

What follows are the notes for our in class discussion on the Canon and How we Use It. We had some very good discussions and I hope we can continue to explore how the Bible interacts with our living faith.

Going from the Original to English

Canon: A list of accepted works

The long process of sorting out the New Testament: 150 AD to 367 AD to 400 AD and beyond

The Jewish Canon v. the Septuagint (the Greek version of Hebrew Scriptures in use in the 1st century)

The changes of the Reformation Era and the "Received Text"

Why new Versions? (check out biblegateway.com)

1. English is a dynamic and evolving language
2. New historical discoveries (Dead Sea Scrolls)
3. New methods of translation
 - a. Literal: as close to word for word, meaning and readability in English obscured
 - b. Dynamic: phrase for phrase, meaning and readability in English important
 - c. Free: Story for story, overall meaning and readability in English primary

Are there parts of the Bible we favor over others? Why?

How does understanding of the authors' intent effect how we read?

How does the original audience's understanding effect how we read?

How do questions of authorship and textual variation effect what we believe?

Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings)

These are probably the oldest books in the Old Testament, at least in the version we know.

2 Kings 22

8 The high priest Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord." When Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, he read it. 9 Then Shaphan the secretary came to the king, and reported to the king, "Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of the workers who have oversight of the house of the Lord." 10 Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "The priest Hilkiah has given me a book." Shaphan then read it aloud to the king.

11 When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes. 12 Then the king commanded the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary,

and the king's servant Asaiah, saying, 13 "Go, inquire of the Lord for me, for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our ancestors did not obey the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."

Religious Reforms of King Josiah of Judah 622 BCE based on what becomes Deuteronomy

Other books written between 622 BCE and shortly after 587 BCE, the beginning of the Exile, possibly in two stages: one during Josiah's life and one after the coming of Babylon.

Their purpose was to preserve the history of the Jewish people and to explain why The Exile happened.

Direct comparisons suggested between Moses, Joshua, David, and Josiah.

How does the concept of herem (the complete destruction of the enemy) fit into our concept of God?

How do depictions of women in Judges alter our understanding of the role of women in the Bible?

How much do we know and understand the history of Samuel and Kings? Do those stories have relevance to us today?

Does the Deuteromistic History (these books) give us a sense of how God works in the world?

The Torah

Having dealt with Deuteronomy last week, we are left with Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers

So who wrote them?

Evidence against Moses:

- two views of God, YHWH who is personal and El who is impersonal
- two different names for the Holy Mountain (Saini and Horeb)
- multiple versions of the same story (twice Abraham tells a King his wife is his sister, Issac does it once)
- conflicting creation accounts
- commentary on Moses or material after his death.

Possible Origin: A series of documents collected by a later editor(s):

- A document that originates in Judah, uses YHWW as the name of God and Mt. Saini
- A document that originates in Israel, uses El as the name of God and Mt. Horeb
- A priestly document containing most of the material focuses on Temple worship and genealogies

722 BCE- Israel falls to Assyria, refugees flee south bringing material with them

587 BCE – Judah falls to Babylon, upper classes taken into Exile

515 BCE – returned Exiles under Persian rule rebuild the Temple

Nehemiah 8:2 – Ezra brings a “book of the law” from those still in Babylon to Jerusalem c. 458 BCE

What do we make of Genesis 1-11? How important is it for the modern Christian?

What relevance does the Mosaic law have for us?

The Prophets

The Assyrian Crisis 700s BCE

Amos: A Judean in Israel who condemns the rich for exploiting the poor

Hosea: A native of Israel, accuses his nation of breaking its marriage bond with God.

Isaiah of Jerusalem (1-39): A prophet associated with both the Temple and the Royal court.

Micah: A rural villager in Judah who criticizes rich land owners.

The Rise of Babylon 600s BCE

Zephaniah: Pre-622, warns of God’s judgement

Nahum: Shortly after Ninevah’s fall (612 BCE), rejoices over Assyria’s collapse.

Habakkuk: Questions God’s fairness in light of the Babylonians.

