

Class: How We Got the Bible

Week 4: The New Testament Books

- **Studies in this Class:** 1.) Inerrancy; 2.) Baptists & the Bible; 3.) How We Got the Old Testament; **4.) How We Got the New Testament;** 5.) Manuscripts; 6.) Translations.
- **Introduction**
 - *"A book is not the Word of God because it is accepted by the people of God. Rather, it was accepted by the people of God because it is the Word of God. That is, God gives the book its divine authority, not the people of God. They merely recognize the divine authority which God gives it"* (Geisler & Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible*, 210).
- **Today's Topic: How We Got the New Testament**
 - The 27 Books
 - Various Authors (Mostly Apostles, But Not All)
 - All Written c. 40-95
 - What Does the Bible Say About Itself?
 - NT Received & Recognized By the Church
 - Other Questions
- **Some Preliminary Interesting Details**
 - **Materials Used in Ancient Writings**
 - Papyrus
 - Parchment
 - Vellum
 - Others
 - **Forms of Ancient Writings**
 - Scrolls
 - Codices (Books)
 - **Chapter & Verse Divisions in the NT**
 - Modern chapter divisions added c. 1227
 - Modern verse markings added in 16th century

- **How We Got the New Testament**
 - **Events of Gospels Through Acts Dates: c. 0-62 AD**
 - **List of the 27 NT Books w/ One-Sentence Summary**
 - **Gospels**
 - Matthew [Matthew, c. 70s]
 - The story of Jesus: his birth, life and ministry, death on the cross, and his commissioning of his disciples to make disciples of all nations, with an emphasis on Jesus being the King of the Jews.
 - Mark [Mark (Peter Source ?), c. late 50s to 65]
 - The story of Jesus: from his baptism, his ministry, his death on the cross, to his resurrection, with an emphasis on the Kingdom of God and Jesus as the suffering Son of God.
 - [Luke \[Luke, c. 62-63\]](#)
 - The story of Jesus: a researched and orderly account of his life and ministry, with a detailed birth announcement, a lengthy travel narrative to Jerusalem and the cross, with an emphasis on Jesus being the Savior for sinners from all peoples.
 - John [John, c. mid 60s to 90]
 - The story of Jesus: signs, teachings, and truths said by Jesus, written down by the Evangelist so that the reader might believe in Jesus the Son of God and have life in his name.
 - **History**
 - [Acts \[Luke, c. 62-63\]](#)
 - The account of how by the power of the Holy Spirit the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Rome, with churches established all over, emphasizing that God's salvation is for all peoples.
 - **Letters of Paul**
 - Romans [c. 57]
 - A lengthy epistle of theological instruction, explaining fundamental biblical truths about the gospel of God, followed by a series of exhortations for the Christian life.

part of the Christian life, the duty to work, and readiness for the second coming of Christ.

- 2 Thesalonians [c. 50/51]
 - Another letter of encouragement for suffering believers, including clarity about the nature and timing of the Lord's second coming, and the need to faithfully labor for the Lord until the day he comes.
- 1 Timothy [c. 62/63]
 - A letter of guidance written to Timothy and the church in Ephesus, with instructions specifically addressing the qualifications for elders and deacons, the need for leaders to model Christlike character, as well as points for dealing with false teachings.
- 2 Timothy [c. 64]
 - A pastoral letter from Paul encouraging Timothy to continue faithfully in his loyalty to Christ and to Paul, emphasizing the need to train up men who can carry on the ministry of the gospel, while addressing false teaching once again.
- Titus [c. 62/63]
 - A letter written to Paul's companion, Titus, who was stationed in Crete to tie up loose ends, including the appointing of elders and deacons, and dealing with false teachers.
- Philemon [c. 61]
 - A letter written to Philemon concerning his slave Onesimus, where Paul exhorts Philemon to receive back Onesimus as a brother.

▪ General Epistles

- Hebrews [Unknown, likely before 70]
 - A lengthy letter of exhortation, most likely written to early Jewish Christians, encouraging them to persevere in the faith, and teaching them on the greatness of Christ as their high priest and the final word of God.

