

THE BIBLE, THE DA VINCI CODE AND THE REAL JESUS
A Historical Survey of Jesus Christ, His Followers and His Church
Test everything. Hold on to the good. (1 Thess. 5:21, NIV)

Session 3

REVIEW

Claim #2: "The Dead Sea Scrolls were found were found in the 1950's hidden in a cave near Qumran in the Judean desert. And, of course, the Coptic Scrolls in 1945 at Nag Hammadi. In addition to telling the true Grail story, these documents speak of Christ's ministry in very human terms. Of course, the Vatican, in keeping with their tradition of misinformation, tried very hard to suppress the release of these scrolls." (p. 234)

1. Dead Sea Scrolls

- a. Found in early 1947 by a Bedouin shepherd boy near the ancient ruins known as Qumran.
- b. Key Thoughts
 - i. These manuscripts are completely Jewish
 - ii. There are in fact no Gospels among the hundreds of documents found at Qumran.
 - iii. These documents do provide a partial context for the literary and historical time period in which Jesus Christ came.

2. The Nag Hammadi Library - "Gnostic Gospels"

- a. They were found in December 1945 when seven Bedouin field hands were digging for fertilizer near the cliff called Jabal al-Tarif along the Nile in Upper Egypt.
- b. Key Thoughts
 - i. 46 different treatises most of them previously unknown in the modern world. Most of these documents were dated to 341-348 AD.
 - ii. The word "Gnosis" is Greek and means knowledge.
 - iii. For the Gnostics it meant a secret knowledge - few select "gurus" have this secret knowledge.
 - iv. These documents focus not on the humanity of Christ but on the divinity of Christ (docetic), at the exclusion of his humanity contra Dan Brown.
 - v. There is no mention of a "Holy Grail".

FORMATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

1. Definition of Canon

- a. Literally meaning “standard” or “rule,” the term is most closely associated with the collection of books that the church has recognized as the written Word of God (Scripture) and that functions as the rule or standard of faith and practice in the church. Although the various Christian traditions are not in full agreement as to which book should comprise the collection of Scripture (i.e. the Apocrypha), at the very least all agree that the sixty-six books of the Protestant Bible are canonical and therefore authoritative.

Claim #3: “Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s *human* traits and embellished those gospels that spoke of Him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up and burned.” (p. 234)

2. Did Constantine form the New Testament?

- a. Constantine did not choose which books to include or exclude.
- b. He did not order the destruction of the Gospels that were left out of the canon. Indeed, there were no imperial book burnings.
- c. Eusebius, in his *Life of Constantine*, tells us that in the year 331 AD the emperor made a request of Eusebius personally for fifty manuscripts of the Christian Bible to be produced for churches that he was having built in his imperial city.

Claim #4: “...Everything you need to know about the Bible can be summed up by the great canon doctor Martyn Percy...The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven...The Bible is a product of *man*...Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds.” (p. 231)

3. How was the New Testament Canon formed?

- a. The Gospels
 - i. By the end of the 1st century there is some noticeable evidence by churches to collect the sayings of Jesus/to record Jesus’ ministry. Some of the churches begin to share their collections with other churches.
 - ii. F.F. Bruce argues that by the time of Irenaeus (2nd Century AD) everyone agreed which gospels were to be part of the canon.
 - iii. *Diatessaron* - 150 AD (compiled by Tatian). This represents the first attempt to synthesize the four gospels - Matthew, Mark Luke and John. Additionally, this presupposes agreement on which four Gospels should be included.
- b. The Pauline Letters
 - i. It is clear that even in the NT there is reference to the authority of Paul’s writings.

1. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. (2 Peter 3:15, NIV)
- ii. Thus, it is not surprising that many Christians wanted to gather his writings.
- c. What was the catalyst for putting the New Testament documents together?
 - i. Two answers have been given:
 1. Marcion's Canon
 - a. Marcion was a Gnostic and believed in a docetic Jesus. Additionally, he separates that God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament.
 - b. He creates a canon that suits his theology.
 - c. In the late 19th Century, a theory was put forth that the church did not have any interest in compiling letters or gospels concerning Jesus. Instead, when Marcion put forth his collection, the church reacted to this and went ahead and created the church's official NT canon.
 2. Book of Acts: Some believe that by the 2nd century, there is a natural relationship between Luke's Acts (the ministry of Paul and others) and the writings of Paul.
- d. Canon as a "will to power"?
 - i. Far from simply creating an "orthodox" Canon for the purposes of imposing their will upon heretics, the Church Fathers seem to appeal to the Apostles when divergent opinions arose.
 - ii. But, can it be inferred from this that the established Church manipulated documents for their own selfish purposes?
 1. Both the established church and the "heretics" appealed to the Apostles.
 2. Here we see inherit authority that had been placed with the writings of the Apostles.
 - iii. The Church came to recognize, accept, affirm, and confirm the self-authenticating quality of certain documents that imposed themselves upon the Church.
 1. If this fact is denied, one comes into serious conflict not with dogma¹ but with history.
 2. Put differently, the announcement of redemption cannot be separated from the history of redemption itself.
 3. As one commentator put it, the canon represents "...the most holy faith on which the church has to build, it is the pledge

¹ A doctrine or a corpus of doctrines relating to matters such as morality and faith, set forth in an authoritative manner by a church.

transmitted to it through the apostles...that the church has to preserve above all else.”

