

The Canon of the New Testament

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Date: 15 September 2019

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[0:00] I covered how the New Testament has been extraordinarily preserved and how this ensures that we have access to the original readings and the original words of the apostles. And last week, I spoke about the accuracy of the New Testament and I covered how the New Testament is historically reliable, how it's accurate, how it's true, and how it can be corroborated by the historical record.

And this extends even to the deeds and words of Christ, even to his miracles. In fact, we talked about last week how non-Christians, even ancient anti-Christians, confessed that Jesus performed miracles.

And so because of all these things, we can conclude that the New Testament claims are worthy of our trust and especially so when it speaks about Jesus' resurrection. So today we've got our final topic.

We're going to be talking about the canonicity of the New Testament. And with this, I'm going to go over questions like who decided what books were in the New Testament? And how was the New Testament put together?

And what about those false gospels we hear about sometimes? Why aren't those in the Bible? If you're like me, you might have heard of a lot of questions or even concerns about these things. You might have wondered about those things yourselves.

[1:10] You might wonder if someone messed up. Maybe someone put something in there that shouldn't be there. Maybe someone took something out that should be there. So today I want us to consider these questions and we'll look at the answers that we have for them.

And my hope is that after today, you'll see a glimpse of how God has worked by His Holy Spirit to not just inspire and preserve the New Testament, but also to assemble it.

So before we talk about how the New Testament was assembled, I need to tell you what the New Testament is. The New Testament is a collection of 27 books and letters that were written or supervised by Jesus' apostles.

And these apostles were the ones commissioned to have authority to teach and preach the gospel of Jesus and to explain Christian doctrine. Now there's a lot of confusion and some false theories about who decided what these apostolic documents included, who assembled them into the New Testament.

You've likely heard some of these false theories. You might even believe some of these false theories. So I think that it would be good for me to start our time off by going through these theories one by one.

[2:22] Some of these mistaken theories are false theories. So let's get started. So the first false theory on how the New Testament got put together, I call this one the Bible dropped down from heaven theory.

And people often don't put it in so many words, but basically this theory assumes that the Bible, the New Testament was created outside of history, that it was done without human hands, and that it was presented to us here on earth in complete form.

Now, of course, this is not how the Old Testament and the New Testament were written or how they were put together, and both of them are very clear on this. If you just glance at it, you'll see how God fit to inspire humans to write his word over many centuries and in many lands.

And as we'll see, he also inspired humans to put his word together. So this Bible dropped down from heaven theory isn't true. But there's another theory on how the Bible, and especially the New Testament, was put together, and I call this one the conspiracy theory.

This theory maintains that sometime in the 4th century, 300 years after Jesus, the Roman Emperor Constantine, or an early pope, they plotted or colluded to manufacture the New Testament.

[3:35] Constantine, of course, is known as the first Christian emperor. He came to power in the early 300s A.D. And the running assumption behind this theory is that Constantine or an early pope were pretty bad guys, and they took out stuff that should have been in the Bible, and they put stuff in that shouldn't be there, and they did all of this in some kind of smoke-filled back room.

They were committing all sorts of terrible crimes. If you're familiar with the Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown, he posits this very theory. But of course, neither Constantine nor an early pope decided what was in the New Testament.

This theory, in fact, is so false, it's hard to believe it has much currency today. There's simply no evidence that Constantine or an early pope ever decided what was in the New Testament.

And there's a whole lot of evidence that they didn't. And even if they did decide what was in the New Testament, their power only extended to the Roman Empire, and by the 4th century, Christianity was so widespread beyond the Roman Empire that anything they did for the Roman Church wouldn't have had any effect on all those Christian communities outside of the Roman Empire.

And on top of that, we have biblical manuscripts and Christian writings from before Constantine, and they're consistent with the Bible we have today, showing that our New Testament goes well back before them.

[4:56] So, the conspiracy theory is also wrong. But let's keep moving. We've got some other theories to talk about. The next one I call the ecumenical church council theory. This one makes a lot more sense than the other two.

This one maintains that there was an ecumenical church council. That is a worldwide, universal church council sometime back in antiquity. And this council had representatives from every church all over the world.

And this council codified the contents of the New Testament. Well, many Christians will be surprised to learn that this is not true. There was no ecumenical worldwide church council that ratified the contents of the New Testament or decided what books were in it.

