

CONCERNING THE WAY

November 8, 2007



LESSON 4: BIBLIOLOGY – PART 2

Introduction

Welcome to part 2 of our Bibliology study. Last time we looked in detail at the Old Testament - how it was written, how it was preserved and handed down, and why we can trust that what we have in the Old Testament is what was originally written. We also looked at why those books are considered scripture, because they were written by prophets who were chosen by God to speak His message. There was an unbroken line of prophets from Moses to Malachi.

In this study we will concentrate on the New Testament. As we mentioned in the last study, the historical sources agree that the canon of the Old Testament was closed with Malachi, the last prophet in Israel. From the passing of Malachi to the birth of Christ there was a period of about 420 years of silence, where God did not speak to Israel through prophets. Many thought God had rejected Israel permanently because of their sin.

Then, in God's perfect timing, He revealed what had been a mystery until that time; His perfect plan for redeeming mankind, to bring us back to Him, to restore what had been lost. The promised Messiah, the One who the prophets foretold would "save His people", was born. He came to offer the Kingdom of God to His people, to fulfill all that had been said by the prophets about Him. He went about doing good, performing amazing miracles and speaking wisdom like no one ever had before. But His people did not recognize Him, and they rejected Him. He was despised and eventually murdered by the Jewish religious leaders.

But three days after He was killed and buried God raised Him back to life, and was seen by hundreds of people. He went around giving His disciples final instructions, including telling of a "comforter" He would send after He went away. He rose visibly to heaven in front of witnesses. Some of his followers, who had been with Him and witnessed all that He did, wrote these events down in much detail. A short time afterward the "comforter" did come, as promised by the Messiah, in the person of the Holy Spirit of God, and indwelt the believers. Many others believed through the witness of the apostles and the Holy Spirit, and the "church" grew rapidly.

A staunch Jewish Pharisee by the name of Saul who opposed this new "movement" went around seeking out its followers. His mission was to obey the Jewish law and have these "blasphemers" stoned. Saul was confronted on the road one day by Jesus Christ Himself, and it made such an impression on Saul that he turned completely around and became a "Christian", or follower of "The Way", as they were being called. He, along with other believers, began spreading the good news of the Messiah far and wide, throughout Asia Minor and Europe. Churches (groups of believers) began forming all over the known world. Paul (as he was now named) and other apostles of the Messiah began writing letters to these churches, teaching them the message of Messiah and correcting false doctrine.

Over time these accounts of the life of Jesus and the apostolic letters were copied and distributed among the churches. Keep in mind that the Bible they had was the Old Testament, which they used extensively, especially teaching about Jesus through the many messianic prophecies. The writings of the apostles were accepted quickly as scripture, and eventually began to be collected together, into what is now our New Testament.

In this lesson we're going to study the details of how that came about, and why we can trust that these writings are authentic and accurate. As we have seen with our other lessons, we accept the scriptures ultimately on faith, but you will see that there are many reasonable and logical evidences on why we can trust them. - *Dusty Rhodes*

An important part of the uniqueness of Christianity is the fact that it is based on real historical events rather than just a set of ethical teachings.

“If it can be shown that the New Testament documents are authentic, written by the traditional authors, then the evidence for Christianity is overwhelming. This is because the writings, when examined carefully, give indisputable evidence of sincerity and accuracy of such high degree that there can remain no reasonable doubt that all the deeds and words of Christ and the Apostles, as recorded therein, really and truly happened.”

Henry Morris - “Many Infallible Proofs”

An important part of the uniqueness of Christianity is the fact that it is based on real historical events rather than just a set of ethical teachings. Because of that, skeptics have always tried to undermine the historicity of the events. If it can be proven that events like the virgin birth, the miracles, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection of Christ did not really happen, then Christianity comes crumbling down.

