

How Did We Get the Bible?

Elders Teaching Resource
Truth in Love Apologetics Conference, 2021

Goal

- ▶ Better understand why the Bible that we have today is the Bible that we should have today.
- ▶ Defense against:
 - ▶ “We don’t have the original manuscripts of the Bible, and the copies we have differ in many places.”
 - ▶ “The Bible has been translated so many times it is impossible to know what the originals said.”
 - ▶ “The Bible is a product of political manipulation by powerful rich men. There are books that are wrongly missing from the Bible (Gospel of Thomas).”

Agenda

- ▶ Transmission of the Bible over the centuries
 - ▶ Copying and preserving
 - ▶ Translation of the Bible over the centuries
- ▶ Canonization

Transmission

- ▶ OT manuscripts copied meticulously
 - ▶ “Masoretic Text” (best copy from 11th century)
 - ▶ Dead Sea Scrolls (200s BC - 1st c. AD)
 - ▶ Meticulous copying
- ▶ New Testament copied voluminously
 - ▶ Bits and pieces of copies from the first century AD.
 - ▶ By the AD 300s many copies
 - ▶ Over 5,000 copies (which means lots of copies, rapidly)

IS IT TRUE???

- ▶ That there are hundreds of thousands of errors among the copies of the NT?
- ▶ Yes, but all but a “handful” are minor:
 - ▶ Obvious spelling mistakes or missing words or “Jesus” instead of “Jesus Christ”
 - ▶ One-off errors
- ▶ The handful that are substantive and serious do not do damage to any core teaching of the Church
- ▶ Bart Ehrman agrees that “essential Christians beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament.” (Gurry, *Myths*, 207)

Quote by Agnostic Critic Bart Ehrman about knowing what the autographs said

Reviewing a new and brilliant computer program analyzing all of our Greek manuscripts of the Book of James, concluded,

“Textual scholars have enjoyed reasonable success at establishing, to the best of their abilities, the original text of the NT. . . . [T]he reality is that we are unlikely to discover radically new problems or devise radically new solutions; at this stage, our work on the original amounts to little more than tinkering. There's something about historical scholarship that refuses to concede that a major task has been accomplished, but there it is.”

Translation:

- ▶ The Bible has been translated so many times we can't know what the originals said.
- ▶ Often compared to the telephone game.

Translation:

- ▶ **Actually, the complaint is irrelevant.**
- ▶ **Translators always go back to the originals, not merely to other translations.**

