

New Testament Formation



Creating, Collecting, Canonizing,
and Copying the books of
the New Testament

- ◆ What are those 4 winged creatures?
- ◆ Why are there 4 Gospels? Why not more? Why not just 1?
- ◆ When does Revelation say the world will end?
- ◆ After the Gospels, are the letters in any particular order?
- ◆ When you see a verse, say Jn 3:16, where do the chapter and verse numbers come from? Who came up with that?
- ◆ How trustable are the books if they've been copied and recopied so many times?
- ◆ Did Jesus (or Paul) (or whoever) really say that?

Intro

- ◆ The Old Testament is the selected sacred books of Israel
- ◆ The New Testament is the selected sacred books of the early church
- ◆ nature of the new “testament” a.k.a. “covenant” ~ Hebrews’ covenant with God: Noah, Abraham, Moses, David (most notably Mo
- ◆ Eucharistic words: the blood of the “new covenant” ...
- ◆ New, as in, now not just Israel. Gentiles as well. OT → NT

I. Letters

- ◆ “Scriptures” = Law / Prophets / Writings
- ◆ Jesus did not write, nor did he instruct to write
- ◆ The end was near! (Strong eschatology)
- ◆ Paul’s 2nd journey in Acts, dreams to cross the Aegean...
Thessalonica... backsliding...
- ◆ Earliest writings: 1 Th, Gal, Phil, Phlm, I and II Cor, Rom
- ◆ “Proto Pauline” ; all roads...

- ◆ Different communities = different emphases: To Judaize or not to Judaize? Faith or works? Predestination or Free Will? ("What if...") Wife submits to the husband, or mutual submission? ("Who am I to judge?")
- ◆ Danger of de-emphasizing and removing the tension to this day; proof-texting
- ◆ Mid 60s: Peter, Paul, James are dying. So:
- ◆ Start preserving letters; writing new ones in their name. i.e. "Deutero-Pauline"

- ◆ Tone more universal: II Th warns against immediacy; “churches” → “church”
- ◆ Structure comes in: presbyter/bishops & deacons... It worked!
- ◆ Post 70s: letters of Peter, James, and Jude address later problems. Later still, I, I, III Jn - “anti-christ” criteria
- ◆ Eventually called “catholic” (universal)
- ◆ THEN: Gospels - actual words & deeds; THEN Rev - own genre... speaking of which...

II. Gospels

- ◆ Gospels: “Evangelists” v “Evangelizers”
- ◆ 3 phase development (See CCC):
- ◆ Phase 1 (0 - 33): JC's words & deeds;
- ◆ Phase 2 (33-50): oral preaching by apostles & peers;
- ◆ Phase 3 (50 - 150): writing it down
- ◆ Experiences between the time of JC and evangelist will color the presentation, and relevance to current problems will determine what gets preserved and what gets left out

- ◆ 60/70: Mark: companion of Paul and then Peter; emphasis on suffering; reflects persecutions of the Marcan community
- ◆ 10 years later: Matthew & Luke (queue "Q") (Mark too) - Mt & Lk - more detail; more coloring reflecting the Matthean and Lucan communities
- ◆ Matthew was one of the 12; Luke was companion of Paul
- ◆ 90/100: John. So different, scholars posit a separate community a.k.a. "Johannine"
- ◆ John was one of the 12... However:
- ◆ None are signed. "According to" = "faithful to the mind of"

III. ACTS

- ◆ Acts = Luke pt. II
- ◆ Christianity from Judah/Jerusalem to Samaria, ending in Rome
- ◆ yay to the ends of the Earth, guided by HS by JC

IV. Revelation: the Final Act

- ◆ Revelation: whole 'nother genre:
“apocalyptic” (“apocalypse” = “disclosure” = “revelation”)
- ◆ OT had too: Ezekiel, Zechariah (& pts of Daniel)
- ◆ In this genre, persecution of God's people by great empires, challenging whether God is in control;
- ◆ || between heaven & earth to show that (spoiler alert!), yes He is in control! Kingdom of God > what they're experiencing
- ◆ plasticity of wild images and anachronisms; NOT a fortune cookie!!

