

Can I Trust The Bible?

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Introduction:

Where does this seminar fit at Summer Conference?

This is a seminar on the historical reliability of the New Testament. Therefore we will spend the next four days looking at several objections the reliability of the New Testament and why you can trust that it is a reliable historical record of Jesus' life and work and the early decades of the Christian church.

If your questions have more to do with science and Christianity or other objections to Christianity like, "Is Christianity exclusive?" or "The Problem of Evil and Suffering" then now would be a good time to switch seminars. We have two seminars that are related to this one but will focus on different questions.

1. *Doubts: Considering Common Reasons for Rejecting Christianity*
2. *Faith and Science: A Theological and Philosophical Conversation*

Two views of the bible: Irrelevant or Absurd

I want to start our time together with a story from, New Testament Professor Bart Ehrman in a book he wrote a couple years ago. He teaches a New Testament Introduction class to undergraduates at UNC-Chapel Hill. At the beginning of the semester he does a little experiment with his students to discover their views of the bible.

"[A] few years ago...I started asking my undergraduate classes about their views of the bible. I get the same response every year. The first day of class, with over three hundred students present, I ask: 'How many of you would agree with the proposition that the Bible is the inspired Word of God?' Whoosh! Virtually everyone in the auditorium raises their hand. I then ask, 'How many of you have read one or more of the Harry Potter books?' Whoosh! The whole auditorium. Then I ask, 'And how many of you have read the entire bible.'(sic) Scattered hands, a few students here and there.

I always laugh and say, "Okay, look. I'm not saying that I think God wrote the Bible. You're telling me that you think God wrote the Bible. I can see why you might want to read a book by J.K. Rowling. But if God wrote a book...wouldn't you want to see what he has to say?" For me it's just one of the mysteries of the universe: how so many people can revere the Bible and think that in it is God's inspired revelation to his people, and yet know so little about it."¹

The reason I share this story with you is to acknowledge what is true for many people. The bible is either *irrelevant* or *absurd*². Even if you do believe the bible is an important book, my guess is a good bit of the time you're not real sure what relevance the bible is supposed to have for your life. On the other hand, my guess is you or someone you know have read things in the bible that you just can't accept or may be offensive to you.

¹ Bart Ehrman, *Jesus Interrupted*, 2009. pgs. 225-226.

² A.J. Jacobs, *The Year of Living Biblically*, Simon & Schuster 2007.



The reason I make this point is because we all come with our questions and doubts about the bible from different backgrounds and experiences. For some of you the question of the reliability of the bible is more theoretical or intellectual. While for others of you the bible represents awful memories or experiences or creates anxiety about your identity and future. At the risk of being overly simplistic, wrestling with what we are talking about this week may be the first step in finding peace and hope for both kinds of people.

Inspiration & Reliability

Over the next four days we will look at a number of objections to the historical reliability of the bible. In doing so I am going to focus primarily on the four gospels because they give us the richest and fullest picture of who Jesus is and what he came to do. Therefore, what you believe about Jesus is primary. What you believe about the bible is secondary. In other words, your view of the bible must be derived from what you believe about Jesus.

While I am arguing for the historical reliability of the New Testament and the gospels in particular, I am not arguing for nor trying to convince you of the inerrancy or inspiration of the bible. My sole purpose is to make a case for the general historical reliability of the four Gospels and the New Testament in general by trying to address some common objections.

Why do I need to make this point? Simply put your view of the bible is not what saves you. Jesus is the one who alone rescues sinners and renews a broken world. Therefore,...

1. It is not necessary for you to believe the bible to be inerrant or inspired before you can honestly grapple with the life and claims of Jesus. We only need to establish the basic historical reliability of the Gospels and the NT documents.
2. However, if the gospels and the NT in general are historically reliable then we must accept as reliable Jesus' view of the bible and all of its implications for our lives.
3. Then and only then can we begin to answer questions about the bible's character as inspired and inerrant.

For example, listen to what Jesus says to the Jewish religious leaders who were seeking to kill him for calling God as his Father. (John 5:37-39.)

John 5:37 And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, 38 and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. 39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

What's the point? It is entirely possible to believe certain things, even very true things about the character of the bible and yet not believe in Jesus. Therefore to believe certain things about the bible doesn't make you a Christian. Jesus' point in John 5 is this: a true understanding of the character of the bible requires coming to him and trusting him.

Interpretation and Reliability



I have one more item to mention by way of introduction. It is vitally important for you to recognize the difference between reliability and interpretation. By trying to demonstrate the historical reliability of the four gospels and the New Testament more generally, I am not advocating any particular interpretation on any given text. The question of interpretation, though extremely important, is not what I am dealing with in this seminar. All I am trying to do is present you with a case for the historical reliability of the four gospels and the New Testament in general in the hope that you will read the bible with confidence and know that wrestling with what the scriptures mean is worth your time.

The Biblical Criticism Defeater

The issue we are dealing with is called the “Biblical Criticism Defeater,” which goes like this: “*Objective scholarship has cast very strong doubts on the historical reliability of the Gospels and as a result you can’t know very much about what Jesus actually said or did from them.*”³ Here are a couple examples of this viewpoint:

Dr. Avrum Stroll, Prof. of Philosophy, Univ. of British Columbia

*“An accretion of legends grew up about [Jesus], was incorporated into the Gospels by various devotees of the movement, was rapidly spread throughout the Mediterranean world by the ministry of Paul, and that because this is so, it is impossible to separate these legendary elements in the purported descriptions of Jesus from those which in fact were true of him.”*⁴

Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and The Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels*

*“The Jesus of the gospels is an imaginative theological construct, into which has been woven traces of that enigmatic sage from Nazareth—traces that cry out for recognition and liberation from the firm grip of those whose faith overpowered their memories. The search for the authentic Jesus is a search for the forgotten Jesus.”*⁵

Perhaps you are wondering, “Why all the fuss about whether or not the New Testament in general and the Gospels in particular are historically reliable? At the end of the day isn’t the point of the Gospels to provide us with a rich ethic of moral and civic virtue that if followed would radically transform our lives and the world we live in? Does it really matter if the events the gospels record actually happened?”

Listen to what the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians (c. 55) 15:16-17 *...if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.* In this verse Paul stresses the vital importance of what actually happened in history for Christian faith. For Paul if the resurrection of Jesus did not happen your faith is meaningless. In other words, there is no such thing as faith or belief in a Jesus who didn’t actually walk this earth, suffer and die, and rise again. New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce put it this way:

³ Tim Keller, “Defeaters” III: *Biblical Criticism*, June 2001. Unpublished. p. 1.

⁴ Quoted from Tim Keller, “Defeaters” III: *Biblical Criticism*, June 2001. Unpublished. p. 2.

⁵ Quoted from J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss The Real Jesus And Mislead Popular Culture*. Kregel, 2006. p. 21.



*"[The] historical 'once-for-all-ness' of Christianity, which distinguishes it from those religious and philosophical systems which are not [...] related to any particular time, makes the reliability of the writings which report to record this revelation a question of first importance."*⁶

The significance of this point can be applied personally in this way: "The central message of every other religion is 'you are saved by what you do, by living [a good life, however defined]' But the central message of the Christian documents is the very opposite. It is 'you are saved not by what you do, but by what Jesus has done. He has entered into history and lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died.'"⁷

Before we take a look at a number of objections to the reliability of the NT, what questions do you have about the bible's reliability?