There were, of course, various smaller regional councils held in various geographical locations, and they did issue New Testament lists, but they had very limited influence.

They didn't have binding power or anything like that. There were no worldwide councils with any kind of binding power that decided on the New Testament. The closest we can come to something like this, to a council of this nature, is the Council of Trulot in Constantinople in 692.

[6:07] This council ratified various New Testament lists that were made by previous smaller councils or individuals. But the problem with the Council of Trulot is that it was not ecumenical.

Only Roman churches were invited. Occasionally, you'll hear people call this an ecumenical council. It wasn't. We can say the same thing about the Second Council of Nicaea. They did the same thing, but again, only Roman churches were invited.

Everyone outside the Roman Empire wasn't invited to this council. So this ecumenical church council theory, it's an attractive one, but it's not true. All right, so the next theory, the next theory has even more merit to it.

This one, we'll just call it the Apostles Did It Theory, and according to this theory, the Apostles not only supervised the writing of the New Testament, they also helped collect the New Testament documents and assemble them together.

So sometimes you hear, for example, that John, the last surviving disciple of Jesus, the author of Revelation, you'll hear that he was responsible for doing this, for sealing the New Testament.

[7:09] And some people find evidence for this with the last words of John that he put in the final verses of the New Testament in Revelation, where he says, if anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book.

And if anyone takes away from the words of the prophecy of this book, God shall take away his part from the book of life. This is Revelation 22, verses 18 through 19. Now, we do have reason to believe that John and the Apostles did help assemble at least part of the New Testament.

For example, there's an ancient Christian writer named Eusebius. He's writing around the year 312, 311. And he says that the Apostle John took the three Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

He bore witness to their truthfulness, and he wrote his fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John, as a supplement to these other three. And so certainly it seems probable that the Apostles played a role in gathering the New Testament documents.

For instance, I can give you some other examples. In 2 Peter, Peter calls Paul's letters Scripture. So he was probably aware of a collection of Paul's letters, and he approved of them.

[8:12] He called them Scripture. It also seems quite likely that Paul and probably the other Apostles collected their own letters to some extent, or their followers did, like Timothy or Silas and so on.

So it's reasonable to conclude that the Apostles played a role in collecting and assembling the documents of the New Testament. But we don't have any explicit evidence that one or some of the Apostles collected all 27 books in the New Testament.

And it would seem likely that early Christian writings would mention this if it had happened, and they don't, as far as I'm aware. And so, clearly the Apostles played a role in deciding which documents were authoritative, but that's not the whole story.

So if this is the case, who decided what was in the New Testament? Most people, when we get to this point, they start scratching their heads and wondering what other option is even available if those aren't true.

Well, the answer, I think, is a wonderful testimony in how God's guiding Spirit works through history and the Church. And here's the answer. The New Testament was not assembled in one place or time, or by one person or group.

[9:22] Rather, the New Testament was assembled by various churches throughout history relatively independently of one another, and it was done so many times.

And this all began in the very early church of the second century. Back then, when these early churches were deciding on the contents of the New Testament, they all had one overriding factor.

They wanted to identify the documents that were published by the apostles or were published with their supervision. And from the very beginning, there was broad agreement over what these documents included.

And any disagreements were met with careful consideration and prayer and research and the remarkable thing. Perhaps the stunning result in this is that every church community eventually came to use the very same 27 book New Testament we have today.

In other words, the same New Testament remarkably emerged in multiple churches relatively independently of one another. Just like how God used multiple people over many countries and languages to write the Bible, so he used many people over many countries to put it together.

[10:35] Now you might be a little skeptical about all of this, so I want to show you what this process of putting the New Testament together looked like. And to do this, we're going to travel back in time about 2,000 years to the very beginning of the Christian church to those first few decades after the resurrection of Jesus to when the apostles were traveling around the world and preaching the gospel of salvation.

So if we go to say 45 AD to the ancient city of Corinth and if we peek in on a church service around this time, we would notice that the church in Corinth at this time didn't have a New Testament and it's because the New Testament didn't exist.

These very first Christians like those in Corinth, they didn't have the New Testament because it hadn't been written yet. The earliest New Testament documents date from around the year 50, give or take a few years.

