

# BASIC CHRISTIANITY

## Lecture Number 8

### THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AND HOW WE GOT THEM

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#### INTRODUCTION

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In this class we are going to look at the writings we know today as the *canon* of the New Testament and reflect on how they came about and got included in that canon.

In the class on the Canon of the Old Testament, we saw how the beginning of the collecting and editing of the Holy Writings (Scriptures) was in response to the Babylonian conquest of Judah, their destruction of God's Temple, and God's People being carried into exile in Babylon.

“So being convinced that God had brought this calamity upon them because they had not obeyed his Law, they set out to put repentance into practice. They put to good use the fifty years they would wind up spending in Exile.

“In order to obey God's Law they had to study it; and everybody had to study it. So they ‘invented’ what came to be called the *synagogue*. Every Sabbath (Saturday) all the men were to gather in small groups for the purpose of systematic study of the writings which enshrined God's Law.”

And in order for this studying to be feasible every congregation had to have a copy of the collected writings. So their most learned men set out to collect, edit and standardize those writings, which could then be copied for all the congregations. The result was the beginning of what we now have as the canon of the Old Testament writings, the ‘scriptures.’”

We also spoke about how in ancient times it was normal for everyone to have a powerful ability to recall stories and teachings word for word from memory. The synagogue schools had to make great use of that ability because it would be very unusual for there to be more than one or two copies of the Scriptures in a given congregation.

Before the time of our Lord Jesus the *codex*, what we think of as a book, had not come into use. In fact, around 100 AD, Christians developed the codex to enable them more easily to make reference to the Old Testament Scriptures for evidence about the Messiah.

That was because, until then, all books were actually scrolls, usually no more than 30 feet long, and never more than thirty-three feet. They were made of either papyrus or sheepskin. Such a scroll was made up of perhaps 30 individual pages about 10” by 14”.

The book was assembled from the individual pages on which the author had written in two columns. Then each page was glued to the next along their sides so that about 36 sheets would make a scroll about 30 feet long.

The book then was fastened to a rod at each end. When it was read, two hands were used, one to

unroll it and the other to roll it up. Obviously, the codex was a great advance on the scroll.

The foundation of the study of the Scriptures was the memorizing of the text. Perhaps ordinary Jews only memorized certain more important texts, just which ones we don't know. But certainly the more one knew from memory the better.

This state of affairs continued into the time of the New Testament. All reading was done "out loud." No one ever read silently, "to himself" as we say, until about 400 AD. St. Augustine of Hippo, who died in 430, was considered unusual, because he could do it. Others would simply pronounce aloud the sounds which the symbols or letters represented.

During the first Christian two hundred-fifty years, the Church was under more or less continuous persecution, and this increased its tendency to be a very close knit family. And so it treasured its traditions, which were rich and widely known by members of the Church. During that time, it relied on its knowledge of the Tradition even more than it did on the written Gospel records. [Wenham, John, *Redating Matthew Mark & Luke*, p. 222]

In fact, St. Clement of Alexandria [AD 150-215] said, "Those teachers, however, who preserved intact the true tradition, as it stems directly from the holy apostles Peter and James, John and Paul, by ensuring that a son always received it from his father, came, by the help of God, to us as well, in order...to sow [in us] those apostolic seeds" [Hauke, Manfred, *Women in the Priesthood?*, p. 387].

Just as the Old Testament is a collection of distinct books, written by different people at different times, so is the New Testament. There are 27 books in the New Testament. And all of them were written on scrolls originally.

The subject of the entire New Testament is God come in human flesh in the person of the Man Jesus and the Salvation which he accomplished. In fact, Christians realized from the beginning that Jesus is the subject of the Old Testament as well as of the New.

The Bible of the first generation or two of Christians was simply the same as that of the Jews, the Old Testament. Usually, Christians used the Septuagint, the Greek version, as did many if not most Greek speaking Jews.

Among the followers of Jesus, one of them had used writing and reading in his previous profession, Matthew the Tax Collector. In the latter part of the second century, the Bishop of Hierapolis in what is now central Turkey, a man named Papias, wrote that Matthew "gathered the sayings of Jesus in the Hebrew tongue, and each person translated them as he was able."

About the same time, St. Irenaeus of Lyons, wrote,

"The Gospel of Matthew was written to the Jews. For they laid particular stress upon the fact that Christ [should be] of the seed of David. Matthew who had a still greater desire [to establish this point], took particular pains to afford them convincing proof that Christ is of the seed of David; and therefore he commences with [an account of] his genealogy."

