

————— ❧ *Special Message: The History and Reliability of the New Testament* ❧ —————

Date: September 27th, 2020

Scripture Referenced: Matthew 24:1-3, John 20:30-31

Key Question: If the 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament are God's Revelation, then *how and when* did these come together to form the Bible as we know it?

Why is it important to know the New Testament is historically reliable?

————— ❧ *Reflection and Discussion Notes* ❧ —————

The Old Testament in a snapshot

- Earliest parts existed in oral tradition for centuries before being written (Torah- Gen, Ex, Lev, Num, Deut)
- Written across roughly 1,000 years spanning approximately from 1,500 to 500 B.C.
- Written by at least 26 authors, primarily in ancient Hebrew, also in Aramaic.
- All the Old Testament books we know today existed and were translated into Greek by the mid to late third century B.C. This Greek translation of the O.T. is called the *Septuagint*. Many of the New Testament quotations from the Old Testament are from the Septuagint.

New Testament in a snapshot: 27 books made up of four genres of literature

- 4 Gospels. Theological historic narratives. Primary purpose isn't historical detail, but theological content in historic context. Authors influenced by background of author and intended audience.
- Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the 'synoptic' Gospels, due to remarkable similarity of many passages.
- 1 History (Acts)
- 21 Letters (Epistles- 13 by Paul)
- 1 Apocalypse- Greek word meaning 'revelation'
- Six of NT books don't claim authorship, including Gospels, Acts, and Hebrews. However, there is solid conservative evidence for the authorship of the Gospels, as well Acts. Hebrews remains anonymous, but there is broad consensus it is written by an early apostle with direct connection to original twelve.



The New Testament was written by nine authors across approximately either 26 years or 52 years, depending on the date of the book of Revelation, which is linked to how Revelation is interpreted.

- The first gospel written was either Mark or Matthew (Mid 40's to early 50's)
- Some place James and Galatians as the earliest NT books (Mid to late 40's)
- The last book written is Revelation, either around A.D. 70 or A.D. 95-96

REALITY! Conservative Biblical scholarship asserts- with great evidence- that ALL of the New Testament books were written in the first century, by first-hand eyewitnesses or people directly familiar with the events surrounding the life and death/burial/resurrection of Christ, and the birth and first generation of the church.



Evidence of complete first century authorship of entirety of the New Testament

- The crucial date of A.D. 70, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple

Matthew 24:1-3 *Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen..."*

- References by early church fathers. By A.D. 300, almost every verse within the New Testament was cited as Scripture in over 36,000 citations in early Christian writings.
- Dates of copied manuscripts. We have manuscripts of complete books from around 200 AD, and almost the complete New Testament by 250 AD. Possessing copied, circulated manuscripts within 100-150 years of original writings, in ancient world, is remarkable and unique. No other writing from ancient world has this small a time frame from origin of writing to preserved circulated manuscript.
- Important! Early dating of the New Testament is a powerful authentication of Christ's resurrection.

Development of the New Testament Canon: Six historic criteria ('Canon' literally means 'measuring stick')

- Apostolic authority: Written by or connected closely to an apostle.
- Antiquity: Written within first century. Later (more recent) writings were rejected.
- Orthodoxy: Content of book consistent with accepted church teaching. No presence of doctrinal deviation, nothing causing doctrinal concern to early church.
- Universality: Book accepted by the broad geographic span of the early church.
- Traditional use: Book had been in use by many churches for long time frame.
- Inspiration: Book held by broad segment of early church as being **inspired**.



A criticism sometimes levied against authenticity of New Testament is that it took until 300's to come together. But this doesn't tell the full story.

- Majority- if not all- of our NT books were referenced by early 2nd century writers (early 100's)
- Evidence that as early as 50 years after last book was written, majority of New Testament as we know it was in circulation and being used by the church.
- In 2nd Peter, Peter refers to Paul's letters as scripture. This indicates that at least some of Paul's letters were being circulated, *and seen as scripture*, in 1st century.
- The Muratorian Canon lists 22 of 27 New Testament books by A.D. 170
- Fragment of document discovered in 1700's, itself from 7th or 8th century, written in Greek that dates to second century. Contains core of New Testament as we know it.

KEY- the vast majority of the New Testament was widely accepted and in use by the church within the 2nd century. The debates that lasted into the 200's and 300's were over a small handful of books.

- The 27 books of the New Testament Canon were universally referenced by Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, and accepted by Council of Carthage in A.D. 397.



Authenticity of the ancient texts

- A common objection: We possess no original manuscripts of the NT, only copies (Greek MSS)
- This is true of ALL ancient writings. If you discount New Testament because we only have copies, then you must discount every work of ancient literature known to man.
- There are almost 5,600 MSS, and none are exactly alike. However...
- Of these thousands of manuscripts, *they are over 98% alike*. There is no other ancient document with this level of textual accuracy. Not even close.
- Most copied manuscripts dating into much more recent history- prior to printing press- don't have this level of accuracy.
- The 2% disagreement are matters such as word order, spelling, and grammar. **KEY!** There is not a single disputed doctrinal problem or issue among all the MSS.
- There ARE several instances where an older manuscript will not contain a section of text found in later MSS. An example is from John 8 (woman caught in adultery), as well as end of Mark. These issues are an interesting study, but they don't raise doctrinal issues, which is why they are included in the canon.

Why this matters! The New Testament is not just a collection of ancient writings. It is, with great evidence, the Word of God.

John 20:30-31 *Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*