient Greek copies. Its antiquity however, is well attested by the frequent use made of it by Clement, Origen, Justin Martyr and other early writers. These seem at least to justify its Apostolic date and origin,

Judging from the earlier writings of Clement of Alexandria A. D. 165-220, he seems to ascribe it to Saint Paul; but Eusebius in E.H. (VI-14) records from one of his last works his views as modified later in life. "Clement, in his outlines to speak generally, has given concise explanations of all the Canonical Scripture-----and moreover, he says that the Epistle to the Hebrews is Paul's, and that he wrote it to the Hebrews in Hebrew and that Luke afterward carefully translated it and published it in Greek.

In E.H. (V-26) Eusebius also speaks of Irenaeus as having mentioned the book and quoted from it. However, he gives us no light on the authorship of the book, the inference being that Irenaeus recognized it only as authentic.

Origen succeeded Clement in office and Eusebius tells us how he expressed himself on the subject, after he states the fact that Origen finds it difficult to harmonize the style and

diction with Paul's accepted writings he says, "And again, that the thoughts of the Epistle are wonderful and not second to the acknowledged writings of the Apostle, every one who pays attention to the reading of the apostle's works would also grant to be true." After other remarks, he adds, "If I were to express  
I should say  
my own opinion, that the thoughts are the Apostle's, but the diction and composition that of some one who recorded from memory the Apostle's teaching." "But who wrote the Epistle, God only knows certainly," (E.H. VI-25)

Here Origen goes beyond Clement of Alexandria in giving it as his opinion that the writer was not Paul, but one of his pupils. The teaching however, being identical with that of the Apostle. Accordingly, he speaks of it, in his quotations, as the writings of Paul "The Apostle." Furthermore, it is clear from <sup>his</sup> E.H. (III-3) that Eusebius agrees with Clement that Paul wrote the Epistle in Hebrew but he is himself inclined to the opinion that Clement of Rome translated it into Greek. His testimony is as follows.- "The Epistles of Paul are fourteen, all well known and beyond doubt. It should not however, be concealed that some have set aside the Epistle to the Hebrews, saying that it was disputed as not being one of St. Paul's Epistles." This expression however, arises from the position taken by the Western church, the Eastern branch being quite unanimous in their

acceptation of the Epistle, Eusebius in E.H. (III-3) affirms that it was rejected by the Roman church, where it was denied a place in the Canon, even in his day. The first of those who belong strictly to the Roman church, to make mention of the Epistle, is Tertullian. He does so in but one place and there refers it to Barnabas. It is therefore clear that Eusebius not only finds the Epistle rejected at Rome, but likewise, in the church of Northern Africa. So far then as the Epistle is concerned in Eusebius' time, we are shut up for our evidence to the testimony of the Eastern church. While however, the Western church in its testimony is almost unanimous in its rejection of the Epistle from the Canon.

We come next to the study of the "Catholic Epistles." This term was first applied to the seven shorter Epistles by Eusebius, who meant by it the "Circular Epistles" or those in common use in the several churches. They were written by James, Peter, John and Jude. Paul, in making mention of the first three, in Gal.- 2-9, says that "They were reputed to be pillars" in the church.

In the days of Eusebius, of these general Epistles, James occupied the first place in the Canon as it still does in our day. As to the name of the writer, the Epistle itself in (I- 1) gives James as the author. But it is not easy to decide which

one of the three men of the same name mentioned in the New Testament is the author; whether James, the son of Zebedee, one of the Apostles, or James the son of Alphaeus, and another of the Apostles, or James the Lord's brother. The first <sup>is</sup> generally excluded by his early martyrdom (Acts 12-2); it is not however, so easy to distinguish between the other two. The evidence is nevertheless quite generally in favor of the latter. This is the Lord's brother and appears chief in authority over the Jerusalem church. Eusebius in "E.H." (II-23) tells us that he is "James the Just" and that "he was holy from his mother's womb. He drank no strong drink, neither did he eat flesh. No razor ever touched his head. and he did not anoint himself with oil." He was certainly abundantly fitted to write the Epistle. As to the authenticity of the Epistle of James, Eusebius quotes it freely; and plainly accepts it as genuine; but places it in his list of doubtful and controverted books, (E.H. III-25) as does also Jerome. Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian are silent. Eusebius remarks that it "was acknowledged by most writers in his day" (E.H. III-25), "but that not many of the ancients mention it." (E.H. II-3) Origen is the first to speak of it by name; accordingly he quotes it in one place as that of James. It was accepted by the Syrian church and is included in their version. It however had no place in the Old Latin version nor is it named in the Mu-

ratorian Canon.

Eusebius in E. H. (VI-14) says that "Hypotyposos gives us an abridged account of all the Canonical Scripture, not even omitting those that are disputed. I mean Jude and the other general Epistles," which of course, includes James. Again, he says in speaking of these same Epistles "We know that these also with the rest, are received as Canonical."

Next in order are the Epistles of Peter. As to the first, a passing notice is all that is necessary, since it was quite generally received into the churches. Eusebius remarks in his catalogue of N. T. Books (E.H. III-25) that the First Epistle of Peter is to be received. Origin says that "Peter has left one acknowledged Epistle." It is also quoted as authority by Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria. The second Epistle however met with some opposition in the early church as Eusebius informs us; (E.H. III-25) He states that the greater part of the N. T. books were generally received; "but some are controverted though well known and recognized by most." "These are Hebrews, James II, Peter II & III John, Jude, and Revelations."