How much more than the Nativity story and the collection of his sayings this "Hebrew" gospel contained we just don't know.

However, the most common form of transmission of the Gospel was oral, from mouth to mouth. And the most common form of instruction in any subject was by rote memory. The teacher drilled the students by reciting the lesson repeatedly as the students said it with him until they were able to recite it by themselves.

Today, in the third world, where books are scarce, this is still the common manner of teaching.

All of us can do it when we are children. It is one aspect of “language plasticity,” the ability to learn languages quickly and easily, and which is great in our infancy. But as we grow older, and then learn to read, the aptitude is lost through lack of use. However it remains strong as long as it is exercised regularly. When you think about it, this is how all of us learned to speak at least one language.

Three Christian writers from about 200 AD, or earlier, say that the Twelve stayed in Jerusalem for twelve years, *at the Lord’s command*, in order to instruct the people there. And each one of those writers are quoting even earlier documents. [See the note at the end of this class text.]

We can infer that the twelve remained in Jerusalem teaching, presumably by rote, and that they more or less had standardized their presentations by the time they dispersed at the end of the twelve years, around 42 AD. And in that process they’d had the use of whatever notes Matthew had recorded on the spot.

St. Paul

Around 36 AD Paul privately visited Jerusalem and spent fifteen days with Cephas (Peter), but saw none other of the Twelve. However, he did see James, the Lord’s brother, who became head of the Jerusalem Church.

Then eleven years later, about 47 AD, with Barnabas and Titus, he visited Jerusalem and met with those leaders who were “in town,” in order to compare what he was teaching with what they taught, “to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.”

Probably he recited for them what he was accustomed to teach, and they agreed with it. For instance, in Romans 2:16, St. Paul refers to “my gospel:”

“They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to *my gospel*, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.”

At the end of Romans, he used the expression again in 16:2:

“Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to *my gospel* and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith — to the only wise God be glory for ever more through Jesus Christ! Amen.”

In 2 Timothy 2:8 Paul says,

“Remember *Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David*, as preached in *my gospel*, the gospel for which I am suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal.” That formula sounds like Paul might actually be reciting from *his* gospel.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:14 he says,

“ But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through *our gospel*, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The “our” refers to Silvanus [Silas] and Timothy.

Undoubtedly, Paul, the former disciple of the great Jewish rabbi, Gamaliel, was in the practice of teaching his gospel by rote to the people in the churches which he founded. And they would welcome that as a normal and good thing. Just as we in the twenty-first century would take notes, or make recordings, when we hear some great teacher.

The letters which he wrote to his various church foundings were not the primary way he taught his converts, some of whom were Jews but most gentiles. He takes for granted that they “know” his gospel.

All of the members of his churches spoke Greek, the language of the Roman Empire. His letters usually were dealing with pastoral or other problems. Romans is the exception. In them he deals with matters which go beyond the basic Gospel.

Presumably, he would expect all his readers to know “his” gospel by heart.

So wherever Paul went on his missionary journeys, founding churches, he would leave behind a group of people who had memorized “his gospel,” his gospel which was in accord with the Gospel agreed upon and taught by the Twelve, because he took pains to make sure that was the case.

The result of all of this was that the Great Tradition to which Clement of Alexandria referred was spread to the ends of the Roman Empire and beyond, to the east and maybe even as far west as Britain.

In addition, copies of the letters of Paul spread throughout all the churches, not just those which he had founded. As a result his letters, which mostly were originally intended for single congregations, were read by Christians at large for pastoral and other guidance.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke

Meanwhile, back at the ranch! In Jerusalem, as the twelve years of concentrated cooperative teaching was coming to an end, St. Matthew put his gospel into writing. Since he only had 30 feet of scroll with which to work he had to distill the gospel which he was accustomed to teach by rote. It probably contained a lot more than just the earlier “Hebrew” collection of Jesus’ sayings.

Mark’s gospel, which was the edited distillation of Peter’s customary teaching by rote, seems to have been written in the early to mid 40s.

Luke’s gospel was written some time before 55. We know that Acts comes after it, because Luke refers to “the former treatise.” There are a number of things about Luke’s gospel which make it clear that it was written for Greek speaking gentiles abroad in the Empire.