V: other "letters"

- ◆ J, 1P, 2P, 1J, 2J, 3J; borderline "letters" - "epistles"
- ◆ Heb: (even "Heb" is based on content, not original)
- ◆ These epistles also address backsliding; "anti-christ" criteria; christology ("Cosmic Christ")
- ◆ JC's death replaces Israelite cult & priesthood
- ◆ John no longer dealing with expulsion as in "his" gospel, but with internal schism

VI. Canonizing the New Testament

- ◆ 50 - 150. Three criteria:
- ◆ (1) Apostolic Origin (real or putative). Dionysius of Alexandria ~250 that whoever wrote Rv couldn't be JJJJ; Heb opposite: they thought Paul did write it! Yet apostolic origin not enough. There are some mentioned that did not make it.
- ◆ (2) Prominence of the addressed community. Churches of Asia Minor and of Rome give us most. Irenaeus against the heretics pointed out lack of apostolicity. Might also explain (way) less significant ones like Phlm and Jude.
- ◆ (3) Conformity with the rule of faith. "Canon" = "rule". Gospel of Peter had docetism (JC not truly human). Other Gnostics: JC did not die on the cross. (Koran does this 500 years later)

- ◆ Why 4 gospels? Paul warns of a contrary gospel; Mark calls itself "the" gospel; Mt/Lk use it; & Jn doesn't mention it!
- ◆ Exclusive gospel -> dangerous exclusivity! Mt's "jot & tittle of the law" against Gentiles v. Jn's "enemies" = Jews. So, greater Church included all 4 (~150)
- ◆ Tatian's Diatesseron (harmony)
- ◆ Ireneaus (W) & Origen (E): God wants 4: winged creatures from Ezekiel and Rv: Mt's human (genealogy); Mk's Lion (voice in wilderness); Lk's winged ox (Zechariah's sacrifice); Jn's eagle (Word from heaven)



- ◆ What about rest of the books? Marcion: OT God = demiurge JC appeased for us (rejecting Jewish heritage)
- ◆ cC reaction: OT side by side with NT (& possibly moving Acts between gospels & letters to show transition)
- ◆ few decades later: Montanus - opposite, still receiving "messages", so rev still open. Uh, no. Closed with the apostles (not even Church Fathers like Clement :-/)
- ◆ weeded out gnostic stuff: Adam & Eve's villainous creator (Gospel of Thomas), anti-church (Apocalypse of Peter), & Egyptian lore

- ◆ ∴ fluidity of canon ~ couple more centuries struggling to find compromise between narrow Marcion and open-ended Montanus
- ◆ At some point, the apostolic letters were placed after the Gospels and Acts, Paul's first, followed by others', and within each apostle, from largest to smallest letter
- ◆ earliest list was the Muratorian fragment;
- ◆ the first appearance of our final list (27 books): councils of Hippo (393) & Carthage (397) (*note: later books categorized as "apocryphal/deuterocanonical" are already here)

VII. The text itself

- ◆ 1st scientific approach 1685-1695 French priest Richard Simon. Scandal to prots & cats alike.
- ◆ ~3000 mss (partial or whole) from 2C to 17C
- ◆ 3 types:
 - ◆ (1) Papyri 2-8C (~100 found in 1890!) (earliest ~135 scrap of Jn);
 - ◆ (2) Great Uncial codices 3-9C (after edict of Milan: 4C Codex Vaticanus*, Sinaiticus, 5C Alexandrinus, Bezae) *possibly most faithful
 - ◆ (3) Minuscules (9C cursive, began superseding uncials: ~ 2900 mss)

- ◆ many discrepancies; none significant; no originals; most happened during papyri & uncials (ie emphasis on preservation by time of minuscules, influenced “sola scriptura”)
- ◆ Chapter divisions: Stephen Langton - 13C; Verse divisions: Robert Stephanus 1551
- ◆ copies & changes, deliberate & not (fix spelling, explain, harmonize, remove dubious, mishearing dictation, misdictating...) - older not necessarily = more faithful!
Cannot tell!
- ◆ Some examples:

