

The Bible: What it is and How we got it

RCF Academy

Lesson 7: New Testament Canon pt. 1

Christian Literacy

- Jews were a bookish people
 - Jewish faith founded upon written texts
 - Jewish people commanded to memorize, meditate, and publically read the scriptures
- Christians were bookish as well
 - Were firmly rooted in Old Testament scriptures
 - Illiteracy in the church brought about confessions of faith
 - Written works were seen as extensions of oral communications and vice versa
- Use of Codex (~20 BC)
 - Codex = book as we know it.
 - Jews were still using scrolls for the scriptures and storing them. Codex more fit for travel
- Use of Nomina Sacra
 - Abbreviation of sacred names
 - Ἰησοῦς, Χριστός, Θεός, Κύριος,

Need for new texts

- Anticipation

- Covenantally

- Written works documented covenantal history, terms, promises and curses
 - Jews always viewed their circumstances and history covenantally
 - Close relation between covenant and writings
 - “Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.”” Exodus 24:7 ESV
 - NT parallels
 - Gospels = historical prologue (like the Tanakh)
 - Acts = historical narrative (like Joshua and Kings)
 - Paul’s Epistles = display of adherence to terms (like Prophets)
 - Revelation = contained curses (like what is in Deuteronomy)
 - “You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you.” Deuteronomy 4:2 ESV
 - “I warn everyone who hears the words of 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.” Revelation 22:18-19 ESV

Need for new texts

- Apostolic witness
 - Recognition of the authority of the Apostles
 - “that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles,” 2 Peter 3:2 ESV
 - “We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.”
 - Lasting witness
 - Apostles wrote down their testimony and teaching before they died
 - “Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have.” 2 Peter 1:12 ESV
 - Wrote to overcome time and space to further the gospel

Need for new texts

- Apostolic witness
 - Correct witness
 - Wrote to establish what was apostolic teaching
 - While alive, they could correct as to what they actually taught
 - Wrote to correct sinful behaviour and false teachers
- Need to know what scripture was during persecution
 - “It was the nineteenth year of the reign of Diocletian, and the month of Dystrus, or March, as the Romans would call it, in which, as the festival of the Saviour’s Passion was coming on, an imperial letter was everywhere promulgated, ording the razing of the churches to the ground and the **destruction by fire of the Scripture**, and proclaiming that those who held high positions would lose all civil rights, while those in households, if they persisted in their profession of Christianity, would be deprived of their liberty. Such was the first document against us. But not long afterwards we were further visited with other letters, and in them the order was given that the presidents of the churches should all, in every place, be first committed to prison, and then afterwards compelled by every kind of device to sacrifice.”

Core Canon

- 22 undisputed books
 - Disputed books were James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Revelation
- Obstacles of a canon
 - False teachers promised to come and distort the scriptures (2 Pet 2:2, 1 John 2:10)
 - Spiritual forces seeking to destroy the church, “did God really say?” (Gen 3)
 - Sinful desires of Christians
 - Heretical groups identifying as Christians
- Scriptures testimony
 - “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 he speaks 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.” 2 Peter 3:15-16 ESV
 - “For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.” 1 Timothy 5:18 ESV

Core Canon

- Church father usage
 - 1 Clement (~95 AD)
 - Loosely quotes Acts, Romans, 1 Cor, Ephesians, Titus, Hebrews, and 1 Peter
 - Ignatius (60-117 AD)
 - Alludes to Matthew, Luke, John, Romans, 1-2 Cor, Galatians, Ephesians, 1-2 Tim
 - Polycarp (69-155 AD)
 - Quotes from 16 books of NT
 - Justin Martyr (100-165 AD)
 - Demonstrates knowledge of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Cor, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thess, Hebrews, and 1 Peter
 - Irenaeus (130-202 AD)
 - Quotes from 25 books
 - Muratorian Canon (190 AD)
 - Lists 20 books
 - Clement of Alexandria (155-220 AD)
 - Quotes from at least 22 books
 - Tertullian (160-220 AD)
 - Quotes from at least 24 books
 - Origen (185-253 AD)
 - Cites 22 books as canonical
 - Eusebius (265-339 AD)
 - Cites at least 22 books
 - Athanasius (296-373 AD)
 - Lists all 27 books

Core Canon

- Grouping of books
 - Four gospels were often grouped together in quotations and circulation
 - Titles of the gospels point to other known gospels
 - “The Gospel according to John” rather than “The Gospel OF John”
 - “A Christian community that knew of only one gospel writing would not have needed to entitle it in this way.”
 - “These titles are evidence that Christians, at a very early point, were conceptually linking the Gospels with one another, even when they occurred within single-Gospel manuscripts.”
 - Other groupings include
 - Paul’s epistles
 - General epistles (Includes Acts)
 - Revelation