So if we're in 45 AD in Corinth, 15 years after the resurrection of Jesus, the only scriptures that the Christian church would have had was the Old Testament. But if we stick around long enough, there eventually will come a day when the Corinthians get a letter from a guy named Paul.

And we call this letter 1 Corinthians. And because Paul was an apostle and commissioned by Jesus to have great authority to preach and teach, the Corinthians start reading Paul's letter in their church services alongside the Old Testament.

[12:02] And in fact, Paul seems to instruct his churches to do this in his letters. The Corinthians then start sending this letter around to their neighboring churches in Greece, to churches in Philippi and Thessalonica.

And again, this is something Paul told his churches to do. And those churches in Thessalonica and Philippi, they start sending the Corinthians their letters from the apostles. And we call these 1st and 2nd Thessalonians and Philippians.

And all of a sudden, perhaps without even them realizing it, the New Testament is being born. And over the next 30 or 40 years, various apostles wrote or supervised the composition of the New Testament documents.

And over these decades and also afterwards, Christians began exchanging and verifying these documents to make sure they actually came from the apostles. And sometimes churches would find that someone had hoodwinked them and a document they had maybe thought might be apostolic really wasn't.

And they would reject it. Now this process of gathering and evaluating and verifying documents as apostolic it took a good deal of time in part because the Christian church expanded so rapidly over so many thousands of miles that it was often difficult to communicate with one another.

[13:17] For instance, by 200 AD, the Christian church had spread from the west coast of Spain to northwest Africa, of course all the way through western Europe to Greece and Turkey to Egypt to the Caucasus to Persia to Afghanistan.

It even seems likely that the church had spread into western China and northwest India. And churches back then they didn't have telephones or email or things like that. They didn't have a quick way to travel back and forth.

And on top of this many churches that you see here didn't even speak Greek and they needed these documents, these apostolic documents to be translated. And all this means is that it took a while for these early churches to come to agreement.

They had broad agreement early on but it took some time for things to settle down and for complete agreement to arise about the New Testament. And if you're curious about this we can even observe this agreement emerging for ourselves.

We can go back and canvas early Christian writings in the second through third centuries and we can see these discussions over the New Testament taking place and we can watch this general agreement arising.

[14:29] And we can do this if we gather some early Christian writings and we scan their contents to see what their New Testament looked like. So for example if we go to 180 AD to Lyon's France and we look at the writings of a Christian theologian named Irenaeus Irenaeus was a disciple of a man named Polycarp and Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John.

So Irenaeus has good apostolic connections. And if we sift through Irenaeus' writings we can see which New Testament books he quotes from and we can get a good idea of what his New Testament looked like.

This would be the equivalent of someone a thousand years from now going through all the sermons at Trinity to see what was in our New Testament to see what our pastors quote from and documenting this to figure out what books we had.

And when we do this with Irenaeus we get the following list of New Testament books. Now I know that this font might be a little hard to see I wanted to get everything on one slide but what you see here on the left is the list of the 27 books of the New Testament and then on the right we can see if Irenaeus included them.

The letter C means he explicitly cites from that particular document. Now Irenaeus' New Testament looks pretty similar to ours. He has all the major books. He has the four Gospels, Acts, most of the letters of Paul which you can see highlighted in red.

[15:52] He also has 1 John and 2 John. He has 1 Peter. He has Revelation. Some of the differences however are that he never mentions Philemon or 3 John or Jude.

Now these are extremely short documents. They're only a few paragraphs long so he probably never had occasion to quote from them. Remember he wasn't giving us a list of New Testament books.

He was just writing a theological work and quoting from the New Testament whenever it was relevant. And you have to preach a lot of sermons to quote from 3 John and Philemon and things like that.

So it's not surprising that he never got around to it. Now notice this chart also has some question marks. I've got a question mark around Hebrews. Irenaeus definitely does mention Hebrews but we don't know if he thought of it positively or not.

We just know he knew about it. There's a question mark at James. He does seem to quote from James but it's not totally certain. There's also a question mark around 2 Peter.

[16:52] It's unclear if he quotes from it. Irenaeus he also might have an additional document in his New Testament called the Shepherd of Hermas but again it's unclear. We're not sure. There's some other things we can glean from Irenaeus.

For example he tells us very clearly that all Christians accept the four Gospels and only the four Gospels. And he seems to be right about this because all Christians before him as far as we can tell and those contemporary with him accepted the four Gospels and only the four Gospels.