Objection #1: "The Gospels aren't eyewitness accounts, they were written long after the events of which they speak."⁸

The first objection we are going to look at has to do with the dating of the documents in question. This objection often goes like this: "The Gospels aren't eyewitness accounts, they were written long after the events of which they speak so we don't really know if what the gospels say really happened." So the issue in question is this: when were the documents written and were they written so long after the events that they can't be trusted as reliable accounts of those events? In the 19th and 20th century many scholars believed that the NT was written over 100 years after the events it describes. However, there is very strong evidence to the contrary.

In order to answer this objection we need to consider two things. First we need to look at the evidence for when the gospels and other NT documents were written. Second we need to examine the claim that the gospels and other NT documents aren't based on eyewitness accounts.

1. The existence of manuscripts. (see Table 1 and 2)

When it comes to dating historical documents we need look at the dating of the manuscript evidence available to us. The most significant piece of manuscript evidence we have for determining the basic time frame for the writing of the NT comes from a fragment of a manuscript called P52. The P52 fragment is a small section of verses from the Gospel of John. At first this might seem completely irrelevant to you. But listen to what Bruce

⁶ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Eerdmans, 1981. p. 2.

⁷ Tim Keller, "Defeaters" III: *Biblical Criticism*, June 2001. Unpublished. p. 12

⁸ See Richard Bauckham, *Jesus And The Eyewitnesses: The Gospels As Eyewitness Testimony*. Eerdmans, 2006. See Tim Keller, "Defeaters" III: *Biblical Criticism*, June 2001. Unpublished. p. 6.

Metzger, New Testament scholar at Princeton and leading expert in NT Textual Criticism, says about this fragment of John's Gospel dated to c. A.D. 125.

"Although the extent of the verses preserved is so slight, in one respect this tiny scrap of papyrus possesses quite as much evidential value as would the complete [book]. Just as Robinson Crusoe, seeing but a single footprint in the sand, concluded that another human being, with two feet, was present on the island with him, so P52 proves the existence and use of the fourth Gospel during the first half of the second century [AD 100-130] in a provincial town along the Nile, far removed from its traditional place of composition (Ephesus in Asia Minor). Had this little fragment been known during the middle of the past century,...New Testament criticism...could not have argued that the fourth Gospel was not composed until the year 160."⁹

The evidence of this fragment makes it virtually impossible to date the writing of John's gospel any later than AD 90-95. Virtually all scholars believe that John is the latest of the four gospels and along with the book of Revelation the latest of all the New Testament books.¹⁰

Therefore, what this manuscript evidence confirms is this: the entire NT was written within 15 to 60 years after the life of Jesus. This means the entire NT was written within the life-time of people who would have been eyewitnesses to Jesus' life and ministry, which leads to the second piece of evidence against this objection.

2. The question of eyewitnesses to Jesus.

When we pay close attention to the NT documents we discover their own evidence for their eyewitness character. It is generally believed that Paul's letters were written 15-20 years after Jesus' death. When we come to 1 Corinthians 15 (c. 55 A.D.) we read something very intriguing.

1 Corinthians 15:3-6 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive,....

Here Paul is telling us that after Jesus rose from the dead he appeared to hundreds of his followers the vast majority of whom were still alive in 55 A.D. As we will see later, the presence of eyewitnesses to Jesus life, death and resurrection would have served as a check against any fabricated claims about Jesus.

In connection to Paul's reference to eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection in 1 Cor. 15:6, we can draw a further conclusion: 20 of the 27 New Testament books were written before or

⁹ Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. Oxford, 2005. p. 56.

¹⁰ See Bart D. Ehrman. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction To The Early Christian Writings*. Oxford, 2007. Pgs. 229-230, 478.



within 10 years of when Paul wrote 1 Cor. 15:6.¹¹ That is to say, we have every reason to believe the gospels and the NT in general are in fact eyewitness accounts of Jesus.

Objection #2: “The gospels are legends not reliable history.”¹²

While we have already attempted to show that we can accurately describe the NT and the gospels in particular as written by people who were either eyewitnesses to Jesus or in a position to get and report accurate historical information based on eye-witness testimony, we need to ask whether or not the documents themselves demonstrate a concern for reporting reliable history. This objection often goes like this: *“Ancient writers were not interested in the difference between fact and legend or in preserving reliable history. Mythical elements were woven into historical records. They felt free to embellish and revise and add.”*¹³

There are at least five responses to this objection that we need to consider.

1. The historical concern of the NT writers
2. The synergy between oral and written tradition
3. The presence of hard and embarrassing sayings
4. The lack of reference in the gospels to known controversies in the early church
5. The literary style of the gospels

1. The historical concern of the NT writers

The evidence from Luke’s Gospel and thus Acts

Before we look at Luke 1:1-4 which is crucial at this point in our discussion, we need to recognize that Luke is the first part of a two part work which includes the book of Acts. Luke 1:1-4 functions as a prologue to both Luke and Acts. Consider the opening verses of each book in succession.

Luke 1:1 1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Acts 1:1-3 1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 To them he presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

When taken together it becomes quite clear that the character of Luke’s gospel as he defines it in Luke 1:1-4 holds true also for Acts. In the introduction to his gospel, Luke is

¹¹ With the exception of the Gospel of John, perhaps 2 Peter, 1,2,3 John, Jude, and Revelation

¹² See F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Eerdmans, 1981 and Timothy Keller, *The Reason For God: Belief In An Age Of Skepticism*. Dutton, 2008.

¹³ Tim Keller, “Defeaters” III: *Biblical Criticism*, June 2001. Unpublished. p. 5.

claiming that what he has written is true and historically reliable.¹⁴ He makes his case by describing four stages in the development of Luke's account of Jesus' life.

Stage 1: The eyewitnesses testified to what they had seen and heard (Acts 1:1-3, 8; 1 John 1:1-3)

Stage 2: The eyewitnesses "handed down" their testimony (Acts 1:8; re: John 14:26)

Stage 3: Many others wrote down the eyewitness testimony of these events

Stage 4: With intimate knowledge, Luke also decides to write an "orderly account"

By including these stages in the introduction to his gospel Luke is trying to teach us at least three things.

- First, there was ample material to draw from and against which to check his work.
- Second, Luke did extensive research and is citing his sources thereby making a robust claim for trustworthiness.
- Third, Luke's introduction is an invitation to his original readers to look into the reliability of his account by asking people who saw and wrote about the life and work of Jesus. (re: 1 Cor. 15:6; 1 Corinthians written c. 55 A.D.; Luke written c. early 60's A.D.)

While ancient history writing doesn't correspond to our modern day "biography," Luke argues strongly for the historical reliability of his account according to the historical standards of his day. As one commentator on Luke's Gospel argues, "Luke is making a claim for the trustworthiness of his book. This opening sentence is designed to impress, to underscore the believability of the narrative by its claims to offer rigorous standards of research, and thus to gain a favorable hearing.... Luke himself raises the question of 'truth' or 'certainty,' and suggests that a primary ingredient that will lead to certainty for Theophilus is the order of the narrative.... By providing a more complete accounting of Jesus in his significance, Luke hopes to encourage active faith."¹⁵

The purpose of drawing your attention to this passage is perhaps more than anywhere else, we see the intense concern for writing a reliable history. Unless we are prepared to impose historical standards that are alien to the 1st century we are very hard pressed to conclude that Luke and others with him were not concerned to write a reliable account of the life and ministry of Jesus. But even if we can say that Luke, for example, was trying to write reliable history how can we have confidence that what he heard from others wasn't embellished?