Critics have always tried to persuade people that the books of the Old Testament were written long after the believed authors lived, thereby rendering the events and miracles as legends, and prophecies as history after the fact. In the same way, skeptics try to convince that the books of the New Testament were written by other men than the original apostles and long after the events described. If successful, they can then consider many of the important events and miracles in the New Testament to be only legends.

This destructive criticism has been so successful that it is now accepted as fact in many of the major seminaries, pastors and teachers that are being turned out by these institutions, and by many gullible and nominal Christians in their congregations. Because of this, today we have more and more churches that

- Teach only the ethical guidelines given in the Bible as a rule of life
- Teach the narratives of the Bible as moral lessons only, not real history
- Treat the prophecies of future events as “spiritual” or allegorical, not literal
- Are full of people who don’t trust the Bible, don’t really understand it, and never read it

Evidence for the Authenticity of the New Testament

We believe the books of the New Testament to be divinely inspired and without error in the original documents. Other than just taking them on faith, there are convincing objective arguments for the authenticity of these books:

- The witness of two thousand years of Christianity, with its tremendous impact on the history of the world, is by itself a very convincing argument that something important took place to get it started.
- The evidence of the historicity of the events and persons of the New Testament is far greater than any other events or persons in ancient history. An example is Julius Caesar, who no one questions the history of. But the evidence for the events of the NT is many times stronger than the evidence for the existence of Julius Caesar.
- There are an amazing number of manuscript copies or fragments of copies that have been preserved. Over 5000 portions of manuscript copies survive in the original Greek language,

and over 15,000 in other languages. No other ancient writings come close to this preservation.

- The great number of manuscripts available provide a powerful way of checking and comparing to make sure that what we have is essentially the same as the original writings.
- The discrepancies between manuscripts caused by careless copying in almost all cases are very trivial, and no discrepancies affect any important Christian doctrine, facts, or the person of Jesus Christ.
- We also have several times as many manuscripts of early Christian writers that quote the New Testament, some of whom lived in the period 90 A.D. - 160 A.D., not long after the original documents were written. Scholars agree that even if we did not have a single surviving manuscript of the New Testament, it would be possible to completely reconstruct it from all the quotations of the early Christian writers.
- Since many of these early writers lived either right after or during the lives of the apostles who wrote the original books, there can be no doubt that what we have in our New Testament today is essentially identical to what the early Christians had at the end of the first century.
- If there would have been any alterations in the documents between the originals and the copies in that period of time they would have been quickly discovered among the churches and corrected.
- The Roman world of the first century was a world of scholarship and skepticism, not of ignorance and gullibility. Any attempt to advance myths and lies would have been quickly discredited.
- Internal evidence regarding apostolic authorship is very strong. For example, Paul's letters are consistent in style and vocabulary, and he is careful to claim his own authorship in each. The same can be said for the books believed to have been written by Peter and John.
- Places, customs, political situations, times, and events mentioned in the New Testament, especially the book of Acts, are strongly supported by history and archeology. Linguistic studies and internal consistency also lend support to the authenticity.

Some skeptics have tried to accuse the writers of the NT with fraud. They charge that the writers, for self-serving purposes, created a mythology of a Saviour-King in order to gain power, or at least spur a revolt that would throw off Roman rule and perhaps elevate themselves to rulers of a kingdom. This is an incredible accusation, one that does not hold up to even the slightest scrutiny.

- This conspiracy would have required an unimaginable degree of collaboration, considering the number of people involved and the wide variety of times and places in the NT.
- Each writer writes from his own perspective - no collusion between so-called conspirators is evident. There are common events described by different authors, but it is obvious that they are accounts of different people witnessing the same event, not people trying to all get their stories straight.
- Their accounts refer to many specific places, people, and events which can be easily verified. If they were trying to pull off a convincing story, they would be much more general in order to keep from being found out.