Irenaeus also tells us that Christians only accept documents that have an apostolic connection. So just from Irenaeus alone we can see that even at this very early date his New Testament is almost identical to ours and perhaps if he were to have given us a list of New Testament books it would have been identical but we just are unclear.

We can't totally verify that. And we can continue doing the same kind of study with other writers around the same time as well. Remember we've been with Irenaeus in France I mean and in 180 AD we can go to Northwest Africa to around 200 AD we can canvas the writings of a Christian named Tertullian we can do the same thing we can make a list and we can see what he had in his New Testament and in fact the only things Tertullian doesn't quote from are 2nd and 3rd John and also James and 2nd Peter but again he may have never had occasion to quote from them he's not making a list here he's just writing some theology.

He also tells us that there's only four Gospels Matthew Mark Luke and John. He also says the New Testament is made up of documents stemming from the apostles. Interestingly Tertullian rejects the Shepherd of Hermas explicitly as being part of scripture.

[18:34] So if you're wondering about this document the Shepherd of Hermas we have good evidence that it was written in Rome probably around the year 150. It was not written by an apostle. There were some early Christian writers that may have thought it was apostolic but eventually everyone agreed that it wasn't.

Now we can keep doing this. We can keep canvassing the writings of the ancient world. For example around the year 200 the first full scale translation of the New Testament happened that we know of.

It's called the Old Latin Translation and it seems to have included all 27 books of the New Testament. And if around this time we can go to a guy named Origen of Caesarea in Palestine.

He's writing around the year 240 and he includes all 27 books. In fact he's the first one to give us a complete New Testament list and it seems to have all 27.

Some scholars believe that his list may have been altered by later scribes or translators but if we go through Origen's writings he quotes from all 27. So we know he knew about them.

[19:36] And like I said we can keep doing this through decades and centuries and if we did we would see all the churches eventually cluster around the 27 documents we have today. And like I said the most remarkable maybe the most wonderful thing about this process is twofold.

Firstly even the very early church had brought agreement on the contents of the New Testament as we just saw. And secondly all Christian churches eventually settled on using the very same New Testament.

And they did this though speaking different languages and sometimes living thousands of miles apart sometimes in communities that were at war with one another. Despite this every church eventually came to use the same exact 27 book New Testament.

Now this did take a very long time in some places. For instance the Roman Catholic Church did not technically authorize the 27 book New Testament until the Council of Trent in the 1500s.

But it I know I know but in practice in practice the Roman Catholic Church had always adhered to a 27 book New Testament since before the year 200 when the old Latin translation happened.

[20:42] Even some of our Protestant reformers questioned New Testament books. For example Martin Luther didn't like the book of James. He wanted to throw it out. But eventually all churches agreed and began using the 27 book the 27 apostolic documents in the New Testament even if they never formally ratified a New Testament list a New Testament canonical list.

So to sum up on how the New Testament was assembled we can say the following. It did not fall out of heaven. There was no conspiracy theory. There was no political subversion by a Roman emperor or a pope or anything like that.

There was no single ecumenical council. And while the apostles did help assemble the New Testament there was no single uniting factor in this process except the Holy Spirit.

He led churches to independently investigate and test which documents were apostolic to verify this and the wonderful result is that they all eventually zeroed in on the 27 book New Testament we have today relatively independently of one another.

So. All right. All right. All right. The early church they carefully went through these materials. They decided on the New Testament but let's be skeptical here. What if they were wrong?

[21:58] What if they messed up? What about those heretical Christians like those Gnostics that we hear about? What about them and their Gospels like the Gospels of Mary and Judas and Peter and the Gospel of Truth?

What if those heretical groups were right? What if those documents really are from the apostles? What if our New Testament should include them? In fact what if those Gnostics were the true Christians and were the ones who are wrong?

How do we know? Well those are great questions. So let's for the sake of argument let's stop trusting the early church. Let's look and see what those heretics thought. In fact let's go one step further.

Let's just not look at what those heretical groups thought about the New Testament. Let's figure out the contents of the New Testament on our own. Let's do this for ourselves and see what documents really are apostolic and what conclusions we come to.