¹⁴ Green, Joel B., NICNT:*The Gospel of Luke*. Eerdmans, 1997. pgs. 34-36. "In narratives, the narrator is typically concerned to communicate that his or her voices of the story is "true." For works like Luke's, this was accomplished with reference to firsthand knowledge of the subject matter – through intimacy with the tradition as well as research and/or personal experience. Openings also set a work within the larger context of other known literary productions, establishing a network of relationships with existing works, inviting comparisons of all kinds. As the 'first step in the intentional production of meaning,' a literary opening suggests continuity or discontinuity with predecessors, and so encourages the reader to approach what follows with a certain set of...expectations.... Luke is making a claim for the trustworthiness of his book. This opening sentence is designed to impress, to underscore the believability of the narrative by its claims to offer rigorous standards of research, and thus to gain a favorable hearing.... Luke himself raises the question of 'truth' or 'certainty,' and suggests that a primary ingredient that will lead to certainty for Theophilus is the *order* of the narrative.... By providing a more complete accounting of Jesus in his significance, Luke hopes to encourage active faith."

¹⁵ Green, Joel B., NICNT:*The Gospel of Luke*. Eerdmans, 1997. pgs. 35-36.

2. The synergy between oral and written tradition

Many scholars now believe that Jewish oral tradition would have governed the oral transmission of what Jesus said and did. Jewish oral tradition put great value and importance on learning accurately and preserving what a respected teacher said and taught.

New Testament Scholar Craig Blomberg commented on recent research into Jewish oral tradition in his book *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*. “[T]here is every reason to believe that many of the sayings and actions of Jesus would have been carefully safeguarded in the first decades of the church’s history, not so slavishly as to hamper freedom to paraphrase, explain, abbreviate and rearrange, but faithfully enough to produce reliable accounts of those facets of Christ’s ministry selected for preservation.”¹⁶

Even if the oral transmission of the sayings and actions of Jesus were at times embellished we see in the pages of the NT a deep concern to check and correct any falsification. Again Luke 1:1-4 tells us that at the time he wrote his Gospel there were both written and oral accounts against which to check his claims.

Luke 1:1-4 1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

2 Thessalonians 2:15 (c. AD 50) refers to both written and oral communication within 20 years of the life of Jesus.

2Th. 2:15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

3. The presence of hard and embarrassing sayings

While a better understand of Jewish oral tradition is helpful we need also to look at the gospels themselves to see if there is any evidence to support the concern to preserve the sayings and actions of Jesus whether oral or written.

The more you read the gospels the more you are likely to notice how the disciples of Jesus are repeatedly shown to be rather stupid and selfish. But interestingly even though the disciples were to be the leaders of the church after Jesus’ ministry and the four gospels were written 25-40 years after Jesus’ life, embarrassing and difficult sayings are still present in the gospels. Here are a few examples.

¹⁶ Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2nd Ed.. IVP 2007. p. 62.



The example of Peter

Take Peter for example, the leader of the disciples. In Mt. 16:23/Mk. 8:33 right after answering correctly Jesus' question of, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter rebukes Jesus for rejecting the idea the Jesus must suffer and die and rise again on the third day. To this rebuke Jesus responds with, "get behind me satan." This is an embarrassing saying if there ever was one. Right after Jesus blesses Peter for proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God he is called Satan. If the eye-witnesses and writers of the gospels felt at liberty to change the story my guess is this would have been on the top of the list. But yet it appears in two of the four gospels.

The example of James and John

Another example is Mk. 10:37, 41 in which James and John request to sit at Jesus right hand in glory. Almost comically after the request the text tells us the rest of the disciples were "indignant" toward James and John. This story reads like a preschool classroom full of three year olds.

The example of Jesus' baptism

A final example comes from passages (Mt. 3:13-17/Mk. 1:4,9-11/Lk. 3:21-22) which recount the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. The baptism of John is described as a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Why would Jesus need to be baptized if he was without sin?

Wherever these difficult and embarrassing sayings occur one would think they would be smoothed out or deleted so as to avoid confusion. However, there are so many that it argues strongly that the early church and the apostles did not feel free to invent or change the words and actions of Jesus.

Under the first objection we've tried to establish that the writing of the New Testament documents, "from the standpoint of historical research, [was] satisfactorily short." In addition we've tried to establish that the New Testament documents and the gospels in particular were written by people who were either eyewitnesses to Jesus or in a position to get and report accurate historical information based on eyewitness testimony.

4. The lack of reference in the gospels to known controversies.

The vast majority of Paul's letters were written before the Gospels, but no Gospel records Jesus dealing explicitly with controversies that receive explicit attention in Paul's letters. (e.g. circumcision/Galatians).

This fact argues strongly that the Gospel writers and those from whom they got their information did not feel free to invent "Jesus incidents." This is particularly striking in light

of Acts 15, which describes an official church council during which they discussed the pressing issue of circumcision as it relates to salvation.

If the later church was trying to argue for a particular theological or ecclesiastical agenda by altering the stories to serve their purposes we would expect to see issues faced by Paul, Peter, James, as well as others on the lips of Jesus advocating a particular viewpoint on those controversies. But nowhere do we see the gospel writers doing this.

5. The literary style of the gospels.

The Gospels often include details that are “irrelevant” (i.e. don’t add anything to the story) to the story and would be difficult to make up many years later. However, they further establish the reliability of the account precisely because these details would require eyewitness testimony followed by meticulous concern to preserve the story handed down. Let me give you just two examples.

In John 21 Jesus asks his disciples to bring ashore some of the fish they just caught. In verse 11 we read

“So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them....”

The inclusion of the exact number of the fish is an example of an “irrelevant detail” that doesn’t add anything to the story. But its presence argues for an eyewitness account and a meticulous concern to preserve the story as it is handed down.

A second example comes from Mark 4 where Jesus calms the storm. There are a number of examples in this story of “irrelevant details” that add to the historical reliability of the account.

35 On that day, **when evening had come**, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” 36 And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. 37 And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. 38 But he was **in the stern, asleep on the cushion**.

The specific time of day “when evening had come” in verse 35 and the exact location of Jesus’ nap “in the stern, asleep on the cushion” in verse 38 are details that don’t add to the story but argue for historical reliability by virtue of their inclusion in the story.

Objection #3: “The Gospels aren’t objective. They are full of bias.”

Perhaps you are willing to grant that the gospel writers were trying to write reliable history. However, regardless of their claim to be historically reliable accounts of Jesus life and ministry, let’s face it they aren’t objective. They are full of bias.

This objection has a measure of truth in it. The Gospel writers, as well as other authors of the New Testament are definitely writing with a bias, or put more positively a particular purpose. However, it is widely recognized today that no one can report or describe any historical event without selecting what details to include and exclude. The notion that there is an objective viewpoint from which one can give an “un-biased” account simply does not exist. When confronted with the reality that everyone is biased, it is very important to discern what was the purpose of what the author did write. Whatever we might say about the bias or purpose of the gospel writers what we’ve said so far argues strongly against any notion that “bias” means distorting the gospel records for some self-interested agenda. The best way to handle this objection is simply to refer to what we’ve already been saying.

1. The relatively short amount of time between written record and the event recorded.
2. The existence of contemporary eyewitnesses and of corroborative testimonies and writings.
3. The existence of so many ‘hard’ and ‘embarrassing’ sayings that the early church did not feel at liberty to change.
4. The concern for accurate and reliable transmission of the words and actions of Jesus.
5. The lack of known controversies in the early church reflected in the gospel stories.
6. The inclusion of “irrelevant details” in the gospel records.

