

Apologetics - Lesson 6

The Canon - Disputed Books, Problem Books, The Codex

Book of James

- Debated but traditionally it has been given a date from 40AD - 62AD
- Attributed to James of Jerusalem. If in fact, then good reason to think it would have possessed reliable apostolic teaching.
- Did not receive as popular reception as Paul's writings but still has seen an impact
 - Cited by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius
 - Letter received fully by Jerome, Augustine, and the councils of Hippo and Carthage.
 - We possess several early manuscripts in the third century of James, suggesting that the book was well known and used by early Christians.

Jude

- Debated but likely written by Jude, brother of James and Jesus 50-80AD
- Again, if written by this Jude, it would only be normal for it to have apostolic teaching
- His possible usage of book of Enoch may explain why some had doubts about it, including Jerome
- But it's reception is very positive
 - The Muratorian Canon, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria cited and wrote commentaries on it, Origen received it as fully scripture, Eusebius notes it is to be used publicly in the churches.

2 Peter

- Had a difficult journey into the canon and some modern scholars still won't give Peter attribution to it. (often dated to the early 2nd Century)
- However, there is good reason to believe that it indeed stems from the mid 60's and is written by Peter.
 - Early sources such as 1 Clement and Apocalypse of Peter seem to overlap in several places
 - Justin Martyr in his Dialogue with Trypho makes an allusion to 2 Peter 2:1
 - Irenaeus seems to cite it
 - Clement of Alexandria wrote a commentary on it
 - Origen cites it 6 times and received it as canonical
 - Eusebius put it in the disputed books but it said it was known to most the church
 - Widely received by Jerome, Athanasius, Augustine

Revelation

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Non Heretical Books - Shepherd of Hermas

- Shepherd is the most well known book outside of the NT in early christianity
- Apocalypse type of book detailing a series of visions and revelations given by an angelic messenger to a 2nd Century christian name Hermas.
- He was a christian slave who was sold in Rome, and then set free
- Afterwards, he married and gained fortune, only to lose it all
- His children betrayed him and led a disorderly life
- It is a call to repentance and adherence to a life of strict morality
- Addressed to christians who have a fresh memory of persecution

Non Heretical Books - Shepherd of Hermas

- Has no claim to apostolic authority
 - Rejected by the Muratorian canon as something written “very recently during our times”
 - Clement of Alexandria used it, but never confirmed it’s canonical status
 - Origen values Shepherd and uses it, but keeps it out of his canonical lists
 - Tertullian rejects and also notes that every council has judged it to be apocryphal
 - Eusebius regards it as spurious
 - Athanasius denies its canonical status but affirms its usefulness
 - Does not appear in any 4th century canonical lists
 - Shepherd is included at the end of Codex Sinaiticus but it was common place to put disputed books at end of codex.

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Non Heretical Books - Epistle of Barnabas

- Not a letter but rather a theological tract
- Much of the epistle is concerned with how the Jews have misunderstood their own books and how Christ fulfills the sacrificial portions of the Old Testament.
- Attributed to Barnabas but written by a 2nd century author who remains unknown.
- Clement of Alexandria comes closest to regarding it as canonical as he writes a commentary on it, but never calls it Scripture
- Although Origen uses “it is written” he intentionally leaves it out of his own canonical list
- Absent from Muratorian Canon
- Eusebius classifies it in the “rejected books”
- Irenaeus gives little attention to it
- Not in 4th century canonical lists of Athanasius, Councils of Hippo and Carthage, Laodicea, Cyril of Jerusalem

Heretical Books - Gospel of Thomas

- (107) Jesus said, "The kingdom is like a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. One of them, the largest, went astray. He left the ninety-nine sheep and looked for that one until he found it. When he had gone to such trouble, he said to the sheep, 'I care for you more than the ninety-nine.'"
- (108) Jesus said, "He who will drink from my mouth will become like me. I myself shall become he, and the things that are hidden will be revealed to him."
- (109) Jesus said, "The kingdom is like a man who had a hidden treasure in his field without knowing it. And after he died, he left it to his son. The son did not know (about the treasure). He inherited the field and sold it. And the one who bought it went plowing and found the treasure. He began to lend money at interest to whomever he wished."
- (110) Jesus said, "Whoever finds the world and becomes rich, let him renounce the world."
- (111) Jesus said, "The heavens and the earth will be rolled up in your presence. And the one who lives from the living one will not see death." Does not Jesus say, "Whoever finds himself is superior to the world?"
- (112) Jesus said, "Woe to the flesh that depends on the soul; woe to the soul that depends on the flesh."
- (113) His disciples said to him, "When will the kingdom come?"
- <Jesus said,> "It will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying 'here it is' or 'there it is.' Rather, the kingdom of the father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it."
- (114) Simon Peter said to him, "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life."
- Jesus said, "I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven."