For instance, he addresses both of the books Luke and Acts to “Theophilus,” literally “God lover.” Perhaps he has in mind the “God fearers,” the uncircumcised gentiles who attached themselves to many, if not most, synagogues but never became Jews. They admired the moral teaching and the theology which they found there.

The ancient tradition is that John’s gospel was the last to be written. But there is little clear ancient tradition as to when. I am following the opinion stated forcefully by Bishop John A. T. Robinson that it was before the year 70 AD. [*Redating the New Testament* and *The Priority of John*]

Besides the four gospels, there are several other types of books in the New Testament: letters, historical, doctrinal and pastoral writings, and an apocalypse, which I will clarify in just a bit.

We have already mentioned the letters of St. Paul, which are these: Romans, I & II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.

Each of Paul’s letters gets its name from those to whom the letter is addressed, for instance, the church in Thessalonica. The letter to the Ephesians may have been simply the Ephesian example of a single letter Paul wrote to churches in several different cities. Philemon was written to an individual person by that name.

There is one letter which is unlike all the others, and that is Hebrews. Furthermore, it is anonymous, which made some in the ancient Church reluctant to include it in the Canon.

In ancient times, some thought that Paul wrote it. Others said it was Barnabas who was a Levite and thus might have been inclined to think about Christ in terms of the Priesthood and the Temple and its sacrifices. Modern scholars have suggested Clement of Rome, Luke, or Apollos. The great third century scholar, Origen said about the question, “...only God knows.”

Then there are two letters written by St. Peter. I Peter is addressed to Christians in what is now Turkey in the region north of the Taurus Mountains.

James is written by James the Just, brother of Jesus and head of the church in Jerusalem. Probably he was the step-brother of Jesus and son of Joseph by an earlier marriage since Joseph was much older than Mary according to ancient tradition. The main theme of James is how to live out one’s faith being a doer of the word and not just a hearer only.

There are three letters by St. John the Evangelist. As the ESV Study Bible says, the first emphasizes the three foundations of the Christian life: true doctrine, obedient living, and fervent devotion. The second letter concentrates on “living in the love of God in accordance with the truth of Jesus Christ.” And the third letter urges steadfastness in the face of opposition.

The short and powerful letter of Jude was written by Judas the brother of James and of Jesus. It exhorts the Church to remain faithful and to contend for the faith to the end resisting all false teachers. Jude addresses the same situation as Peter does.

The last book in the New Testament is The Revelation to John. In Greek, the word “revelation”

is “apokalypsis.” This book is the biggest and most important example of apocalyptic literature in the Bible. There are several examples in the Old Testament. This kind of literature flourished among the Jews during the period after the canon of the Old Testament was completed.

In general, such writings said that they were revelations of what was to come with the purpose of encouraging faithfulness and warning of the terrible consequences for those who opposed God and or oppressed his People.

From about 40 to about 160 AD, written and oral tradition were *circulating* side by side. [Wenham, op. cit.] Most Christians who either couldn’t read or couldn’t afford to own codices continued even after that period to depend on the Oral Gospel Tradition.

As the second century went on, more and more books appeared which claimed to tell some or all of the story of Jesus, as well as others which were read for their interpretation of the Gospel or for pastoral guidance. Some of these appeared authentic and/or valuable. Others were clearly heretical and dangerous.

Many of them were read in church right along with the Old Testament Scriptures.

Increasingly, it became necessary to decide which books were suitable and which were not.

Here is a list from an online site, <http://www.ntcanon.org>, which gives in chronological order the ancient sources of our knowledge about the process. It illustrates how the consensus about the *canon* developed:

--110 St. Ignatius of Antioch quotes and alludes to Christian Scriptures, but does not identify any by name.

--110 St. Polycarp of Smyrna, disciple of the Apostles themselves, in his one letter uses 100 quotations and allusions to Christian Scriptures but does not identify any by name.