So we're going to do two things now. We're going to examine the early Christian heretical sects to see what their New Testaments contain. And then while we're doing this we're going to figure out which writings truly come from an apostle so that we can create our own New Testament and we see what we come up with.

[23:10] All right. So there's a few things we need to know before we start. First, the early heretical sects made up a small minority of Christians.

Our evidence clearly shows that the vast majority of Christians in the early centuries followed the mainstream church that you and I all would have been a part of because their core beliefs, their theology, match our own.

And this mainstream church spanned thousands of miles, dozens of cultures, many languages and countries. And secondly, it was directly linked to the apostles. And we know this through various lines of evidence. But, you know, deciding on what the New Testament is, it's not a popularity contest.

Who cares about the apostolic connections? We're being skeptical here. Let's go with the heretics for a moment. They claimed like they had apostolic connections as well. Let's see if they're right. So the most influential heretical sects in the second through fourth centuries were the following groups.

It was the Montanists in Asia Minor, the Novationists in Rome, the Donatists in North Africa, the Arians there in Egypt and Western Europe. These were the largest heretical sects outside of the mainstream church.

[24:15] They flourished between the second and fourth centuries. But the interesting thing about these folks is that all the evidence points to the fact that they accepted the very same New Testament as the mainstream church.

Their dispute had nothing to do with the contents of the New Testament, but it had everything to do with its interpretation. So from this, we conclude most heretics accepted the New Testament of the mainstream church.

That wasn't the issue. But let's look at those oddball groups that didn't do this. Perhaps the largest sect with a different New Testament was the Marcionites. They flourished in the mid-second through third centuries.

But the problem with them is their New Testament. Their whole Bible actually was different because they rejected every biblical writing that was Jewish. Now, if you think about that, that's everything except for the Gospel of Luke.

Luke was the only Gentile writer. And they also accepted Paul because Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles. But that still wasn't enough. They had to go through and change all the verses because they're constantly quoting from the Old Testament.

[25:20] So they had to take all that stuff out. Now, I have to say that these Marcionites don't seem like a very reliable group to trust. If we know anything about Jesus and the apostles, they were Jewish.

They believed the Old Testament. So it seems like a silly group to trust on which documents are apostolic. So remember, we're trying to see if heretics were right about the New Testament. And what we found so far was that they either agree with us or they maintain an absurd position like the Marcionites do.

So we only have one group of heretics remaining, the big bad Gnostics. Now, these guys, they had all sorts of additional New Testament documents. Gospel of Thomas, Peter, Philip, Mary, Judas, Gospel of Truth, Acts of John, Acts of Andrew, Revelation of Paul.

And they claimed that these were from the apostles. Now, one of the curious things, though, is that the Gnostics don't seem to have rejected the New Testament of the mainstream church. They just added to it.

So they acknowledged the authoritative status of the New Testament of the mainstream church. Hmm. But even so, what about all these additional Gnostic Gospels?

[26:24] Sometimes people are troubled by these things. Sometimes people are wondering if these should be in our New Testament too. They wonder why they're not. So, like I said, we're going to figure this out right now.

I want to do to these Gnostic documents what I did to the documents of the New Testament last week. I want to subject these Gnostic texts to historical investigation, to historical scrutiny, to see if we can verify their contents and their claims.

And when we do this, when we go through these Gnostic documents, we quickly find that we can't verify their historical contents. None of the false Gospels, the false Acts, the false Epistles can have their contents historically verified, except only in the vaguest of ways.

They're totally disconnected from history, and frankly, they seem just made up. They have none of the fine-grained historical anchors that exist in our New Testament. And this is precisely what we would expect from something that was fictitiously crafted after that point.

And secondly, they not only seem disconnected from history, they seem disconnected from Judaism. They have no idea about Jewish culture in Palestine. Our New Testament is filled with information like this.

[27:31] In fact, the Gnostic documents have much more in common with Greek philosophy and culture and tradition. And like I said, if we know anything about Jesus and the Apostles, it's they were Jewish and living in Palestine.

On top of this, though, the content of these Gnostic documents has all sorts of ridiculous things. They have a giant walking cross that comes out of the tomb of Jesus and talks to people.

They have the Apostles doing things like sham miracles, like resurrecting fish and taming bedbugs. And they've got Simon the Magician, he's mentioned in the book of Acts, flying around in the air in some kind of wizard's duel with Peter, and people are paying money to see it, according to the Acts of Peter anyway.