Objection #4: “The Gospels are full of contradictions.”

Even if you are willing to grant even some of what I’ve been saying, sooner or later as you read the gospels you are likely to encounter what would appear to be a complete contradiction. And if there are contradictions in the gospels how do we know which is right?

So how can we begin to address the objection that the Gospels are full of contradictions. We need to keep in mind two basic principles.

1. The highly selective use of data by each gospel writer.

This objection is related to the previous one. No one is able to write an “objective” account in which any and every detail is presented in a totally “unbiased” way. It is inherent in any historical record that one must select certain details to include and certain details to exclude in keeping with the writer’s purpose. The Gospel makes this very point in John 21:25.

²⁵ Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

So, the first thing we need to remember when it comes to the differences between the Gospels is they are selective accounts by different writers who were selecting, arranging, and presenting the words and actions about Jesus in ways that were consistent with their

goals. Each writer was seeking to answer certain specific questions and make certain specific points.

Therefore, the first step in making sense of the differences we encounter in the Gospels is to try to understand the purpose for which the writer included and arranged the material he chose. In other words whenever you come across a difficult passage that appears to be in conflict with another gospel, the first step is to try to discern what is the purpose of each author at that point and in the surrounding paragraphs.

Here is an example from John 20:1 compared to Matthew, Mark and Luke. In John 20:1, John mentions that only Mary Magdalene went to the tomb, while Luke says “they went to the tomb” – plural, Mark says “Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome” went to the tomb, and Matthew says “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.”

Upon examination it becomes clear that John was drawing attention to Mary Magdalene to emphasize her reaction to the empty tomb and conversation with Jesus, which is clear from the surrounding context (re: 20:11-18).

However, even though John emphasizes Mary Magdalene’s role in this story, John also indicates that Mary Magdalene was not alone in her interchange at the empty tomb by the way *she* describes her visit to the empty tomb to Peter. “So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and **we** do not know where they laid him.” (re: Jn. 20:2).

The result is there is no contradiction between these differing accounts. Each writer was giving an account of the events from the vantage point that best served his purposes.

2. The selectivity of eyewitness memory.

Again it is important to remember that even when it comes to eye-witness testimony each person would have witnessed an event from his or her vantage point and as a result may differ in their description of a given event. And we must concede, given what we’ve already said, that there were potentially many eyewitnesses to the events recorded in the gospels which helps to explain the differing perspectives or viewpoints between different accounts.

As an example let’s return to John 20 and Mary Magdalene’s journey to Jesus’ tomb, John says “Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, *while it was still dark* (20:1).” But Matthew says it was “*toward the dawn* of the first day of the week” (Mt. 28:1) and Mark says, “very early on the first day of the week, *when the sun had risen* (Mk. 16:2). It is clear from each of these passages that the writers are referring to the same time of day but their description is different.



The point is that “all of them might have remembered the incident in the very same way, and yet described the ‘dark-turning-light’ moment in a different way. Reliance on a real historical [eye-witness account] can account for the selectivity and different descriptions of the events and words described.”¹⁷

The important point to take from this section is that selectivity is not contradiction. “What is striking is how much *is* repeated in more than one Gospel. The unity of the [Gospels] witness to Jesus’ life is much more impressive than its diversity. The fact the each evangelist remained highly selective in which details he chose to include in no way impugn the historical accuracy of the information he did incorporate.”¹⁸

To be sure there are more difficult examples to work out, but remembering these two principles along with a good commentary will help you grow in your confidence in the reliability of the Gospels. If this objection is really troubling to you I would recommend that you read chapter 4 of Craig Blomberg’s book *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*.

Objection #5: “We don’t have the originals. We only have copies.”¹⁹

Well you might say, “that’s all fine and good but we don’t have the original documents, we only have copies, so how can we have any confidence that the documents we today call the New Testament are at all reflective of what actually happened or was actually written?”

Dr. Ehrman is very helpful in articulating this very position. He says, “*Not only do we not have the originals, we don’t have the first copies of the originals. We don’t even have copies of the copies of the originals, or copies of the copies of the copies of the originals. What we have are copies made later – much later. In most instances, they are copies made many centuries later. And these copies all differ from one another, in many thousands of places...Possibly it is easiest to put it in comparative terms: there are more differences among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.*”²⁰

How are we to deal with this position? While it is true that we only have copies of the original NT documents, the problem isn’t that we don’t have the originals. We don’t have the originals of any ancient document. The real issue is whether or not we have a sufficient number and quality of manuscripts to reconstruct the original. At first this may be alarming, but this is how all historians approach any ancient document (e.g. Livy or Tacitus or Suetonius). To put the issue this way means we need to consider two things: 1) the number and quality of New Testament manuscripts available to us and 2) the task of discerning what the original documents said, which is called Textual Criticism.

¹⁷ Tim Keller, “Defeaters” III: *Biblical Criticism*, June 2001, p. 9.

¹⁸ Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2nd Ed., IVP 2007, p. 172.

¹⁹ See Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text Of The New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, And Restoration*. Oxford, 2005.

²⁰ Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed The Bible And Why*. Harper San Francisco, 2005, p. 10.



The number and quality of manuscripts

In considering the number and quality of NT manuscripts (MSS) available to us it is helpful to put them in perspective with other ancient documents (see Table 1). When we compare the oldest MSS of other ancient documents, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning²¹, we discover the evidence for the NT documents is far greater than any other ancient document.

First, let's consider the number of available MSS. If we only use the number of Greek MSS of the NT documents there are 5600. The next closest is Homer's Iliad with 643 MSS. When we compare the time span between the original documents and the oldest copies, the NT MSS we have date from 100 to 200 years after the original. The closest ancient documents are MSS of Livy that date from 300 years after the original. The next closest is 500 years, then 750 years, 800 years, 1000 years, and so on.

When we consider all the NT MSS available beyond the Greek MSS, which would include MSS in Syriac, Latin, Coptic, and Aramaic, the total MSS base for the NT is over 24,000. To put the matter this way is not to say that all these MSS are of equal value for establishing as closely as possible the original documents. It is simply to say that we have a preponderance of evidence by which to assess and evaluate any differences that exist between MSS.

Textual Criticism²²

However, as I just mentioned, there are differences between these MSS and if we are going to resolve those differences we need to do so in a way that will enable us to reconstruct the original document as accurately as possible. This is called Textual Criticism.²³ Here is a definition of Textual Criticism "[Textual Criticism] determine(s) as exactly as possible from the available evidence the original words of the documents in question."²⁴ Textual critics call the differences between MSS "textual variants" and a variant is defined as "Any place among the manuscripts in which there is variation in wording, including word order, omission or addition of words, and even spelling differences."²⁵

Textual criticism, as you are probably thinking, is a very dry and tedious field of study. So I won't bore you with lots of explanation. However, the most basic principle of Textual Criticism is – *Choose the reading that best explains the rise of the others*. Two corollaries to this basic principle help to explain it. First, textual criticism tends to prefer a harder reading to understand because scribes tended to make harder readings easier to understand. Second, textual criticism tends to prefer shorter readings as opposed to longer ones because scribes tended to add words not take them away. There is a great deal more

²¹ F.F. Bruce. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Eerdmans, 1981, p. 10. "The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning."

²² For more information on Textual Criticism see the Appendix on Textual Criticism.

