

HOW WE GOT THE BIBLE

SESSION 3: How We Got The New Testament

REVIEW:

_____ trusted the Old Testament; so should we.

The Bible sometimes _____ things that it does not necessarily _____ of.

Canonicity:

- Meaning – a 'kanon' was a rod, ruler, staff or measuring rod. Thus, a 'kanon' was a standard for measurement. In regard to the Bible In theological usage, "canon" refers to authoritative Scripture. In a Christian context, we might define the word as "the list of the writings acknowledged by the Church as documents of the divine revelation."
- Recognition –
 - _____ – The well-established tradition that many of the books came from Moses or one of the other acknowledged prophets.
 - _____ of the books themselves — as they were used in public or private reading and in exposition.
 - Recognition in the _____ as sacred
 - _____ of leaders and people – The opinions of religious leaders and common convictions of the people about the books were considered.
 - _____ – For Christians, there was the additional consideration that Jesus himself and his apostles, in the pages of the New Testament, often refer to the Jewish scriptures in general, and to many of the individual books as having the authority of God.
- Final Composition – _____, the last Old Testament book, was written around 430 B.C. The Old Testament canon era, then, as determined by God, lasted from 1445 B.C. to 430 B.C. Evidences that the OT canon ceased at the time of Malachi include:
 - _____ – According to the Jewish historian, Josephus (A.D. 37-95), the Hebrew OT was complete and no more canonical writings were composed after the reign of Artaxerxes (464—424 B.C.) (The time of Malachi.): "From Artaxerxes (the successor of Xerxes) until our time everything has been recorded, but has not been deemed worthy of like credit with what preceded, because the exact succession of the prophets ceased. . . . For though so long a time has now passed, no one has dared to add anything to them, or to take anything from them, or to alter anything in them" (Josephus, *Against Apion* I. 8.). Josephus also wrote, "We have not tens of thousands of books, discordant and conflicting, but only twenty-two containing the record of all time, which have been justly believed to be divine." (NOTE: It is the opinion of most scholars that Josephus in deriving his number of twenty-two books joined Ruth to Judges and Lamentations to Jeremiah; and remembering that the Jews enumerated their books differently ... the twenty-two books mentioned by Josephus equal our present thirty-nine books.)
 - The _____ – The Jewish Talmud states, "After the latter prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel." (The Talmud is a collection of writings that covers the full gamut of Jewish law and tradition, compiled and edited between the third and sixth centuries. Talmud is Hebrew for "learning".)

- _____ – The NT never quotes any OT book as authoritative after the time of Malachi.
- Council of _____ (A.D. 90) – This council met to discuss the canonicity of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and Esther. The Council of Jamnia did not include any new books as canonical, it simply reaffirmed those books already considered canonical.
- Early _____ –
 - In the third century A.D., Origen confirmed the testimony of Josephus on the number of books in the Hebrew canon. The books Origen listed correspond to the thirty-nine books of the Protestant Old Testament.
 - In the fourth century eight prominent Church fathers, Athanasius of Alexandria, Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius of Cyprus, Amphilocius of Asia Minor, and Gregory Nazianzus of Cappadocia, Hilary of France, Rufinus of Italy, and Jerome have left us lists all of which agree with the Hebrew canon except for very minor variations.
- What about the Apocrypha? The word *apocrypha* has come into the English language from the Greek and basically means _____. It was used very early in the sense of secretive or concealed, but was also used in reference to a book whose origin was doubtful or unknown. Eventually the word took on the meaning of non-canonical, and thus for centuries the non-canonical books have been known as apocryphal books.
 - Old Testament: Written approximately between the third century BC and the first century AD, these books include 1 & 2 Maccabees, 1 Esdras, Judith, Tobit, the Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, as well as some smaller works and even some additions to existing canonical books.
 - Little evidence to suggest they were regarded as Scripture. Neither Josephus nor Philo—key sources for our understanding of the scope of the OT canon—used them as Scripture.
 - No NT author (most of whom were Jews) cites even a single book from the Apocrypha as Scripture.
 - Many historical and geographical inaccuracies
 - Unbiblical or heretical doctrines
 - No claims to be the Word of God
 - Later rabbinic writers do not receive the Apocrypha, affirming only the Hebrew Scriptures as part of the Jewish canon.
 - There was a clearly established belief that inspired prophecy had ceased by the time of the fourth century BC. This sentiment is evident even within the OT Apocrypha itself.
 - New Testament: The NT Apocrypha refers to large array of books that look similar to our NT writings in both style and genre, may even claim apostolic origins, and yet never found a permanent home inside the church's emerging canon.
 - All of these apocryphal writings are dated to the second or third century, or even later.
 - Many (though not all) of these apocryphal writings contain systems of doctrine that were out of accord with the rule of faith that had been passed down to the early church.
 - None of the apocryphal NT writings, with only a rare exception, were ever serious contenders for a spot in the canon. Most apocryphal works were either ignored, or condemned outright by the church fathers. By the time the edges of the NT canon were solidified in the fourth century, the apocryphal works were noticeable mainly by their absence.

Listening Guide:

When was the New Testament written?

Paul's letter to the Galatians (AD ____)

1 and 2 Thessalonians (early AD ____)

Oral histories of Jesus:

Stories were shared in a culture of _____.

Believers cared deeply about preserving the message of _____

Luke (Luke 1:2)

Papias (1st century AD)

Pastor disciplined for fabricating stories about Paul in "Acts of Paul" (AD 160)

Oral histories were _____ before eyewitnesses _____.

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

- 1 Corinthians 15:3-6

Why did Christians write the New Testament texts?

Letters to address _____ in churches

Loss of _____

The Four Gospels:

_____ was the apostle Peter's translator.

_____ likely wrote in Aramaic; translated into Greek.

_____ investigated and got stories from eyewitnesses.

_____ was an eyewitness.

Key Terms

Autographs — The original manuscripts of the Bible in their final form are known as the autographs. The autographs of the New Testament decayed into dust centuries ago—but there is some evidence that the autographs might have survived at least until the end of the second century.

Gospel — (from Old English *godspel*, translation of Greek *euangelion*, “good news”)

(1) gospel: Outside the New Testament in the first century AD, the word translated “gospel” referred to the proclamation of an event—such as a victory in battle or the rise of a new king — that changed the hearer’s status and called for a response. In the New Testament, “gospel” came to mean the proclamation that the power of God’s kingdom had entered human history through Jesus Christ to renew the whole world by means of his perfect life, substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection. When we trust what Jesus did — instead of what we can do — to be made right with God, God restores us to union with himself and communion with others.

(2) Gospel: A text that narrates the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The four New Testament Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—are ancient biographies (Greek, *bioi*) and were clearly intended to be read as historical testimonies.

New Testament — The second part of the Christian Bible, which announces the fulfillment of God’s Old Testament promises and the arrival of God’s kingdom on earth through the perfect life, sacrificial death, and triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ. The New Testament was originally written in Greek. “Testament” translates a Greek word that can also be rendered “covenant” (Luke 22:20; Heb. 8:8–13).

Oral Culture — A culture in which stories and memories are recalled and shared primarily through spoken words instead of written words. In the oral culture of the first Christians, rhythmic patterns and mnemonic devices were woven into oral histories so that learners could quickly convert spoken testimonies into permanent memories. God worked through this cultural pattern to preserve the truths that we read today in the New Testament.

Oral Histories — Spoken testimonies which were memorized and shared in communities during the lifetimes of the eyewitnesses.

Next week: **How the Books of the New Testament Were Chosen**

“The Church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity.”

- J.I. Packer, *God Speaks to Man*, p. 81