- How did the NT come to us?... is a question about canon. What is *canon*?

- **Meaning of the Word *Canon***

- **Definition:** F.F. Bruce: "When we speak of the canon of Scripture, the word 'canon' has a simple meaning. It means the list of books contained in Scripture, the list of books recognized as worthy to be included in the sacred writings of a worshipping community. 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'" (*The Canon of Scripture*, 17).

- **The Debate Over Canon**

- **What do you mean there has been a debate?** On one level, we could simply say that the NT canon is the 27 books of the NT, and that is the way it has been ever since those books were written and received by the church. That's the way God sees it, the way it is, and we believe it! But naturally, we would still have some curiosity about how the Bible came to us, and we would still want to have reasons for explaining to others why the Bible is our Bible. Over the centuries, in seeking to answer some of those curiosities and questions, there has been a range of answers put forward—which has led to some level of debate...

- **Why There Has Been Debate:** There are many reasons. There has been disagreement as to the definition of canon. There have been questions raised concerning the canonicity of some NT books, and by whose authority the 27 books of the NT were determined to complete the canon, among other questions. If the canon *developed* historically, then there are questions regarding the nature of canon itself. If the canon was *determined by the church*, then there are questions over whether that process was authoritative.

- **Three Perspectives on Canon... Which is Best?**
(From Kruger's *Canon Revisited*)

- **#1 Canon Because the Church (Or Somebody) Says So?**
 - **Summary:** This is likely your default understanding of canon. The idea here is that the church determined the list of books that would comprise the New Testament canon. It would begin with

in 1546 confirmed the apocryphal books as canonical and anathematized dissenters. This is the same council that officially made the Vulgate *the* authorized Catholic Bible. Marcion, the early church leader-turned-heretic, determined his own canon. In fact, he produced the earliest canon list in church history. He included an edited version of the Gospel of Luke and ten of Paul's epistles, and that's it. Irenaeus's list, which includes twenty books, was in response to Marcion.

- In this view the NT itself does not have its own authority or canonicity. Instead, canonicity is imposed on the NT books by an outside "authority." J.I. Packer in response: "The Church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity. ... Newton did not create gravity but recognized it" (*God Has Spoken*, 109).
- A modern-day problem of a kind of Marcion bent would be Christians who claim to be "red-letter Christians," following the teachings of Jesus, but rejecting Paul. (Making such a determination *yourself* because *you like* Jesus and *don't like* Paul would be more of an existentialist/neorthodox attitude.)

▪ #2 Canon Because NT Books Are Historically Genuine and/or Meet Outside Criteria?

- **Summary:** We will consider two models here that reach wildly different conclusions. The idea with these models is that the canon is determined following examination of the historical merits of each of the books.

• Models

- **Canon-within-the-Canon Model:** That the true canon is found by "exploring the *origins* of these books and finding the 'core' material that could be considered genuine" (*Canon Revisited*, 68). The intent is to find or discover and only keep that which is the "real" Jesus or apostolic faith.

- *Of interesting note:* Luther's criterion of "what [he thinks] preaches Christ" (sounds better!, but...) was his model and the reason why he devalued James.
 - There are also problems with the criteria of canonicity model. The Bible is not a book like every other book. We also are not capable of independently making judgments about the canon. Even if we were, it would make our authority greater than the authority of the Bible itself.
 - Lists of criteria can also fall short. Example: *Shepherd of Hermas* was orthodox, old, read by Christians all over, but was not canonical. 2 John, of the canon, received little attention early on, but was canonical. If we were left to decide on our own what makes the canon and what does not, it could be that we would get this one wrong.
- **#3 Canon Because God Says So? [BEST!!]**
 - **Key Concept:** That God's Word itself (and God's providence in giving the church his Word) determine the canon's own authenticity and authority.
 - Can God do this? Yes!
 - Heb 6:13, "*For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself ...*"
 - How did he do this, then?
 - **Summary: 3 Key Points**
 - **#1. The NT canon *claims* to be the Word of God.**
 - Rev 22:18-19, "*I warn everyone who hears the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.*"
 - Also 1 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21 (see below)

- Quote: "The heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby [Scripture] doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God" (Westminster Confession of Faith 1.5).