The Exile: 500s BCE

Jeremiah: Active during the end of Judah, a descendant of Israel who warned of God’s Judgement.

Obadiah: condemns Edom.

Ezekiel: One of the early wave of Exiles, deals first with the certainty of judgement and later with the hope of restoration.

Second Isaiah (40-55): Promises restoration, speaks of a new Exodus, and the redemptive role of the Suffering Servant.

After the Exile Post 500s to ?

Haggai: Encourage rebuilding of Temple.

Zechariah: Proclaims blessings on Royal Governor Zerubbabel and High Priest Joshua c. 520

Third Isaiah (56-66): Criticism of religious failures of Judah.

Joel: Visions of the Day of the Lord

Malachi: Judgement is coming, also promised return of Elijah.

Jonah: Allegorical story of a prophet used to illustrate the need to accept God’s love for other nations.

Do the historical contexts of these works affect how we read them?

Do we have favorites from among these?

How do we react to God's judgement on his people as a nation rather than individuals?

The Writings

The Writings represent the collection of Jewish literature written after the Exile. This was a period of change for the Jewish people. They had no independent Kingdom (except for a roughly 100 year period that ended around 37 BCE with the Roman conquest.) The daily language changed from Hebrew to Aramaic and Greek. The vast majority of the Jews lived outside of Palestine. While there was a Temple, the focus of devotional life had moved to the synagogue system.

The literature of the era represents two things. First, a call to reinvigorate traditional systems and views; and, second, an attempt to interact with the ideas of the wider world.

The Writings are as follows:

Three Poetic Books:

Psalms: Likely the Hymn book for the second Temple, borrowing heavily from traditional sources.

Proverbs: An example of Wisdom literature, basically a guide on how to live a successful life. Contains lots of material from other cultures.

Job: A counter-point to Proverb's Retributive Theology model. Why do bad things happen to good people? None of your business, that's why.

Five works associated with Holidays:

Song of Songs or Song of Solomon (Passover): It's springtime. Sex is nice. Romantic poetry probably associated with courtship and marriage.

Book of Ruth (Feast of Weeks/Pentecost): Romantic story whose climax is during the Feast. Also argues against the religious reforms of Ezra-Nehemiah by making the hero a non-Jewish woman and ancestor of David.

Lamentations(Ninth of Av): Commemoration of the destruction of the 1st Temple. 4 highly structured poems ending in a more chaotic free verse lament.

Ecclesiastes (Feats of Booths): The search for meaning in a diverse world. In the end the message is: eat and drink and do what makes you happy.

Book of Esther (Pûrîm): A reminder to be true to your roots because the Jews have to stick together.

Others:

Daniel: Hero stories and Apocalypse. Both promise God's protection in foreign lands. Second half likely about the fall of the Greek Empires.

Ezra and Nehemiah: Two books from the same source, a call to fundamental values and a rejection of the influences of the world.

Chronicles: A somewhat idealized history of the Jewish people that reinforces the world view of Ezra-Nehemiah.

How does the changing world of the Jews resonate with Christians today?

The Gospels

The gospel, as it a literary genre, first appears in the form of Mark. Taking inspiration from both the Hebrew prophet stories and the Greek "Lives" the authors of the New Testament creating something new. Prophet stories focus only on message and miracles, with little biographical data if any. The Lives focus on a single aspect of the subject and make the point by telling anecdotes, often not in chronological order, to illustrate that. Thus the gospels are not written to be biographies as we would think of them, but rather are intended to depict Jesus in a certain way.

Mark's gospel was chronologically first, taken from oral traditions and recorded in the grammatically poor Greek spoken by the poor. It reads as a series of "and then this happened" that takes us through Jesus' baptism to the morning of the resurrection. Mark seems to be writing to people facing persecution. Jesus constantly tries to keep his true nature a secret, the Son of God, and seems unable to effect the beliefs and understanding of even his closest followers. The gospel ends abruptly in the oldest form in 16:8 with a picture of what his audience must have been feeling "and they were afraid and told no one."