LET'S PROCESS

Take 5-10 minutes and discuss with your table the following questions. Assign someone who is willing to share with the entire group.

1. Why would some find it important to question the authority of the Biblical canon?
2. What exactly is at stake?

TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE AND OF THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

1. The Internal Evidence
 - a. Equality of Prophets and Apostles
 - i. Ephesians 2:19-20; 3:3-4
 - ii. 2 Peter 1:19-21; 3:2
 - iii. 1 Thessalonians 2:13
 - iv. Revelation 18:20
 - b. Their Apostolic Sayings are To Be Treasured
 - i. 1 Timothy 6:20
 - ii. 2 Timothy 1:14; 2:2
2. The External Evidence
 - a. Irenaeus (140-200 AD)
 - i. He is the first person that we know of to refer to the New Testament.
 - ii. Gospel of Matthew
 1. Now the Gospels, in which Christ is enthroned, are like these. Matthew proclaims his human birth, saying, 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham,' and, 'The birth of Jesus Christ was in this manner'. for this Gospel is manlike, and so through the whole Gospel [Christ] appears as a man of a humble mind, and gentle. (*Against Heresies*, 3.11.8)
 - iii. Gospel of Mark
 1. Now the Gospels, in which Christ is enthroned, are like these. But Mark takes his beginning from the prophetic Spirit who comes on men from on high saying, 'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet,' showing a winged image of the gospel. Therefore he made his message compendious and summary, for such is the prophetic character. (*Against Heresies*, 3.11.8)

iv. Gospel of Luke

1. Now the Gospels, in which Christ is enthroned, are like these...That according to Luke, as having a priestly character, began with the priest Zacharias offering incense to God. For the fatted calf was already being prepared which was to be sacrificed for the finding of the younger son. (*Against Heresies*, 3.11.8; c.f. Luke 15:23)

v. Gospel of John

1. Now the Gospels, in which Christ is enthroned, are like these... For that according to John expounds his princely and mighty and glorious birth from the Father, saying, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,' and, 'All things were made by him, and without him nothing was nothing made'. Therefore this Gospel is deserving of all confidence, for such indeed is his person. (*Against Heresies*, 3.11.8)

vi. Pauline Letters²

1. Refers/alludes to each of these letters as follows: Rom 84X, 1 Cor. 102X, 2 Cor. 18X, Gal. 27X, Eph. 37X, Phil. 13X, Col. 18X, 1 Thes. 2 X, 2 Thes. 9X, 1 Tim. 5X, 2 Tim. 5X, Titus 4X, Philemon 0X.

vii. Hebrews

1. There seems to be an allusion to Hebrews 1:3 in *Against Heresies* 2.30.9.

viii. James

1. There are 2 possible allusions to James in *Against Heresies*. They are in 4.16.2 (James 2:23) and 5.1.1 (James 1:18, 22).

ix. 1 Peter

1. There is an allusion to I Peter in *Against Heresies* 5.7.2.

x. 1 & 2 John

1. Irenaeus cites I John in *Against Heresies*, 3.16.5 and, three paragraphs later, refers back to the same epistle but quotes from II John. He may have regarded I-II John as one letter; perhaps he was quoting from memory.

xi. Revelation

1. In *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus quotes 29 times from the Revelation.

b. Eusebius (260-340 AD) - Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.1-7

- i. At this point it seems appropriate to summarize the writings of the New Testament which have already been mentioned. In the first place

² Grant, Robert M. *The Formation of the New Testament*. New York: Harper & Row, 1965. Source for Pauline Letters through Book of Revelation.

must be put the holy quaternion of the Gospels, which are followed by the book of the Acts of the Apostles. After this must be reckoned the Epistles of Paul; next in order the extant former Epistle of John, and likewise the Epistle of Peter must be recognized. After these must be put, if it really seems right, the Apocalypse of John, concerning which we shall give the different opinions at the proper time.

c. Athanasius (c. 367 AD) - 39th Festal Letter

- i. "Continuing, I must without hesitation mention the scriptures of the New Testament; they are the following: the four Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, after them the Acts of the Apostles and the seven so-called catholic epistles of the apostles -- namely, one of James, two of Peter, then three of John and after these one of Jude. In addition there are fourteen epistles of the apostle Paul written in the following order: the first to the Romans, then two to the Corinthians and then after these the one to the Galatians, following it the one to the Ephesians, thereafter the one to the Philippians and the one to the Colossians and two to the Thessalonians and the epistle to the Hebrews and then immediately two to Timothy, one to Titus and lastly the one to Philemon. Yet further the Revelation of John... These are the springs of salvation, in order that he who is thirsty may fully refresh himself with the words contained in them. In them alone is the doctrine of piety proclaimed. Let no one add anything to them or take anything away from them..."

d. *Westminster Confession of Faith*

- i. "The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it as the Word of God." (1.4, cf. 1.3)

LET'S EXPLORE!

1. Dan Brown is right is stating that the "...The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven..." How do the Biblical passages above and our Church Fathers help us to be in meaningful dialogue with those who question Scripture's authority?
2. At the same time, Dan Brown is wrong when he states that "The Bible is a product of man...Not of God". Having walked through how the Bible has been passed on to us, what new appreciation do you have for God's goodness and His provision of His Holy Scriptures?