²³ For short introduction to textual criticism see J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction To New Testament Textual Criticism*. Hendrickson, 1995.

²⁴ F.F. Bruce. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Eerdmans, 1981. p. 14.

²⁵ Darrell L. Bock & Daniel B. Wallace. *Dethroning Jesus: Exposing Popular Culture's Quest To Unseat The Biblical Christ*. Nelson, 2007. p. 54.

that I could say about Textual Criticism. However, before we leave this objection I want to speak to the way the reality of textual variants is sometimes presented.

Taken together there are 300,000 to 400,000 variants in the NT. At present the Greek New Testament has about 138,000 words, which means, on average, for every word in the Greek New Testament there are at least two or three variants.²⁶ If we left it at that you might get the impression there is no way the NT is reliable. However, out of the 300,000 to 400,000 variants only 1% or 3000-4000 variants are considered by Textual Critics to be differences that affect the meaning of the text and are viable. “By ‘meaningful’ we mean that the variant changes the meaning of the text to *some degree*. It may not be terribly significant, but if the variant affects our understanding of the passage, then it is meaningful. To argue large-scale skepticism because we cannot be certain about a very small portion of the text is a careless overstatement....”²⁷

Let me offer just one example to illustrate what is meant by a variant that is meaningful. Take the longer ending to Mark 16. The oldest MSS show Mark ending at verse 8 while younger MSS include verses 9-20. The MSS evidence we have argues strongly in favor of not seeing verses 9-20 as original. Why do Textual Critics make that decision? Remember the basic principle of textual criticism -- *Choose the reading that best explains the rise of the others*. When compared with the other gospels, Mark’s gospel ends very abruptly if it ends at verse 8 thus given rise to the need to add a conclusion similar to the other gospels which is not uncommon given scribal tendency to harmonize the gospels. The evidence for concluding that verses 9-20 are a scribal addition fits with the principles of preferring the harder reading and the shorter reading.

I want to conclude addressing this objection with a quotation by NT Textual Critic, Bruce Metzger. “*Besides textual evidence derived from New Testament Greek manuscripts and from early versions, the textual critic has available the numerous scriptural quotations included in the commentaries, sermons, and other treatises written by early Church Fathers. Indeed, so extensive are these citations that if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament.*”²⁸

The point of what we are saying is the MSS evidence, even with all the variants, only adds to our ability to establish an historically reliable text.²⁹

²⁶ J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss The Real Jesus And Mislead Popular Culture*. Kregel, 2006. p. 54. Darrell L. Bock & Daniel B. Wallace. *Dethroning Jesus: Exposing Popular Culture’s Quest To Unseat The Biblical Christ*. Nelson, 2007. p. 52.

²⁷ J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss The Real Jesus And Mislead Popular Culture*. Kregel, 2006. p. 60. “In this regard, it needs to be remembered that plenary, verbal inspiration (inspiration at the level of words and extending to every word) does not mean that every word in Scripture has the same semantic importance or is equally crucial to its meaning. Nor does verbal inspiration mean that we must have every word of an autograph if we are to understand any word.” Richard B. Gaffin Jr. “The Canon of the New Testament” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, Edited by Harvie M. Conn, Baker, 1988. p. 182.

²⁸ Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. Oxford, 2005. p.126.

²⁹ For additional explanation see Darrell L. Bock & Daniel B. Wallace. *Dethroning Jesus: Exposing Popular Culture’s Quest To Unseat The Biblical Christ*. Nelson, 2007. pgs. 43-76



Objection #6: “The Canon of the New Testament is incomplete.”

Even if you’re willing to grant what we’ve already said, you still may be wondering, “yea but how do we know that what we are calling the NT is the complete picture? How do we know we have the right books?”

The Basic Idea

There is a personal God who is the creator and sustainer of all things who made human beings to live in perfect communion and fellowship with him. But we have rebelled against him and sought to become our own Lord and Savior. Despite our rejection of him, God sent his unique and final agent, his beloved son, Jesus Christ, to accomplish redemption and to restore sinners to a right relationship with him through faith in his son. The report of this work of redemption is reliable and has been written down and preserved. He will make sure we can find out what it all means. And he will make sure we get the right books that communicate to us what he wants for us to know. That’s what canon is all about. But there are still several things we can say about canon to reinforce this basic idea.

Brief Historical Overview

First what do we mean by the Canon of the NT. “Canon refers to the authoritative collection of books, which forms the “standard” or “rule” of the Christian Church.”

Second it is important to recognize and appreciate that the development of the canon was a slow and very organic process. Contrary to what some would say, there was no one official council or group or individual that determined the canon of the NT. Despite the long history of the development of the canon, we can make two broad generalizations that simplify this organic process.

As early as the first half of the 2nd Cent. (AD 100-150) the church was already dealing with fundamental issues related to the idea of the canon. A figure by the name of Marcion (c. 80-c.160) was the first figure to really press the question of a canonical list of books. In fact he was the first figure we know of to make an exclusive list of canonical books. However, due to his theological commitments, he rejected the entire Old Testament and all of the New Testament except for a highly edited form of Luke’s Gospel and edited forms of Paul’s letters. The fact that Marcion compiled a list that caused controversy in the early church argues strongly that the idea of the canon was already present in the early church even if not explicitly stated. Marcion represents for us the struggle in the early church to recognize what books should be included in the canon. On the other hand, a figure by the name of Montanus (late 2nd Cent.) represents the opposite struggle for the early church to recognize what should not be included in the canon. Montanus claimed to receive ‘new prophecy’ from the Holy Spirit, which he believed was new revelation in addition to any written documents there might be. In light of discussions today about the inclusion or exclusion of



certain books in the New Testament Canon (e.g. Gospel of Judas) we need to remember that these issues are not new in the history of the church.

What conclusions we draw from the historical information available to us about the establishment of the NT Canon?

First we can say on the basis of a passage like 2 Thess. 2:15 [So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by four letter.] that there was a clear consciousness among the early church that the written traditions of the apostles as Jesus chosen representatives were to be for the church an authoritative rule of faith and life even after the ministry of the apostles. We will come back to this in a moment when we talk about the “self-establishing character of the NT canon.”

Second based on the writings and evidence from the 2nd century (c. 180 AD) the four gospels, Acts, the thirteen letters of Paul, 1 Peter, and 1 John were widely accepted throughout the church as canonical (20 of the 27).³⁰ Due to the early churches reaction to Marcion and his edited list of the Canon, we are led to infer that there was already an idea of the canon present in the early church as early as c. 100 AD. The Canon of the NT as we have it today was settled by the end of the 4th Cent. in the Western, Latin speaking, church and by the middle of the 6th Cent. in the Syrian church.

Criteria of Canonicity

As helpful as these conclusions are we still need to ask, what criteria can we use to determine which books should be included in the canon? When we consider the information available to us from the early church there are at least four criteria that are helpful for establishing which books are canonical.

The first is *apostolicity*. Only the books written by an apostle or someone closely associate with the apostolic circle should be included in the canon. However, this criterion fails for the following reasons. First, Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews, Jude, and most likely James are not written by apostles. Second, expanding the idea of apostolicity to an apostolic circle fails too. Luke 1:1 seems to suggest a wealth of material that would qualify as apostolic in an expanded sense but have not been included in the New Testament. Third, 1 Cor. 5:9; Col. 4:16; and perhaps Phil. 3:1 speak of other letters that Paul wrote and evidently were on a par with the canonical letters of Paul but yet not included in the canon.