--140 Marcion [heretic] founded his own sect with its own New Testament collection of books; he had one “Gospel” based mainly on Luke. He rejected the entire Old Testament, but accepted these books:

Luke  
Galatians  
I & II Corinthians  
Romans  
I & II Thessalonians  
Ephesians [he called it “Laodiceans”]  
Colossians  
Philemon  
Philippians

140-50 Valentinus [Gnostic heretic]  
Matthew  
Mark

Luke  
John  
Romans  
I & II Corinthians  
Galatians  
Ephesians  
Philippians  
Colossians  
I Peter  
I John  
Revelation

150-60 Justin Martyr - The most prolific and important orthodox philosopher and apologist of the time. Notice at this time the question is “how valuable or trustworthy are particular books?” There is evidence that he considered these to be of spiritual value:

Matthew  
Mark  
Luke  
John

--180 Irenaeus of Lyons, had heard “the genuine unadulterated gospel” from St. Polycarp, disciple of the apostles themselves:

The four and only four gospels  
He refers to or quotes from all of the other books of the NT except for Philemon, II Peter, III John, and Jude.

180-200 Clement of Alexandria - Apologist, missionary theologian to the Greek cultural world, and second known leader of the catechetical school of Alexandria.  
He cites all the books of the NT except for Philemon, James, II Peter, II John and III John.

200-210 Tertullian of Carthage - an early Christian writer and polemicist, he helped to establish Latin as an ecclesiastical language and vehicle for Christian thought.  
He cites all the books of the NT except for II Peter, James, II John, and III John.

200-- Muratorian Canon - found in 1897 in the Ambrosian Library in Milan - Latin translation from Greek original - lists all the NT books except for Hebrews, James, and I and II Peter.

220-250 Origen - great scholar and theologian - he cites from all the books of the NT, but has reservations about James, II Peter, II John, and III John.

300-330 Eusebius of Caesarea - first great Christian historian. He has access to the excellent libraries in Caesarea and in Jerusalem. He counts the votes of his “witnesses” and puts the different books in four categories:

RECOGNIZED

Four Gospels  
Acts  
Epistles of Paul  
I John  
I Peter  
Revelation [maybe!]

#### DISPUTED

James  
Jude  
II Peter  
II John  
III John

#### SPURIOUS

Revelation [?]  
*Acts of Paul*  
*The Shepherd of Hermas*  
*Apocalypse of Peter*  
*Epistle of Barnabas*  
*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles [Didache]*  
*Gospel of the Hebrews*

#### HERETICAL

*Gospel of Peter*  
*Gospel of Thomas*  
*Gospel of Matthias*  
*Some other "Gospels"*  
*Acts of Andrew*  
*Acts of John*

- 350 Codex Sinaiticus - found in the Monastery of St. Catherine at the foot of Mt. Sinai in 1859 - it includes most of the Old Testament and all of the New PLUS the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas.
- 367 St. Athanasius of Alexandria - bishop, theologian, and Egyptian national leader - chief defender of the orthodox faith against Arianism ["There was a time when Christ was not."] . In his Festal Letter of 367 AD he says he has "decided to set forth in order the writings *that have been put forth in the canon, that have been handed down and confirmed as divine, ...*" Then he lists the 27 books of the New Testament.

He is referring to what he has *received* as being the Holy Tradition concerning the New Testament Canon. He is witness to something already settled. This is the first known mention we have of the entire New Testament Canon.

- 397 Third Council of Carthage - [northern coast of Africa, west of Alexandria, Egypt]  
This was only a regional council and not a General Council. It decreed that nothing be read in church as scripture except the books that are in the Canon of the Old and New Testament. Then it lists the books including apocryphal ones. It does not purport to

establish the Canon but rather to make clear what it is talking about.

---- The Peshitta - the Bible of the Syrian Church, which spread out from Edessa on the eastern edge of Syria. The language understood there was neither Greek nor Latin. The Church there was never permanently and thoroughly integrated into the rest. In the end they wound up with a New Testament Canon of only 22 books, omitting: II Peter, II John, III John, Jude, and Revelation.

384-405 The Vulgate - Pope Damasus commissioned St. Jerome to produce a complete Latin version of the Bible. He started out translating the Septuagint into Latin, but was not satisfied. So he started over translating the entire Old Testament from Hebrew. He translated the Gospels himself, but the rest of the New Testament was edited by him using older Latin translations.

From the fourth century on in the Western Church things were settled concerning the New Testament. And by the fifth century the Eastern Church had accepted Revelation, with some few exceptions. [Wikipedia note]

Minor differences remain to this day between the Canonical lists affirmed by the Western Christians, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and other reformation groups, and the Eastern Orthodox, not to mention the Syrians, the Armenians, and the Coptic Church of Egypt.

Things were never quite as simple as the Reformers seemed to think.

There has never been a General Council of the whole Church which settled the matter of the Canon. The Canon is closed, but just which canon depends on which Church you are talking about.