- **#1. Scripture's beauty—that it's a book unlike any other book**

- **Summary idea:** Calvin: "[Scripture] is clearly crammed with thoughts that could not be humanly conceived" (*Institutes* 1.8.2). The idea here is that the NT books were so good, so moving, that they essentially chose themselves. The church couldn't help but acknowledge them to be Scripture.
- 1 Cor 2:4-5, "... *my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*"
- Example quotes
 - Jerome on Philemon: "... a document which has so much of the beauty of the Gospel ... [the] mark of its inspiration."
 - Origen on Hebrews: "... the ideas of the epistle are magnificent."

- Irenaeus: "[These Gospels are always] breathing out immortality on every side."
- **#3. Scripture's unity/harmony—that it's a coherent book, unified in doctrine and in its story it tells**
 - **Summary idea:** Kruger: "The third category of divine qualities is the remarkable internal harmony and consistency borne throughout the canonical books" (*Canon Revisited*, 133).
 - God never contradicts himself. Ps 89:35; Prov 14:5; Tit 1:2; Heb 13:8.
 - Neither does his word. 40 authors (or more), over 2,500 years. No contradictions!
 - Doctrinal unity: Deut 18:20; Acts 17:10ff
 - Redemptive-historical unity: Luke 24:44; Matt 1:1; Matt 17:1-8; Gen 12:1-2 and Rev 7:9; Heb 1:1-4
 - Example quotes
 - Irenaeus: "All Scripture, which has been given to us by God, shall be found by us perfectly consistent ... and through the many diversified utterances [of Scripture] there shall be heard one harmonious melody in us, praising in hymns that God who created all things."
 - Justin Martyr: "I am entirely convinced that no Scripture

might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

- John 10:5, "A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

○ #3. External evidences are important and useful aids.

▪ Apostolic origins

- "Both [the old and new covenants] are established in written form *after* God's special (and powerful) redemptive work was accomplished" (*Canon Revisited*, 109).
 - Exo 20:2, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

← EXODUS REDEMPTION ... THEN

→ GIVES THE OLD COVENANT

BOOKS

- Jn 20:30-31, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

authority Christ gave to his apostles to lay down the permanent foundation for the church" (*Canon Revised*, 109).

▪ **The reception of these books by the church**

- These books are God's covenantal books for God's covenantal people.
- McDowell & McDowell: "The church did not *create* the canon; it did not determine which books would be called Scripture, the inspired Word of God. Instead, the church *recognized*, or *discovered*, which books have been inspired from their inception" (*Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, 25).
- John 10:27, "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*" Christ speaks, we receive.
- "Simply because the church, through the internal witness of the Spirit, will collectively respond to the voice of Christ in these books does not make the voice of Christ in these books somehow dependent on the church" (*Canon Revised*, 108).
- By God's providence, the church received his Word, the very Word he gave to the church.

• **How others have articulated that God gave us his Word and made sure that we understood that it was, in fact, from him:**

- **Augustine:** "Thou didst persuade me, that not they who believed Thy Books (which Thou hast established in so great authority among almost all nations), but they who believed them not, were to be blamed; and that they were not to be heard, who should say to me, 'How knowest thou those Scriptures to have been imparted unto mankind by the Spirit of the one true and most true God?' For this very thing was of all most to be believed" (*Confessions* 6.5).

- Jn 10:35, "If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—..."
- Jn 17:17, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."
- 2 Pet 1:19, "And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."

- **The Bible is Authoritative:** God has so identified himself with Scripture that to disbelieve or disobey it is to disbelieve or disobey him.

- Jos 1:8, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. ..."
- 2 Kings 22:11, "When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes."
- Isa 40:8, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."
- 1 Thess 2:13, "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers."
- Jas 1:22, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."
- 2 Jn 9, "Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son."