The second is *antiquity*. Only the oldest documents should be included in the canon. However, this criterion fails for the following reason. 1 Cor. 5:9 again states that Paul wrote a letter prior to 1 Corinthians, which means the previous letter would be dated c. 55 A.D. or earlier and would be older than Hebrews or all four of the gospels.

³⁰ Richard B. Gaffin Jr. “The Canon of the New Testament” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, edited by Harvie M. Conn, Baker, 1990. pg. 166.



The third is *public usage*. Only the books that were used in the church's worship and life should be included in the canon. However, this criterion fails for the following reason. "At an early point, documents like the Shepherd of Hermas and the Didache were used in public worship, while no evidence exists for such early usage of 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, or Jude."³¹

The fourth is *inspiration*. Only the inspired books should be included in the canon. However this criterion fails too for the following reasons. 1 Cor. 5:9 and Col. 4:16 both refer to letters Paul wrote and as such carry full apostolic authority and are therefore presumably inspired. At the very least this suggests that Paul along with at least some of the other apostles produced other writings that have not been included in the canon. If inspiration is to be a criterion of canonicity we would need to demonstrate inspiration for each New Testament document, which would be virtually impossible.

All four of these are helpful for understanding which books were recognized as important and valuable to the early church. However, these criteria do not adequately decide the issue of which books should be in the canon and no others.

Initially this might be rather discouraging. However it need not be if we recognize that to insist that we must find an all-embracing criterion would be to undermine the authority of the New Testament itself. In other words, to attempt to demonstrate a certain mark or criterion of canonicity would be to subject the authority of the New Testament to our own fallible insight and historical study. In other words, not only we would be making history the final authority but also our assessment of history and the information available to us.

Self-Establishing Character of the New Testament

So if there is no all-embracing criterion of canonicity, then what can we do? We must turn to the New Testament itself to see if it argues for its own unique canonical authority.³² We need to ask, "How does the New Testament demonstrate its self-validating and self-establishing character?"

In order to answer this question we need to understand three strands of NT teaching that will show the self-establishing character of the NT. By doing so we will be able to see how we can trust that the books now called the New Testament are in fact the books Jesus intended his church to have.

³¹ Richard B. Gaffin Jr. "The Canon of the New Testament" in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, edited by Harvie M. Conn, Baker, 1990. pg. 169.

³² Richard B. Gaffin Jr. "The Canon of the New Testament" in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, edited by Harvie M. Conn, Baker, 1990. pg. 170. "In the final analysis the attempt to demonstrate criteria (the necessary and sufficient conditions) of canonicity seeks, from a position above the canon, to rationalize or generalize about the canon as a unique, particular historical state of affairs. It relativizes the authority of the canon by attempting to contain it (kanon) within an all-embracing criterion (kriterion). Instead we must recognize that we are shut up to the New Testament canon as self-establishing, self-validating entity. Canonicity is a unique concept. It neither coincides with what is apostolic nor even with what is inspired. Rather, canonical is what belongs to the New Testament, and what belongs to the New Testament is canonical. (The evident circularity of the last sentence is not unintended!)"

The first strand of teaching is the NT idea of *the apostolate*. From the very beginning of Jesus' ministry he surrounded himself with twelve disciples whom he also appointed to be apostles "so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach." (Mk. 3:14)

For our purposes it is important to understand what it meant to be an apostle. In all likelihood the definition of an apostle "was derived from the Jewish legal system, where one person could be given the legal power to represent another person.... So unique was the relationship to the person...represented that the [apostle] was regarded as that person himself. Therefore to receive an apostle was to receive the person who sent him."³³

We see Jesus applying this basic structure to His relationship to his appointed apostles in Matthew 10:40. "*Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.*" Jesus commissioned and empowered his apostles to bear authoritative witness to Him, which form the rock or foundation of the church. (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:20) "The apostles were not simply witnesses or preachers in a general, ecclesiastical sense. Their word is the revelatory word; it is the unique, once-for-all witness to Christ to which the church and the world are accountable and by which they will be judged."³⁴ In other words, "their witness is the foundational witness to the foundational work of Christ; to the once-for-all work of Christ is joined a once-for-all witness to that work" (Eph. 2:20).³⁵

Furthermore Jesus guaranteed the witness-bearing activity of the Apostles by sending his Holy Spirit who would guide them into all the truth. (re: John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:13-15) Here is the point: Jesus himself established a fully authoritative mechanism through which he could guarantee the communication and transmission of his life and ministry. With the mechanism in place for conveying and establishing the authoritative witness-bearing activity that Jesus intended for his church we can go a step further to see how this works.

The second strand of teaching is the NT idea of *apostolic tradition*. Building on the idea of the apostolate and their witness-bearing work we just discussed, it is important to recognize that before any of the New Testament books were written, the Apostles "exercised their authority orally, by preaching rather than by writing."³⁶ However, as soon as the Apostles began to write they presented their oral proclamation and their written words as carrying the same level of authority.³⁷ Consider Paul's words in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, which was written around 50 A.D. *So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.*

The importance of the New Testament idea of *apostolic tradition* becomes all the more important as the Apostles die. As those who have been commissioned by Jesus to bear

³³ Ridderbos, Herman N. *Redemptive History And The New Testament Scriptures*. P&R, 1988. pg. 14.

³⁴ Ridderbos, Herman N. *Redemptive History And The New Testament Scriptures*. P&R, 1988. pg. 15. Also Richard B. Gaffin Jr. "The Canon of the New Testament" in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, edited by Harvie M. Conn, Baker, 1990. pg. 176.

³⁵ Richard B. Gaffin Jr. "The Canon of the New Testament" in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, edited by Harvie M. Conn, Baker, 1990. pg. 176.

³⁶ Ridderbos, Herman N. *Redemptive History And The New Testament Scriptures*. P&R, 1988. pg. 15.

³⁷ Ridderbos, Herman N. *Redemptive History And The New Testament Scriptures*. P&R, 1988. pg. 15.

witness to him and his work pass from the scene the preservation of that witness becomes vitally important. We see the concern for this preservation of Apostolic Tradition within the New Testament itself. Consider the following passages.

2 Thess. 3:6 *Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.*

1 Cor. 11:2 *Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.*

1 Cor. 15:1-3 *1 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,*

2 Thess. 2:15 *So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.*

In addition, Paul instructs his protégé, Timothy to guard and preserve the authoritative witness he has received and look to pass it on to reliable men.

1 Timothy 6:20 *O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge,” [guard and preserve]*

2 Timothy 1:14 *By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you. [guard and preserve]*

2 Timothy 2:2 *and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. [pass on]*

When we combine the NT idea of *the apostolate* and *apostolic tradition* we are now able to see the third stand of NT teaching on the self-establishing character of the NT emerge. It is what we might call *the trajectory of the New Testament*. The New Testament itself sets a trajectory or a trend for the transition from the living apostolic witness (both oral and written) to only the written apostolic witness and its perpetual importance for the life of the church. The result of this trend is that written apostolic witness becomes increasingly important and central to the life and practice of the church, until it exclusively is recognized to be the foundational word of God (Eph. 2:20; 1 Thess. 2:13) in fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to build his church (Mt. 16:18) upon the apostolic witness.³⁸

³⁸ Richard B. Gaffin Jr. “The Canon of the New Testament” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, edited by Harvie M. Conn, Baker, 1990. pg. 177.