One of the criteria used by Christians in developing the consensus is this: was it written by an apostle or an eye-witness? Probably the next most important question was: how it squared with the Old Testament on the one hand and with the great New Testament Oral Tradition on the other.

During the middle of the third century the Church came to rely more and more on the written version of the Great Tradition, the books of the New Testament, and less and less on the oral version, even though it was broader and deeper than the written. The last verse of John's Gospel, 21:25, put it this way:

“Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”

To this day, it is the Great Tradition of the Christian Gospel which matters most of all. The books of the Canon enable us to verify what things belong to that Tradition and which do not. It is the Great Tradition which helps us interpret the Holy Scriptures.

The Great Tradition includes such things as the Creeds, and the dogmatic definitions of the General Councils about the Holy Trinity, the two natures of Christ, and his relationship to the Father.

We must avoid the mistake of the continental reformers who set the Bible against the Church and against the the Great Tradition! We need the Church's Great Tradition to guide us in our understanding and interpretation of Holy Scripture.

We must embrace and hold fast to the Holy Scriptures, however, because they are the heart of the Great Tradition. We might say that they, along with the Creeds, are the sacrament of that Tradition.

Let us pray.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ: who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

Note on the Twelve Years of the the Twelve in Jerusalem

*Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke*

*The Intractable Problem*

[pages 3-4]

Westcott <sup>[1]</sup> acknowledged that 'the explanation of the phenomena which [the Synoptic gospels] present is sought by universal consent in the presence of a common element' (177). He considered that this common element derived from the fact that the Twelve devoted themselves to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4), remaining 'together at Jerusalem in close communion long enough to shape a common narrative, and to fix it with the requisite consistency' (157). This was a ministry to Judeans, Galileans and Jews from the whole Diaspora. During this period, 'out of the countless multitude of Christ's acts, those were selected and arranged . . . which were seen to have the fullest representative significance' (157). In recounting the words spoken by Jesus and others a close unanimity was preserved, but in narrative each evangelist developed his individual style (183), making it 'a separate organic whole' (189).<sup>10</sup>

It was W. Sanday and his Oxford school who, towards the end of the nineteenth century, began to establish the two-document theory which became increasingly the received orthodoxy of the English-speaking world in the twentieth century, as it had already become in Germany.<sup>11</sup> It was felt that precise, detailed and objective work, as exemplified in J. C. Hawkins' *Horae Synopticae* (Oxford, 1899), gave hope of a 'scientific' solution to the problem, such as the oral theory could never provide. Precise, statistical studies to determine the redactional relationship between documents have formed a major part of the work on the problem throughout this century.<sup>12</sup>

That the relationship is primarily literary rather than oral has been the assumption underlying most of the work of the present century.<sup>13</sup> This is strikingly illustrated by Farmer in *The Synoptic Problem*, where Westcott is dismissed in a footnote.<sup>14</sup> It was illustrated even more strikingly by Sanders and Davies in 1989, who simply say that the synoptists 'often share the same Greek vocabulary, suggesting literary dependence' (vii) – they barely allude to the oral theory. After reviewing elaborated forms of the two-source hypothesis advocated by F. C. Grant and R. Funk and the multiple source hypothesis of M. A. Boismard (with four sources and three intermediate 'gospels'), they too favour a complicated literary

source theory – which, however, decisively rejects Q.<sup>15</sup>

### *The Date of Peter's Going to Rome*

[pages 160-2]

*Further elements of the tradition pointing to 42*

Other elements of the tradition which should be mentioned concern a) the belief that the apostles had instructions to remain in Jerusalem as their centre of operations for twelve years after the ascension of Jesus, and b) the belief that Simon Magus went to Rome in the reign of Claudius and that Peter confronted him there.

#### **A twelve-year stay in Jerusalem**

Harnack perhaps exaggerated slightly in declaring the twelve-year residence in Jerusalem to be 'a very old and well-attested tradition'.<sup>17</sup> Our direct early evidence consists of three statements. 1.) Eusebius refers to a book against the Montanists (written about 200?) by Apollonius: 'He says, as though from tradition, that the Saviour ordered His apostles not to leave Jerusalem for twelve years.'<sup>38</sup> 2.) Acts of Peter, also to be dated perhaps 180-90, tells of a vision given to Peter in Jerusalem in which he is told to set sail for Rome in pursuit of Simon the sorcerer 'now that the twelve years in Jerusalem which the Lord Christ had enjoined on him were completed'.<sup>39</sup> 3.) Clement of Alexandria in his *Stromateis* of about the same date quotes the lost Preaching of Peter: 'Peter records that the Lord had said to the disciples: If now anyone of Israel wishes to repent and through my name to believe in God, his sins will be forgiven him. And after twelve years go ye out into the world that no one may say: "We have not heard [it]."'<sup>40</sup> There are thus three statements from about 200 or earlier, one of them explicitly based on an even earlier document.