- ◆ Mt 6:13 "For the kingdom, the power..." not in all mss
- ◆ Mk 16:9-20 (longer ending added) - ends abruptly @ 16:8 - No resurrection appearances! Gospel Interrupted? Not Good News? A: Paul earlier, other evangelists later (whew!)
- ◆ Lk 23:34 "Father forgive them..." not in all Western mss. (Added by pious copyist or removed by antisemitic copyist?)
- ◆ Lk 24:12 (Peter running to tomb)
- ◆ Jn 1:18 "It is [God], the only Son..." - some mss omit "God" (not necessary to say God every single "Son")
- ◆ Jn 7:53-8:11 woman caught in adultery - not in all mss! (too scandalous? & then put back in?)
- ◆ Eph 1:1 (Eph inferred)

- ◆ King James (not Lebron) tries to get “authorized” with an official authoritative translation.
- ◆ Probs: too many ongoing discoveries still showing errors; Latin Vulgate and Douay Rheims more faithful than KJV (sorry prots); more modern **ecumenical** translations like NJB, NAB, NRSV... are more faithful still (sorry exclusionists!)
- ◆ Moral of the story: Sacred Scripture came from, and will forever need, Sacred Tradition to keep it faithful to the mind of Jesus - independent from scandals of our Church or any other, to weed out the waves of neo-Gnostics that keep washing up on our shores (ie “Jesus Seminar”, movies like “Stigmata”, “Dogma”, “DaVinci code”...)

The DaVinci Code: Hollywood v. History

1. "Constantine needed to strengthen the new Christian tradition, and held a famous ecumenical gathering known as the Council of Nicea...."
2. "At this gathering, many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted upon - the date of Easter, the role of the bishops, the administration of sacraments, and, of course, the *divinity* of Jesus."
3. "My dear, until *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet... a great and powerful man, but a man nevertheless. A mortal."
4. "Jesus' establishment as 'the Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicea... a relatively close vote at that."
5. "Establishing Christ's divinity was critical to the further unification of the Roman empire and to the new Vatican power base...."
6. Constantine collated an entirely new Bible at the Council of Nicea, containing only books that speak of Jesus as divine. All books that portrayed him as human were burned.

1. Constantine presided over the council to ensure unity in the Church and in the Empire, but there was no "new" Christian tradition, as we'll see.
2. The date of Easter, the role of the bishops, the administration of the sacraments, yes. The divinity of Jesus, not quite! They debated not whether he was divine, but how that mixed with his being human at the same time.
3. My dear Dan Brown, until "that moment in history," nearly every Christian believed that Jesus was divine. "Jesus is Lord!" "My Lord and My God!", and from the NT on.
4. Read the gospels lately? The very reason given for his execution was the claim to be the Son of God. And the vote in question (*how* he was divine) was not even close.
5. LOL. There was no Vatican yet. And can you say Pax Romana? Cult of the Emperor? Even Constantine's later Arianism was overruled!
6. Wow. Nicea had nothing whatsoever to do with the Bible. No books were burned. And the "secret" books (ie Gnostic gospels) tend to *de-emphasize* his humanity, leaving out the crucifixion entirely.

“The Unique Galilean”

by Wesleyan professor Russell DeLong

He was not an author. He wrote no books, composed no poems, compiled no documents, edited no papers, nor contributed to any periodicals. The only sentence he ever wrote was a single line in the sand, which disappeared the same day. No letter of it was preserved.

He never used a fountain pen or a typewriter. {Or a computer.} We have no line, word, or syllable from His hand.

And yet -

more books have been written about Him and His words than any other man. He has affected the lives of more people than all the authors of all the ages. The story of His life has been translated into more than 1,100 languages, read by countless millions, and is the best-selling story every year.

Thy Word

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet
and a light unto my path.

And when I feel afraid, and I think I've lost my way
Still you're there right beside me.
And nothing will I fear, as long as you are near.
Please be near me to the end.

And I will not forget, your love for me, and yet,
My heart is forever wandering.
Jesus, be my guide, and hold me to your side,
and I will hold you till the end