Translation: So This

Hebrew/Greek



KJV

Hebrew/Greek



ESV

Hebrew/Greek



Spanish

Translation: Not This

Hebrew/Greek



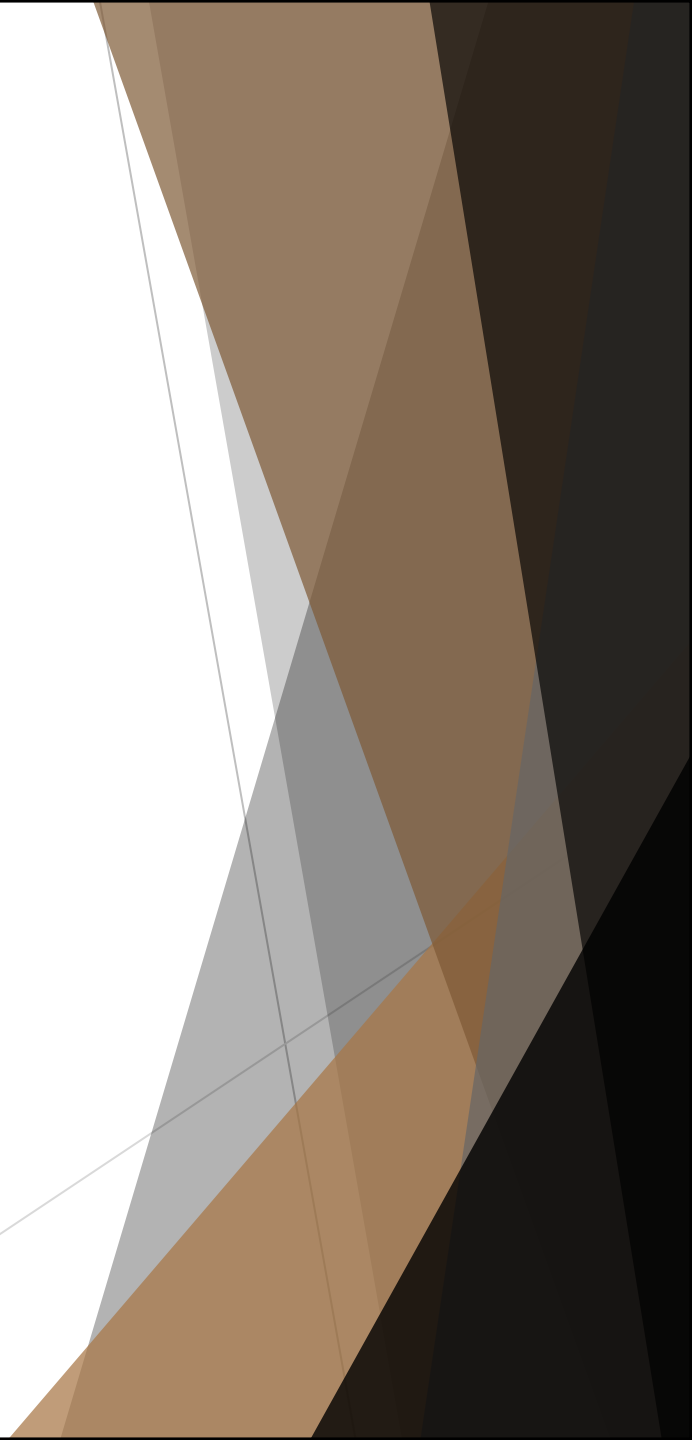
KJV



ESV



Spanish



Canonization

- ▶ Canon = rule, as in the ruler by which everything else is measured
- ▶ The Bible is the Christian Canon = The Bible is the ruler by which every other claim to knowledge is measured
- ▶ Canonization = the process of gathering writings into the canon of the Bible

Canonization Main Point

- ▶ The process of canonization was not random and not political
- ▶ Rather, the canonization process was:
 - ▶ Commissioned by Jesus
 - ▶ Guided by the Holy Spirit
 - ▶ Followed by the Church

Commissioned by Jesus, Guided by the Holy Spirit

- ▶ Mat 16:18-19 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (19) And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.
- ▶ Joh 16:13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.
- ▶ Fulfilled in the Book of Acts: “Acts of the Apostles,” or, “Acts of the Holy Spirit”

Canonization: the Canon was Deliberately Recognized by the Church

- ▶ So, seeing this commissioning by Jesus and empowering by the Holy Spirit, the Early Church recognized the Canon.
- ▶ The EC did not declare or randomly decide on the canon.
- ▶ J.I. Packer: "The church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity."
- ▶ The EC followed criteria that reflected the commissioning and empowering foretold by Jesus.

Canonization

1. Authored or Supervised by the Apostles

- ▶ Most written by an Apostle
- ▶ Luke - Paul and others; Mark - Peter
- ▶ All within the lifetimes of the Apostles (1st century)
- ▶ Not so for those writings outside of the canon (Gospel of Thomas)

Canonization

2. Consistent with the Apostolic Tradition

- ▶ “The Tradition”:
 - ▶ The teachings of the Apostles
 - ▶ Passed down orally
 - ▶ The “Rule of Faith” and the creeds
 - ▶ Preceded the writings we have (Events of the NT in the 30s, written down no earlier than the 40s)

Canonization

2. Consistent with the Apostolic Tradition

- ▶ “The Tradition”:
 - ▶ 1Co 15:3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;
 - ▶ 2Th 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.
 - ▶ Col 2:6 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:
 - ▶ Many more examples

Canonization

2. Consistent with the Apostolic Tradition

- ▶ The Church recognized as Canon only those books that reflected “The Tradition.”
- ▶ “But that’s not what the Apostles taught” - argument ended.
- ▶ Gospel of Thomas, Prologue: “These are the hidden sayings that the living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down.”

Canonization

3. Power to Transform

- ▶ Does this writing change lives?
- ▶ After all, it is a living Word, inspired by the Spirit and used by the Spirit.

Canonization

4. Wide Recognition by the Church

- ▶ Widespread use in the Church
- ▶ Not merely one or a small group of powerful Christians.
- ▶ Or Constantine.

Canonization

- ▶ What we have just seen is that the Bible is self-authenticating, or self-canonizing:
 - ▶ Apostolic (authorship and tradition)
 - ▶ Spirit (transform)
- ▶ You and I have no grounds for adding to or taking away from the Canon
- ▶ Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited*

Final Point

- ▶ **Godly Christian scholars have dedicated their lives to making sure we know what the autographs said.**
- ▶ **Godly Christian scholars have dedicated their lives to translating accurately the Word of God into our own languages.**

Four book recommendations