This tradition tallies with certain indications in Acts. At the time of Stephen's death the persecution was apparently directed against the Hellenistic Jewish Christian leaders and not against the apostles, whose orthopraxy was evidently not questioned, for we are told 'they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles' (Acts 8:1). But when Herod Agrippa I came to power in 41 things had changed considerably. According to Josephus,<sup>41</sup> Agrippa had been richly rewarded by Claudius for the important part which he played in securing the emperor's peaceful accession, and:

He was especially desirous of impressing [his new subjects] with his careful observance of the Mosaic law and his zeal for the national religion, being to some extent suspect through his long residence in Rome and alien descent.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly having gone to Jerusalem to keep the first Passover after his accession, he resolved to give a signal mark of his fervour as a defender of the faith, by the summary execution of James the son of Zebedee. Possibly he was the only one of the Christian leaders on whom for the moment he could lay hands. But finding his action had pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also ... There is no hint that the Twelve were at Jerusalem at this critical time. St. Peter himself does not seem to have been there when St. James was beheaded. His parting words (Acts 12:17) point to the two conclusions: (1) that the other James, the Lord's brother, was already the recognised head of the Jerusalem community; and (2) that the speaker had no expectation of being able to tell his tale to 'James and the brethren' in person. The explanation however lies to our hand, if we accept the ancient and well-attested tradition of which I have already spoken, that the Lord Jesus had bidden his Apostles to make Jerusalem the centre of their missionary activity for twelve years, after which they were to disperse and go forth to preach to the nations. Already before Herod Agrippa struck his blow the Twelve had begun to set out each one to his allotted sphere of evangelisation. (Edmundson 42, 43)<sup>[2]</sup>

Even if the supposed instruction by Jesus to stay for twelve years is apocryphal, the tradition may well be a witness to what in fact happened: that there was a general dispersal of the apostles at about this time.<sup>43</sup>

[1] B. F. Westcott, *An Introduction to the Study of the Gospels* (1860)

[2] G. Edmundson, *The Church in Rome in the First Century* (London: Longmans, 1913), available from Amazon.

Above excerpts are from John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1992)

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## Note

Thus, from the fourth century, there existed unanimity in the West concerning the New Testament canon (as it is today),<sup>[80]</sup> and by the fifth century the East, with a few exceptions, had come to accept the Book of Revelation and thus had come into harmony on the matter of the canon, at least for the New Testament.<sup>[81]</sup>

This period marks the beginning of a more widely recognized canon, although the inclusion of some books was still debated: Epistle to Hebrews, James, 2 John, 3 John, 2 Peter, Jude and Revelation. Grounds for debate included the question of authorship of these books (note that the so-called Damasian "Council at Rome" had already rejected [John the Apostle's](#) authorship of 2 and 3 John, while retaining the books), their suitability for use (Revelation at that time was already being interpreted in a wide variety of [heretical](#) ways), and how widely they were actually being used (2 Peter being amongst the most weakly attested of all the books in the Christian canon).

Christian scholars assert that when these bishops and councils spoke on the matter, however, they were not defining something new, but instead "were ratifying what had already become the mind of the Church".<sup>[19][73][82]</sup>

By the turn of the 5th century, the [Catholic Church](#) in the west, under [Pope Innocent I](#), recognized a [biblical canon](#) including the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which was previously established at a number of regional Synods, namely the [Council of Rome](#) (382), the [Synod of Hippo](#) (393), and two [Synods of Carthage](#) (397 and 419).<sup>[83]</sup> This canon, which corresponds to the modern Catholic canon, was used in the [Vulgate](#), an early 5th century translation of the Bible made by [Jerome](#)<sup>[84]</sup> under the commission of [Pope Damasus I](#) in 382.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development\\_of\\_the\\_New\\_Testament\\_canon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_of_the_New_Testament_canon)