Again (E.H. VI-25) Eusebius says "Peter left one acknowledged Epistle; let it be granted that he left a second for it is as matter of doubt." Thus it is clear that Eusebius places the Epistle among the doubtful books, while he himself accepts

it as both genuine and authentic. Moreover, he has preserved in his history the testimony of Origin which is as follows, "Peter has left behind an Epistle generally acknowledged, perhaps also also a second. It is a doubtful question."

The second and third Epistles of John come next in the list of disputed books. The church from the earliest times down ascribed to the Apostle John quite generally the undisputed authorship of five of the New Testament Books. Of these, the Fourth Gospel and the First Epistle are placed by Eusebius (E.H. III-23) among the universally undisputed books. In (E.H. (III-24) he says "But besides the Gospel of John his first Epistle is acknowledged without dispute, both by those of the present day and also by the Ancients," and adds finally that "The other two Epistles however are disputed."

Once more, (E.H. VI-25) he says "He (John) also left an Epistle consisting of very few lines; suppose also that a second and third is from him, for not all agree that they are genuine, but both together do not contain a hundred lines."

The first Epistle of John only, appears in the Syriac version and it alone was used in that church down to the sixth century. The Muratorian Canon contains the First and Second Epistles. The fact, however, that they are wanting in the first of these Canons does not, by any means, prove that they are therefore

spurious and of no value. The way in which they were used and the fact that they were so generally quoted by the early writers is sufficient guarantee for both their genuineness and credibility.

We come now to consider the last of the so-called Catholic Epistles. In verse one, the author is styled, "Jude the servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James.

Eusebius in his E.H. (III-22) says. "There were yet living of the family of our Lord, the grand-children of Judas, called the brother of our Lord, according to the flesh. These were reported as being of the family of David, and were brought to Domitian." in order that he might inquire of them "whether they were of David's race" and also "respecting Christ and his kingdom; what was its nature and when and where He was to appear." It seems from these statements that if we give any credence whatever to Eusebius, there can be but little reason for dispute as to the authorship of Jude.

Certainly, the preponderance of evidence is in favor of Jude, the brother of our Lord, and not Jude Thaddeus, the Apostle. The authorship of the Epistle being questioned, we are not surprised to find that the canonicity is also questioned" not only in modern times, but also in the early ages of the primitive church. While the Peshito-Syriac version of the second

century, does not contain this Epistle; it is included in the Canon of Muratoria. Furthermore, no trace of it is found in the writings of Irenaeus, while Clement of Alexandria and Tertul'ian both quote him as the Apostle Jude.

Origen remarks "That Jude wrote an Epistle of a few lines, but filled with words powerful in heavenly grace." It is perfectly clear that Origen had no doubt that the Epistle was written by Jude, the brother of Christ; he is not however so certain as to its authenticity. Eusebius makes frequent reference to the fact that it was in his day a disputed book. In his history (III-25) he states that "not many of the Ancients have mentioned it." Again . . . (II-23) he remarks "We nevertheless know that also these (the Epistles of James and Jude) along with the rest have been publicly read in most of the churches." It is evident that while some disputed both the authorship and authenticity, Eusebius accepted both, and believed firmly in their reception into the Canon.

We come finally to the last book of the N.T. Canon. The traditional title as handed down to us in the oldest extant MSS. is simply "Apocalypse of John" which means (Revelation) From the ~~above~~, we cannot be certain whether the author was John, the son of Zebedee and one of the Apostles, or John, the Presbyter. In (Rev.I-1) the author calls himself the servant of

God. Again, in (I-9) "I John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the Kingdom and patience in Jesus Christ was in the Isle that is called Palmos, for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus." Such are the statements of the author respecting himself.

Moreover, it is clear that Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian all support the view which favors John, the Apostle.

Eusebius gives the testimony of seven early writers which corroborates this view while he himself seems rather to favor John the Presbyter as the author. In his E.H. (IV-24) Eusebius gives the testimony of Theophilus, in E.H. (IV-26) that of Melito, bishop of Sardis, and in E.H. (IV-18) that of Apollonius; all of whom seem to agree with the Apostolic authorship. Origen adds his testimony as preserved by Eusebius (E.H. IV-25)

"What shall I say concerning John who leaned upon the breast of Jesus, and who left one Gospel. He also wrote the Apocalypse etc."

In E.H. (III-28) Eusebius states that Caius, Presbyter of Rome, attributed the Apocalypse to Cerinthus. We come finally to record Eusebius' own opinion as nearly as we can gather it from his history. While he unquestionably accepts the Johannine authorship, it is equally certain that he rejects the authenticity and canonicity of this wonderful book. In his E.H. (III-25) af-

ter naming what he considers canonical of the Scriptures, he remarks, "After these is to be placed, if thought fit, the Apocalypse of John, concerning which at the proper time, we will explain the various opinions." Again, "Besides these as I said, if it is thought fit, let the Apocalypse of John be added, which some as I said reject, but others place among the acknowledged Scriptures."

It appears from the forgoing quotations that Eusebius wavered in his belief regarding the canonicity of Revelation. This, partially, at least, grew out of the opposition of Dionysius to its authenticity: He therefore leaves this book, whose authorship is unquestioned, more open to doubt as to canonical authority than either one of all those found in his doubtful list of New Testament books.

Such then, was the state of the Canon, when Eusebius wrote his Ecclesiastical History just before the Council of Nicca which convened in the year 325 A. D.

Graduation Theses

by

J. W. Stephens

Class of 1897.