It's crazy stuff. It totally lacks verisimilitude, authenticity. It strains credulity. But none of this is the case with the 27 documents of the New Testament.

They are anchored in history. They are steeped in Jewish background. And we can verify them from many angles. But we've got more reasons for rejecting the Gnostic writings. And this is because none of them can be reliably dated to the first century.

[28:36] Every single one of them is most likely dated to the second or third centuries or later. None of them can be placed in a first century context. Every once in a while you hear someone say the Gospel of Thomas can come from the first century.

There's no hard evidence for this. In fact, there's good evidence against it. But all 27 documents of the New Testament can be dated to the first century. With great certainty or at least a great amount of plausibility.

And this gives us a final reason to reject the Gnostic writings. And this is that none of them can be reliably attributed to apostolic authorship or oversight.

Not a single scholar that I'm aware of actually believes that these Gnostic writings come from the Apostles. And not only did the early Church agree with this, but even most ancient heretics agreed with this.

We saw this. The Donatists, the Montanists, the Novationists, the Arians. They rejected the Gnostic writings too. And if that's not enough for you, even ancient non-Christian writers claimed the same thing.

[29:38] Some of the most famous Neoplatonic philosophers named Plotinus, Amelius, Porphyry, they were aware of the Gnostics. They attacked the Gnostics. And Porphyry explicitly accuses the Gnostics of forging documents in other people's names.

And the most amazing thing about all of this is that when Porphyry turns to attack the early Church, the mainstream Church, he acknowledges that their writings did come from the Apostles. So, let me summarize.

We reject the Gnostic writings because none of the Gnostic writings can have their contents verified. None of them engage with Judaism. None of them can be reliably dated to the first century. Many of them have ridiculous content.

And most importantly, none of the Gnostic writings can be reliably attributed to the Apostles. And even ancient heretics and non-Christians agreed with this. On the other hand, the 27 books of the New Testament can be historically verified.

They can be reliably dated to the first century. They can be reliably indexed back to an Apostle through various lines of evidence. And in fact, the 27 documents of our New Testament are the only documents in the entire world that can be linked to an Apostle.

[30:45] And these apostolic connections are something confessed by the ancient mainstream Church, ancient heretical Christians, and even ancient non-Christians. Therefore, if we were constructing a New Testament from scratch, these 27 documents are precisely the documents we would put in.

But we can keep adding to this. As we saw earlier in this talk, it so happens that these same 27 New Testament documents happen to exactly match the earliest complete New Testament list that exists.

from 245 AD, from origin. And they also match the earliest full-scale New Testament translation, the Old Latin, around the year 200, maybe earlier. And lastly, these 27 books are the very documents that every church eventually chose to put in their New Testament.

Therefore, for all these reasons, we can be confident that our New Testament includes all apostolic documents and that it excludes all non-apostolic documents. So, in brief, no one person decided what was in the New Testament.

Rather, many churches decided independently, and we accept their decisions because when we do the same research, it does in fact seem that our New Testament contains only apostolic documents and all the apostolic documents.

[32 : 08] We didn't leave anything out. So, to sum up this three-part series we've been talking about, we have good reason to trust that our New Testament indeed has been well-preserved.

We also have good reasons that it's accurate and true, and that it contains all documents connected with the apostles and only documents connected with the apostles.

But if you're like me, you might still be wondering a couple things here. You might be wanting a little more assurance, maybe some more guarantees. In fact, why stop at the apostles and their writings?

Because I'll tell you what I'd really like to see in my New Testament. I'd like to have a letter directly from Jesus, delivered by the apostles. That's what I want in my New Testament, and I'd like to know why we don't have it.

Well, if you're wondering about this, if you're like me, I want to invite you to read the New Testament, and then you'll find your answer. Paul writes to the Corinthians, he says this, You are a letter from Christ, delivered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of the human heart.

[33 : 24] You see, we do have this letter from Jesus, and it is delivered by the apostles, but it's written on something better than paper. It's written on something better than pen and ink.

It's written on your heart, and it's written by the Spirit of God. What a wonderful privilege and gift that we've been given. A few verses after this, Paul explains something very profound about this letter from Jesus, and something very profound about the nature of the New Testament.