Matthew and Luke both use Mark (Matthew repeats over 90% of Mark) along with their own material research and a shared source of Jesus' sayings that we no longer have.

Matthew is the Gospel for Christian Jews to encourage them to keep the faith. He depicts Jesus as a new Moses, ties him to prophecy of the Old Testament, while also making a case for the acceptance of Gentiles as part of the Kingdom.

Luke is for Gentile Christians, and probably wealthy ones at that. He depicts Jesus as a heroic figure who, much like Greek myths, does not deserve his death but embraces it as his divine destiny.

John is something else entirely. Not based on Mark and, at least in the form we have it, obviously revised. John seems to be the Gospel for those on the fringes of Christianity who are taking the gospel in a different direction than either the Jewish Christians or the Gentile followers of Paul. His cosmic version of Jesus seems to be portrayed in a way that would appeal to Greek philosophers as well as Jewish mystics. His is a much more esoteric Jesus.

None of these books were written primarily for evangelism. They were all written to encourage and educate Christians.

Which is your favorite or least favorite? Why?

How does knowing that they have different audiences help us understand their messages?

The Writings of Paul

The first books of the New Testament to come into existence are attributed to Paul, although there has been debate about their authenticity not only recently but in ancient sources as well. Undisputed books have wide acceptance as originating with the historical figure known as Paul the Apostle, probably between about 50 CE and 62 CE, give or take a few years. Disputed books have some support, but also some questions as to their origins. The remaining books fall into the Unlikely category, these are books that a significant majority of scholars feel are not written by the same person who wrote the Undisputed books. It should be noted that the conservative stance on all of these is that they were written by Paul.

Undisputed	Disputed	Unlikely
Romans	Colossians	1 Timothy
1 Corinthians	2 Thessalonians	2 Timothy
2 Corinthians		Titus
Galatians		Ephesians
Philippians		
1 Thessalonians		
Philemon		

It should also be noted that some portions of the books are also in question. For example: 1 Cor 14:34–35. Part of the reason for doubt is that in some manuscripts, the verses come at the end of the chapter instead of at its present location. Furthermore, Paul is here appealing to the law which is uncharacteristic of him. Lastly, the verses come into conflict with 11:5 where women are described as praying and prophesying. This suggests to many they were a later scribal insertion.

Questions

Does authorship alter the way you perceive the books?

What problems do you have with Paul? Are they based on how the books have been used or actual content?

None of the undisputed books are evangelical in nature but are instead intended to address specific issues in the churches (except Romans). Does the effect how we perceive them?

What should the church's response be to the Unlikely books? How should they effect policy and doctrine?

Everything Else

The majority of the remainder of the New Testament is taken up with what are known as the General, or Catholic, Epistles. They are all circular letters, not addressed to any place in particular, and most of them have a Jewish audience in mind.

James – the closest the New Testament has to a book of Wisdom Literature. This book is primarily about behavior in a group that could almost be a synagogue as well as a church.

Jude – Claims to be by the brother of James, and by implication Jesus, but is mostly about how terrible “those people” are. Quotes from 2 non-Biblical books.

1 Peter – a Baptism sermon in a time of trouble. Possibly associated with the Peter, but in the form we have now a later work.

2 Peter – Someone rewrote Jude. Possibly the latest book in the New Testament.

1 John – A defense of Jesus’ Incarnation, probably from the same group of people who finished the Gospel.

2 John – An attack on people who do not believe in Jesus’ Incarnation. Only place in the Bible the term “antichrist” is used, and its plural.

3 John – This guy is nice, help him. This guy is not nice, don’t listen to him. Kthanksbye.

Hebrews – not technically one of the “General Epistles” but only due to length. Shares the circular format and focus on Jewish Christians. It is a carefully constructed argument about the superiority of Christ to all things.

Revelation – the much maligned and misinterpreted. This book purports to be an apocalypse, but I think is actually a distortion of the form that denies all the stuff apocalypses are usually about. Deliberately difficult and really not meant to be read by anyone but the original audience, it can nonetheless be meaningful if approached intelligently.