- The miracles described in the NT were done publicly with many witnesses and could have easily been discredited if they were not real.
- An objective reading of these books would never lead you to believe the authors are guilty or fraud or hypocrisy. They are very honest about their own shortcomings and sins, and come across as very sincere.
- None of the authors gained any worldly power or wealth from their writings or beliefs. They all lost everything, in fact, and suffered persecution and most martyrdom, going to their deaths proclaiming that what they said about Jesus Christ was true. Some will sacrifice themselves for a cause that may be false, but never if they know it to be false.

Finally, the character of Christ Himself is a powerful argument for the authenticity of the New Testament. Without yet discussing His claims of divinity, He is acknowledged to be the greatest teacher, by words and example, that the world has ever known, even by His enemies. Even other religions of the world acknowledge Him to be a great prophet. No one in history has ever spoken like this man. No one has ever lived a life like Jesus Christ.

The influence of His teachings has been the greatest force for good in the history of mankind. An objective reading of the NT would lead you to believe that this man was not insane, not a charlatan, not a fraud, but who He said He was. In our next study we will discuss fulfilled prophecy, and take a look at some of the prophecies uttered by Jesus Himself that have come true in an amazing way, as more proof that the New Testament scriptures are authentic.

Because of these points, the authenticity and integrity of the books of the New Testament can be regarded as well established.

Canonicity of the New Testament

Authorship was the determining factor. Apostolic authorship in the New Testament corresponds to prophetic authorship in the Old Testament. This is based on the "pre-authentication" passages where Christ authorized the apostles to write scripture in advance (Matthew 10:40; Luke 10:16; John 14:26; 15:26,27; 16:13).

A. Internal Evidence

1. The 13 letters of Paul all indicate that he is the author, although this is challenged by some modern scholars.
2. The gospel of John indicates that John is the author (John. 21:23,24).
3. The 3 epistles of John are identical to the gospel in style. I John also claims to be written by an eyewitness (I John. 1:1).
4. Revelation claims to have been written by John (Revelation 1:4,9).
5. Both I Peter & II Peter claim Petrine authorship (I Peter 1:1; II Peter 1:1; 3:1).
6. This leaves only Luke, Acts, Hebrews, Matthew, Mark, James, and Jude without direct internal claims to apostolic authorship.
 - Early church history connects Luke-Acts with Paul, saying that it was written by Luke under Paul's supervision and approval (Papias quoted in Eusebius).
 - Papias and others also said that Mark wrote the memoirs of Peter.

- Hebrews is of uncertain authorship, although it is theologically and conceptually connected with Paul. At the same time, the grammar and vocabulary are quite different from Paul's other books. Two options are possible:
 - Paul wrote it in Hebrew or Aramaic (and it was later translated). This would account for the obvious difference in vocabulary and style. Clement of Alexandria states that this was the case according to his earlier sources.
 - One of Paul's companions wrote it under his supervision (see Hebrews 13:23).
- James and Jude -- two options are possible:
 - The book may have been written by Christ's half-brothers (Mark 6:3) who were evidently designated as apostles after the resurrection (I Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:19). Early Church sources indicate that this theory is the correct one.
 - It may have been written by James and Jude the Alphaeus brothers, two of Jesus' original disciples (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13). This possibility comes about from a comparison of the crucifixion accounts, which seem to establish that James the Less (James Alphaeus) and Jesus were first cousins on their mothers' side. Therefore, James the Less might have called himself "the Lord's brother" (Galatians 1:19) within the common usage of the day.
 - In either event, both books are of apostolic origin.

Closing comments:

It's important to understand that books were included in the canon of the New Testament not just because of their authorship. The overriding factor was whether or not the writings were authenticated by Jesus Christ and His teachings. If a book or letter circulating around the churches did not agree with the doctrine handed down by Christ through the apostles and the Holy Spirit (see the verses on Page 4), it was rejected.