This is just three verses later, 2 Corinthians 3.6. He says, Now the Greek words behind the phrase New Covenant are and they can just as well be translated New Testament.

And with this understanding, Paul is making a statement about the very nature of the New Testament. He says it's not ultimately written in pen and ink. It's ultimately written by the Spirit.

And this all points to the fact that the New Testament is more than just pen and ink and letters and a bunch of words. It's a spiritual document. It's of the Spirit. And what this means is that for you to have a complete New Testament, you need more than just the pen and ink apostolic documents and letters.

[34 : 45] You need that letter from Jesus written on your heart. And if you're missing that letter, then you don't have the whole New Testament. And when you put that spiritual letter from Jesus together with the writings of the apostles, then each one are like self-authenticating witnesses that declare the truthfulness of one another.

I remember when I was 18 years old and I was caught up in my sins and I encountered Jesus. And He caught me up and He cleaned me up and He wrote me this living letter on my heart saying, forgiven.

And the remarkable thing for me was that for the first time in my life, the Scriptures came alive to me. I'd heard them every week in church for 18 years. But once that letter was delivered, every word of Scripture had new and profound meaning for me.

And you know, this is the same way the apostolic documents of our New Testament were independently gathered by various churches throughout history. People filled with the Spirit of God, carrying that letter of Jesus in their hearts, they met with these apostolic documents, and they all fit together.

And they testified to each other. And this was prophesied centuries before in the prophet Jeremiah. He said this about the New Testament. I guess I don't have it in there.

[36:03] He said, Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant, a new testament, with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Not like the covenant, the testament, that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

My covenant, my testament that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the testament that I will make with the house of Israel after those days. I will put my law within them.

I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God. And they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord.

For they all shall know me. From the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity. And I will remember their sins no more. If you're here today and you're still looking for that letter from Jesus, I want to invite you to pray with me right now.

Let's pray together. Father in heaven, we thank you that you sent your son Jesus. We thank you that you inspired your apostles to write letters and documents for us by your Holy Spirit.

[37:10] And we thank you that you've also written on our hearts. Father, I pray now for anyone who's longing to know you, who's longing to be forgiven in your name, who's longing for that letter of Jesus.

And I pray, Lord, you write on their hearts right now. And I pray for all of us, Lord, if we're doubting or struggling, if we have questions about the faith, that you would affirm your truth to them now.

You'd comfort them. And you would make the scriptures come alive for them. And we pray all this in the holy and mighty name of Jesus. Amen. We've got some questions.

That was a lot. A lot of names and dates and places. So the question's about the book of Hebrews.

If you guys read the book of Hebrews, it doesn't say who wrote it. And it doesn't say in the title. It just starts out. So this is the early church really wondered this too. And they had the very same question.

[38:15] You see these debates over the epistle of Hebrews. And what we can say is if we go back to the second century and the third century, everybody claims that it came from an apostle.

Many of them said it was Paul, but that he had help, that Luke translated it from Hebrew into Greek, or that someone else translated it, or someone else helped him write this letter. And when we read Hebrews, if you're very careful, you'll see that the author says that he received this message from the apostles.

There's a line in there in the beginning when he says, this was declared to us by the apostles. And then you also have the historical evidence that he seems to be writing before the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

So the apostles are still alive. They're still around. The whole epistle is structured around temple worship. So if that thing had been destroyed, I mean, there's no way he would have mentioned this. So you put all those together.

And it's written in the apostolic times. It's written by someone connected with the apostles. And the early church explicitly testifies that it had, either it was written by apostles or had apostolic oversight.

[39 : 23] So we would class Hebrews in the same way that we class the Gospel of Luke, the Gospel of Mark. These were not apostles, but they wrote with apostolic supervision, that there was apostolic help and commissioning in their documents.

So that's where we would put the Gospel of Hebrews. The final thing with the Gospel of Hebrews is that it just sings to you. I mean, you just read this thing and it just comes alive. And I've read a ton of early Christian writings, and the only writings like that are in the New Testament.

I've never encountered any even remotely close to that. So that's what I'd say about the Gospel of Hebrews. Or the epistle of Hebrews. Did I say Gospel of Hebrews? Epistle of Hebrews. Gospel of Hebrews is a different topic.

Anything else? So I realize that in this presentation you've been focusing on the New Testament, but some of these lists generated by the councils would have included lists of the Old Testament.