The intention of Paul, that the authoritative deposit of truth would be preserved and maintained, is reflected in the process of the churches recognition of the New Testament Canon. And if we may say that this intention is an apostolic intention, then we are bound to say that it is also the intention of Christ. In other words, “no one less than the exalted Christ himself is the architect of that process whereby the church has come to recognize the canon of the New Testament.”³⁹ Therefore, the trajectory set by the New Testament itself must become the overarching perspective in which we try to understand the process of recognizing the canon up through the fourth century and beyond. In the words of F.F. Bruce, “The historic Christian belief is that the Holy Spirit, who controlled the writing of the individual books, also controlled their selection and collection, thus continuing to fulfill our Lord’s promise that he would guide his people into all the truth.”⁴⁰

Conclusions

Finally, with the passing of the apostles, as the foundational once-for-all authoritative witness to the once-for-all work of Christ, we can say that the canon is closed or that it is complete at least until Jesus returns at the end of history.

I fully recognize that this understanding of the New Testament Canon does not answer all difficulties most notably the exact number of books. “Why, of all the inspired apostolic writings, just these twenty-seven? Why not twenty-eight or twenty-six, or some other number?”⁴¹ To this question we must admit that these twenty-seven books are what God has chosen to preserve, and he has not told us why just these twenty-seven.

However, to admit that we don’t know why the New Testament is 27 books, no more and no less, does not mean we have no reason to trust that God has given to us what he intended to give us.

What this means is that, like everything in the Christian life we must walk by faith, and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). But at the same time we also must remember that the New Testament provides us with very good reasons for believing that God in Christ is the architect of the historical process through which he preserved for his church exactly what he wants his church to have in the 27 books of the New Testament.

Conclusion: Reliability and the heart of God

Remember where we began. My purpose was not to argue for the Inspiration and Inerrancy of the Bible or to argue for any particular interpretation on hot button issues.

³⁹ Richard B. Gaffin Jr. “The Canon of the New Testament” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, edited by Harvie M. Conn, Baker, 1990. pg. 177.

“The complement to the apostolic intention, in other words, is post apostolic recognition of the New Testament canon. Furthermore, that process of recognition—because it answers to apostolic intention—reflects as well, we may say, the intention of Christ.”

⁴⁰ F.F. Bruce. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Eerdmans, 1981. p. 16.

⁴¹ Richard B. Gaffin Jr. “The Canon of the New Testament” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, edited by Harvie M. Conn, Baker, 1990. pg. 181.

My purpose was to make a case for the historical reliability of the NT in general and the gospels in particular in the hopes that you might dig into them for yourself and discover the Jesus you find there and not the Jesus of our or someone else's imagination.

Talk about the reliability of the bible should never remain merely an academic pursuit. Rather reliability takes us to the very heart and character of a God who is perfectly reliable and trustworthy. It brings us face to face with a God who at infinite cost to himself sent his beloved son to suffer and die for people like us who have rejected him and seek after our own glory. If we want to be sure the bible is reliable we need look no further than the cross of Jesus Christ and what it demonstrates about the God of the bible.

Remember the central message of the Bible is that you are saved NOT by what you do but by what JESUS has done. He has entered into history and lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died in order to bring us home and make us truly human.

Excursus: “The Gospels are full of miracles, which we know are simply not possible.”

As you might imagine we don’t have time to cover all the ways this objection gets articulated. Therefore, I am going to limit what I say about this objection to two points.

1. The problem of intellectual consistency.

Some scholars in the past have argued that because we live in an age of electricity and modern science it simply doesn’t make sense to believe in a world of spirits and miracles. When applied to the gospels, it is argued that we know miracles don’t happen so the Gospels must not be genuinely historical if they affirm the reality of miracles. There is a serious intellectual problem with this view that needs to be acknowledged. Tim Keller expressed the problem in the following way.

“There is an intellectual inconsistency involved in objecting to the historicity of the gospels because they contain miracles. The only way we would know of a miracle is if someone has seen one and gives an account. So if you assume that any account of a miracle is untrue simply because it describes a miracle, then you are assuming there are no miracles before you examine and evidence for them. You are viciously arguing in a circle: “miracles cannot happen, THEREFORE miracles have not happened.” If you say, I reject any document as unhistorical if it contains miracles, you have a belief that cannot be disproved under any circumstances. That is a type of blind faith.”⁴²

2. The shifting perspectives within science.

Fewer and fewer scientists are willing to speak about “laws” of nature and instead are beginning to speak of “regularities” of nature. Again Tim Keller has summarized the issue in a helpful way.

“Experience can only tell us that a ‘law’ or custom of nature has not been violated, but empirical observation could never prove that it never can be. Science cannot disprove miracles. The scientific method tells how nature customarily behaves when we have been looking at it. We cannot know how it has behaved before we looked or in places we haven’t looked or what it will look like in the future. (e.g. Heisenberg’s principle of indeterminacy) What this means is that, unless you are sure there is no God (and that is a faith-commitment that can’t be proven) you can’t rule out the possibility of miracles.”⁴³

⁴² Tim Keller, “Defeaters” III: *Biblical Criticism*, June 2001, p. 11.

⁴³ Tim Keller, “Defeaters” III: *Biblical Criticism*, June 2001, p. 10.



Appendix 1: Textual Criticism Revisited

The four different kinds of textual variants with examples.⁴⁴

1. *Spelling differences and nonsense errors*⁴⁵
 - a. Two different ways of spelling John (Ioannes or Ioanes) with one “nu” or two.
 - b. The movable nu. Occurs at the end of 3pp forms of some verbs prior to a word beginning with a vowel. This is similar to the two forms of the indefinite article in English, ‘a’ or ‘an’.
2. *Minor differences that do not affect translation or that involve synonyms*⁴⁶
 - a. Do not affect translation...
 - i. The definite article with proper names. Sometimes Greek uses the definite article with proper names and sometimes not (e.g. Paul or the Paul). However, the article occurs in Greek doesn’t affect our translation of the Greek.
 - ii. Transposition. In Greek various parts of speech are indicated by the form of a given word and not by word order unlike English. It is common to find changes of word order in the manuscripts but these changes of order do not affect the basic syntax of what is written. In Greek a simple phrase like “God loves Paul” could appear no less than six different ways and they would all mean the same thing.
 - b. Synonyms...
 - i. Mark 6:31-8:26 Jesus is never identified by name or title for 89 verses. These verses only use pronouns to refer to Jesus. As a result most manuscripts add nouns here and there to identify the person in view. These variants affect translation but do not affect the meaning; the referent (Jesus) is still the same either way.
3. *Differences that affect the meaning of the text but are not viable*⁴⁷
 - a. Variants found in a single MSS or group of MSS that by themselves have little likelihood of going back to the wording of the original text.
 - i. e.g. 1 Thess. 2:9, instead of “the gospel of God” (which is found in almost all manuscripts), a late medieval manuscript has “the gospel of Christ.” There is little chance that one late manuscript could contain the original wording when the textual tradition is uniformly on the side of another reading.
 - b. Harmonizations in the Gospel MSS.
 - i. “Scribes had a tendency to harmonize parallel passages in Mark, Matthew and Luke.... Since this is a known scribal practice to harmonize the wording between two Gospels, the reading that does not harmonize is typically considered to be authentic. Especially when such non-harmonizations are found in earlier MSS, the evidence that there is no harmonization is convincing that these readings are

⁴⁴ J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss The Real Jesus And Misdemean Popular Culture*. Kregel, 2006p. 53-63.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 56.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 57.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 59.



authentic.... This textual problem illustrates a couple of things. First, Scribes were prone to harmonize the Gospel accounts, even when there was no real discrepancy between them. Second, when it came to harmonization, the scribes tended to add material to one Gospel rather than take away material from another.”