Heretical Books - Gospel of Thomas

- Probably the best known apocryphal gospel in modern times.
- It was part of the discovered documents at Nag Hammadi in 1945
- Contains 114 sayings of Jesus, many of which are rather cryptic and esoteric while others do seem close to the canonical Jesus.
- It lacks the narrative structure that is common with the Gospels
- Leaves out any account of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
- Debatable but probably written in the middle of the 2nd century (not the apostle Thomas)
- It has strong gnostic flavor, showing less of a concern of his divinity and more concerned with teaching us to find the divine spark within ourselves.
- Not mentioned in any early canonical list, not found in any manuscript collections, and often condemned outright by many church fathers.

Heretical Books - Gospel of Peter

- But in the night in which the Lord's day dawned, when the soldiers were safeguarding it two by two in every watch, there was a loud voice in heaven; [36] and they saw that the heavens were opened and that two males who had much radiance had come down from there and come near the sepulcher. [37] But that stone which had been thrust against the door, having rolled by itself, went a distance off the side; and the sepulcher opened, and both the young men entered. [38] And so those soldiers, having seen, awakened the centurion and the elders (for they too were present, safeguarding). [39] And while they were relating what they had seen, again they see three males who have come out from the sepulcher, with the two supporting the other one, and a cross following them, [40] and the head of the two reaching unto heaven, but that of the one being led out by a hand by them going beyond the heavens. [41] And they were hearing a voice from the heavens saying, 'Have you made proclamation to the fallen-asleep?' [42] And an obeisance was heard from the cross, 'Yes.'
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- But it was midday, and darkness held fast all Judea; and they were distressed and anxious lest the sun had set, since he was still living. [For] it is written for them: Let not the sun set on one put to death. [16] And someone of them said: 'Give him to drink gall with vinegary wine.' And having made a mixture, they gave to drink. [17] And they fulfilled all things and completed the sins on their own head. [18] But many went around with lamps, thinking that it was night, and they fell. [19] And the Lord screamed out, saying: 'My power, O power, you have forsaken me.' And having said this, he was taken up.

Heretical Books - Gospel of Peter

- Fragmentary remains from 200 AD but mostly from 8th and 9th century documents.
- Narrative style gospel, mainly focused on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.
- Probably written in the middle of the 2nd century
- A Majority of scholars show its dependence on the canonical gospels
- Used by some church fathers, but never factored into canonical discussions or any of the lists
- Condemned outright by Eusebius and others as being “altogether wicked and impious”

Seeing Canon through Manuscripts

Although we can see which books the early Christians preferred by early church fathers citations and usage, we can also get a glimpse in their preference by looking at the physical remains of early christian writings

- NT documents were by far the most popular
- Over 60 manuscripts from second and third centuries
- Most copies come from Matthew, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, Hebrews, Revelation
- John has 18 copies
- During the same period, we have 17 total manuscripts coming from apocryphal writings such as Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Mary, Gospel of Peter, etc. Gospel of Thomas has the most with 3.

We aren't using this as a rule but mainly to show that Christianity was a very bookish religion and found its identity within literary texts.

Seeing Canon through Manuscripts

- Even before we get our later complete codices, we can still see a trend on how early Christians grouped multiple books within a single manuscript
- There is no instance where an apocryphal gospel is joined with canonical Gospels within a single manuscript
- Gospels
 - P75 (late 2nd,early 3rd) - contains portions of Luke and John
 - Matthew and Mark as P4 and P64+67 appear to come from the same codex
 - P45 (250AD) contain all 4 gospels and Acts
 - Other contain multiple gospels plus even the ones that contain just one book show signs of it being part of a larger collection.
 - Gospels have titles “gospel according to...John, Mark, Matthew, Luke”
 - These titles are evidence that Christians at a very early point, were knowingly linking Gospels with one another, even when they occurred within a single Gospel manuscript.

The Codex

- The most notable feature of the early Christian manuscripts was that they were almost always in the Codex form (our modern day book type.)
- It is established that it was widely established Christian practice by the late 1st, early 2nd century.
- Why?
 - It is true that practicality was one (convenient, size, cost)
 - But probably the best suggestion is that it could do something a roll could never do: Hold all four Gospels in one volume.
 - This could be regarded as a symptom of the canon's development.
 - A sign that Christians were already linking some books together and excluding others.

Other characteristics of the Manuscripts

- Some NT Manuscripts Contain Reading Aids
 - Strongly suggests that they were used for liturgical reading in public rather than private
 - Examples of reading aids are: sense breaks, breathing marks, punctuation points, accents
 - Divide up the text in a manner that would be suitable for public reading
- Lines per page difference
 - Many manuscripts tend to have anywhere from 25-28 lines per page when some other classical literary texts have near 50.
 - Such spacing seems to be designed to ease the task of public reading aloud
- Size of the Codex
 - Our earliest codices are mostly not in the miniature format showing that early on they were created for use in public worship
- “On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read” - Justin Martyr

NT Canon Study - Complete

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