It seems like there's substantial more variance in those lists. Are there any quick comments? Yeah.

[40 : 31] Yeah, so the questions about the Old Testament and variations between the Old Testaments of churches. Some of you may know that while churches agree on the contents of the New Testament, they don't agree on the contents of the Old Testament.

If you go to a Catholic Bible, they've got some few extra books. And if you go to an Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, they've got some few extra books. So the short answer is that Protestants, Evangelicals, accept the Hebrew-Jewish canon, the Hebrew-Jewish Old Testament.

We believe this is the Old Testament of Jesus and the Apostles. This is the stuff written in Hebrew. That extra stuff, this stuff ends around the year 400 BC. So there's a 400-year gap between our Testaments.

The Old Testaments of the Catholics and the Orthodox, they fill in that gap with other Jewish writings that were mostly written in Greek, not in Hebrew. And if we go back to the earliest Jewish lists, it seems to be our list, the one that we have, whereas the other churches, the Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox, they follow the Greek Jews in Egypt, whereas we follow the Hebrew Jews in Palestine.

Now, there are lots of debates about this. I mean, the early church talked about this extensively again and again. The other thing I'll add is that the first Christian list of Old Testament documents is by Melito of Sardis around the year 170, very early.

[41 : 58] And it appears to agree with us. And so I think we're on good, firm ground for that, that we go with the Old Testament that seems like was the Old Testament of Jesus and the Apostles.

We don't add the Greek stuff that later Greek Jews added in. This is books like 1st Maccabees, 2nd Maccabees, stuff like that. So that's the short answer that I would say.

Other questions? All right. Great. It's been awesome being with you folks. Oh, one more. Could I just ask, do you really write Greek and other languages?

I mean, how did you do all this stuff? This is my dissertation. So my dissertation is on the reception of the Book of Revelation into the New Testament all throughout church history.

And so I went through all the writings and all the council lists and anything anyone said about the contents of the New Testament. Some of the stuff you've heard is pretty new stuff.

[43 : 06] It hasn't been published before, and I'm hoping to do that in the future. It's Greek and Latin and languages. So my program, they make you learn a ton of languages.

We just have to keep taking languages. So Greek and Latin, Syriac, Coptic, I mean, there's a lot. And we have to study them. I can't, they get you to the point where you can kind of muddle through something with a dictionary.

To get to the point of like fluently reading something takes, you know, years of efforts. So I can kind of do that with Greek, but the other ones I can't, I can't really do that.

But so these, most of what I quoted from are from Greek and Latin writings, but we could go to Syriac and Armenian and Arabic and Coptic and stuff like that too, if people were interested. Those writings are usually after the Greek and Latin writings.

And Syriac's about the same time. Syriac's just as early. But the other writings are a little later. And these are professors at the Divinity School that...

[44 : 05] They are, yes, some of them, most of them are in the Religious Studies Department. Some of them are in the NALC Department, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. They have lecturers that teach languages.

Sometimes you have to do independent studies or you go somewhere else and take these languages. Could you put the comments, since Luther was mentioned on that?

Yeah, yeah. Are you... Yeah, James... Correct me, correct me. No, no, no, no, no, no correction. James is an official of straw. Yeah. You know, one of the things with Luther you got to watch out is, you know, he's just quick to make these statements.

Yeah. A lot of stuff's from table talk and, you know, like, well, strictly off the record, this is what I really think about the Anabaptists. Hey, you spell that with one B or two. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But a dissertation's been done that looks to see, if even, say, as the Epistle of Strahd, James, he cites that no less.

Oh, really? And in his theological treatises, he cites James no less than any other book. It's perfectly proportional. Oh, great.

[45 : 06] In terms of his practice... Yeah, yeah. That's fantastic. I'd love to see that dissertation. And, in fact, you can find similar phenomenon with some of the early church. I mentioned a writer, Eusebius.

He is suspicious about the book of Revelation. But if you look at his writings, he quotes from it. And he'll use it, even though he's a little suspicious of it. And so we find similar things, too.

And there are actually churches today, I mentioned, that don't technically have a ratified canonical list of New Testament. But if you go to their church, the New Testament that they have printed is the 27-book New Testament.

All right, thank you guys so much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[46 : 03] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.