- **The Bible is Clear:** I've heard it said that Scripture is shallow enough for a child to wade, but deep enough for an elephant to swim.

- Deut 6:6-7, "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."
- Ps 19:7, "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes."

- 1 Pet 1:23, "... since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God."

- **The Bible is Powerful:** Since the Bible's ultimate author is God, it is a book of unparalleled power. Its words are strong enough to melt hearts and change lives.

- Jer 23:29, "Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"
- Jn 17:17, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."
- Rom 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."
- 1 Thess 1:4-5, "For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."
- Heb 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."
- Isa 55:10-11, "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

- **The Bible is Christ-Centered:** From beginning to end—Genesis to Revelation—the plotline of Scripture anticipates, spotlights, and finds its ultimate resolution in God's redeeming Son.

- Luke 24:25-27; 44-45, "And he said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning

- The Reception of the NT Books By the Church
 - From NT Passages!
 - **2 Peter 3:15-16**, “And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when we speak in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.”
 - Peter is aware of Paul’s letters.
 - They are acknowledged to be Scripture.
 - **1 Timothy 5:17-18**, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’”
 - The first quotation is from Deut 25:4.
 - The second quotation, “The laborer deserves his wages,” is word-for-word from Luke 10:7:
 - Lk 10:7 ... **for** the laborer deserves his wages. ...
 - 1 Tim 5:18 The laborer deserves his wages.
 - Lk 10:7 Greek ... ἄξιός **γάρ** ὁ ἐργάτης τοῦ μισθοῦ αὐτοῦ
 - 1 Tim 5:18 Greek Ἀξίος ὁ ἐργάτης τοῦ μισθοῦ αὐτοῦ
 - “Scripture” (Greek γραφή) in 5:18 means writings
 - Luke was written c. 61-62; 1 Tim was written c. 62-63
 - Both quotations—Deut 25:4 and Luke 10:7—are identified as Scripture!
 - **Early Church History**
 - **Polycarp & Others:** “Polycarp (115), Clement of Alexandria (c. 200), and other early church fathers refer to the Old and New Testament books with the phrase ‘as it is said in these scriptures’” (*Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 30). Polycarp was a second-generation leader in the church.

○ **Answering Questions Concerning Certain NT Books**

▪ **Mark, Luke, and Acts?**

- **Q:** These were not written by apostles. Are they canonical?
- **A:** Yes! Though these were not written by apostles, they were acknowledged *early* by the church and *without much question*. The historian Eusebius relates that Papias of Hierapolis (60-135)—who claimed he heard it from the apostles themselves—claimed Mark scribed for Peter the Gospel of Mark from Rome. Luke, of course, was a companion of Paul. Luke and Acts were quickly and universally acknowledged.

▪ **Hebrews?**

- **Q:** The author is unknown. Should it be included in the canon?
- **A:** Yes! While some early church fathers attributed the authorship of Hebrews to Paul, this was not the driving factor in its acceptance. The message of the book itself was the determining factor for its canonicity.

▪ **James?**

- **Q:** Martin Luther questioned James's inclusion in the canon, calling it "an epistle of straw," thinking it at odds with Paul and not doing much to "preach Christ." Was he right?
- **A:** He was simply wrong. James is not at odds with Paul, and its teachings are consistent with Jesus. The church, including Luther's contemporaries, did not accept Luther's evaluation of James. About the author's credentials, Grudem says, "James seems to be considered an apostle in 1 Cor 15:7 and Gal 1:19" (*Systematic Theology*, 62). (To be fair, Luther did not necessarily wish to exclude James from the canon; instead, he placed James on a lower tier of value among the canonical books.)

▪ **Jude?**

- **Q:** Jude was not an apostle, and his epistle references an apocryphal book. Should it have been included in the canon?
- **A:** Yes! Because Jude was not an apostle and the letter references the apocryphal 1 Enoch, the universal acceptance of Jude was slower than for others. But the author's connection to James—and that he was the brother of Jesus—was a driving factor for its