Some popular myths in recent years have said there were dozens of books that were used in the churches and some were just arbitrarily voted out by religious councils. This is not true. With the growth in the Church throughout the Roman world along came sects and groups of individuals each with their own agenda and leader. Among these groups included the Judaisers, The Gnostics, The Mandaens and the Manichaens. In order to establish their credibility, they published works that included apostles names. Many of the writing of the early church fathers, such as Irenaeus and Justin Martyr combat these early heresies. The spread of these heretical teachings and their books with misleading names was causing confusion in the early church.

The main test to determine whether a New Testament book was part of the canon, was its authorship, was the author an apostle? To discover the true canon, the church also looked to the witness of the church fathers. Did early church fathers attest to the authenticity? Was the

author an Apostle or associated with one? Several events created a necessity to standardize the need for an established canon.

1. Persecution: Diocletian in 303 AD called for the destruction of sacred books of the Christians.
2. Missions: The spreading of the Gospel to pagan lands and the translation of scripture into local languages required an authoritarian Christian canon.
3. Spread of false teaching: Counterfeit works were causing confusion in the early church, about what books were apostolic.
4. Rise of Heretics: As early as 140 AD, the heretic Marcion developed his own Canon and began to propagate it. The church needed to counter his influence by collecting the books of the New Testament.

The main point here is that the church is not determining the scripture but discovering what already exists and was established by Christ.

If you're interested in knowing more of how the New Testament books came down to us, please let me know. I have resources I can send to you which go into much greater detail. Don't miss the short article on the next page, it sums up the subject rather nicely.

I hope this study has served to strengthen your faith in the validity of the Bible. Maybe you were skeptical before, maybe you have been swayed by a popular book you have read that attacks the Bible, or a movie you have seen.

Hopefully you can see by now that there are good reasons why millions of people have trusted the Bible as the Word of God, and how important it is that we learn what God has to say to us.

But wait, there's more! Next lesson we're going to look at even more convincing proof, that of fulfilled prophecy. This is stuff that cannot be refuted. Critics just don't know what to do with it, and have no answer for it. Stay tuned!

In Christ,
Dusty Rhodes

Excerpt from “Development of the New Testament Canon”, an article by

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We often fail to appreciate that the church was founded not upon the apostolic documents, but rather the apostolic doctrine. The church existed at least a decade before the earliest book of the New Testament was penned, and possibly as long as six decades until it was completed. But during this period it was not without authority. Its standard, its canon, was ultimately Jesus Christ Himself, and mediately His apostles. Even in the immediate post-apostolic period we find a great stress on apostolic *tradition* along side a written New Testament canon.

As the apostles died, this living stream of tradition grew fainter. The written documents became progressively more important to the on-going life of the church. The question of competing authorities in the sense of written and oral tradition subsided. However, even as late as the mid-second century we find an emphasis on oral tradition which stands *in some way* parallel to the written gospels as authoritative.

The concept of an authoritative Christian tradition can be traced back into the New Testament itself. On numerous occasions Paul speaks of the chain of receiving and delivering a body of teaching. It is therefore not surprising to see in this early period both written works and oral tradition existing side by side in some sort of authoritative fashion.

I believe that Charles Briggs has proposed a viable method for us to consider today. Following the Reformers, he proposed a threefold program for canon determination, built upon the "rock of the Reformation principle of the Sacred Scriptures." The first principle in canon determination was the testimony of the church. By examining tradition and the early written documents, he contended that probable evidence could be presented to men that the Scriptures "recognized as of divine authority and canonical by such general consent are indeed what they claim to be.

The second and next higher level of evidence was that of the character of the Scriptures themselves. This is the Reformers' doctrine of the *autopistie* of the Scriptures. Their character was pure and holy, having a beauty, harmony and majesty. The Scriptures also breathed piety and devotion to God; they revealed redemption and satisfied the spiritual longing within the soul of man. All these features served to convince that the Scriptures were indeed the very Word of God.

The third and highest principle of canon determination was that of the witness of the Spirit. He stated, "The Spirit of God bears witness by and with the particular writing . . . , in the heart of the believer, removing every doubt and assuring the soul of its possession of the truth of God."