4. *Differences that affect the meaning of the text and are viable (only about 1% of the variants)*⁴⁸
 - a. “By ‘meaningful’ we mean that the variant changes the meaning of the text to *some degree*. It may not be terribly significant, but if the variant affects our understanding of the passage, then it is meaningful. To argue large-scale skepticism because we cannot be certain about a very small portion of the text is a careless overstatement....”⁴⁹
 - i. Romans 5:1 “we have peace” vs. “let us have peace”
 - If indicative, Paul is speaking about their positional status with God.
 - If subjunctive, Paul is urging Christians to grab hold of the promises of the gospel.
 - Point: Neither variant contradicts the teaching of scripture.
 - ii. Mark 16:9-20⁵⁰
 - Mark’s abrupt ending especially in light of the other gospels.
 - Scribal tendency to harmonize the gospels.
 - The harder reading is preferred.
 - The shorter reading is preferred.
 - The earliest and best MSS don’t have Mark 16:9-20.
 - But the majority of MSS include these 12 verses.
 - iii. John 7:53-8:11⁵¹
 - Our oldest and most reliable MSS do not contain these verses.
 - A number of MSS that do include part or all of this passage show scribal doubt about whether it should be included at all.
 - Other MSS show divergent views about where these verses should be inserted. Some insert the passage after John 7:36; 21:25; or even in Luke, after 21:38 or 24:43.
 5. *Conclusion*
 - a. More MSS evidence for NT than any other known ancient document
 - b. Of the 300,000 to 400,000 variants only 1% (3000-4000) are viable and in some way affect the meaning of the passage in which they are found. However, to say they affect the meaning of the passage does not mean they contradict or alter or undermine the teaching of scripture as a whole.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 60.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 60. “In this regard, it needs to be remembered that plenary, verbal inspiration (inspiration at the level of words and extending to every word) does not mean that every word in Scripture has the same semantic importance or is equally crucial to its meaning. Nor does verbal inspiration mean that we must have every word of an autograph if we are to understand any word.” Richard B. Gaffin Jr. “The Canon of the New Testament” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, Edited by Harvie M. Conn, Baker, 1988. p. 182.

⁵⁰ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd Ed. United Bible Societies, 1994. pgs. 102-107.

⁵¹ See Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2nd Ed.. IVP 2007. p. 334-335.



Appendix 2: New Testament Canon Revisited

The Definition of Canon

The word canon (κανων), whether in literature outside the bible or in the bible itself (Gal. 6:16; 2 Cor. 10: 12-13) or throughout the history of the church, has always carried the meaning of a “rule” or “norm” or “standard.” Since Christianity is so integrally tied to the scriptures, canon eventually was used to describe the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the “norm” or “standard” of the Christian Church. In other words, “canon” is used to identify the “authoritative collection of books, which forms the standard of the Christian church.” Therefore the idea of canon and authority are interchangeable concepts.

Part 1: Historical Survey of the development of the NT Canon⁵²

100-150 AD (Early to Mid 2nd Cent.)

Period of the Apostolic Fathers: Ignatius, Polycarp, and Clement of Rome.

All we have from the Apostolic Fathers are scattered references and allusions in their writings to the authority of the NT, but no extended discussions. We need to be careful about what conclusions we draw about the idea of canon from these writings as they weren't specifically talking about the Canon. It would be similar to listening to sermons in a church today and drawing conclusions from what books were used to draw conclusions about the canon.

150-200 AD (Mid to late 2nd Cent.)

Period of the Apologists: Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria.

These men were more self-conscious about the idea of canon due to the presence of heresy, particularly Marcion and Montanus. While scholars are largely agreed on the importance of heretics, like Marcion and Montanus in forcing the church to give specific attention to the question of canon, there is significant difference of opinion as to the nature of their influence. Did Marcion create the idea of the NT Canon? Did Marcion's canon force the church to give a more specific account of the books it already possessed?

Marcion (c. 80 - c. 160)

Marcion was the first figure we have record of to draw up an exclusive list of canonical books. However, due to his theological commitments, he rejected the entire Old Testament and all of the New Testament except for a highly edited form of Luke's Gospel and edited forms of Paul's letters. Marcion was excommunicated from the church in 144 A.D. Here is the point: It is generally believed that Marcion's effort to limit the canon accelerated a

⁵² For full treatment see Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon Of The New Testament: Its Origin, Development, And Significance*. Oxford, 1997. Also F.F Bruce, *The Canon Of Scripture*. IVP, 1988.

process, which was already underway in the church. In other words, the churches reaction to Marcion tells us that the church had a working idea of canon demonstrated in their handling of Marcion's views. Marcion is significant for us because he illustrates the concern of "How do we know a book hasn't slipped into the canon that doesn't belong there?"

Irenaeus (c. 178-200) and Marcion

Irenaeus, realized that Marcion was right in one thing: that it was necessary to have a fixed list of authoritative writings of the New Testament. In response to Marcion, Irenaeus was the first writer to create a list of books for the New Testament, which virtually corresponds to the traditional New Testament.⁵³

Muratorian Fragment (late 2nd Cent.)

A list of books considered as canonical, at the very least, in the Western, Latin speaking, church at the time. This list includes 20 of the 27 books of the New Testament as we have it today.

Montanus (late 2nd Cent.)⁵⁴

Montanus claimed to receive 'new prophecy' from the Holy Spirit, which he believed was new revelation in addition to any written documents there might be. In a similar way to Marcion, Montanus and the controversy he is known for "greatly [reinforced] the conviction that revelation had come to an end with the apostolic age, and so to foster the creation of a closed canon of the New Testament."⁵⁵

Conclusion

When we take Marcion and Montanus together we can see that as early as the 2nd Cent. the church was already dealing with fundamental issues related to the idea of the canon: the taking away from the received writings of the Apostles (Marcion) or the adding to the received writings of the Apostles (Montanus). In light of some discussions today about the inclusion or exclusion of certain books in the New Testament Canon (e.g. Gospel of Judas) we need to remember that these issues are not new in the history of the church.

When we take the writings of Irenaeus and the Muratorian Fragment together we can conclude that by the end of the 2nd century (c. 180 A.D.) 20 of the 27 books of the New Testament were considered canonical: four Gospels, Acts, the thirteen letters of Paul, 1 Peter, and 1 John were widely accepted throughout the church as canonical.⁵⁶

300-399 AD (4th Cent.)

The Testimony of Eusebius (c. 260-339 AD)

⁵³ Henry Chadwick. *The Early Church*. Penguin, 1993. pg. 81.

⁵⁴ Dunbar, David G. "The Biblical Canon" in *Hermeneutics, Authority, And Canon* Editors D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge. Zondervan, 1986. p. 338-339.

⁵⁵ Henry Chadwick. *The Early Church*. Penguin, 1993. pg. 53.

⁵⁶ Richard B. Gaffin Jr. "The Canon of the New Testament" in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, edited by Harvie M. Conn, Baker, 1990. pg. 166.

He wrote an Ecclesiastical History, which attempted to chronicle the history of the church as far back as he was able to. It covers the life of Christ to the great persecution in the beginning of the 4th Cent. and ends with the conversion of Constantine (c. 315). In Book 3, Ch. 25 we find a very important statement.⁵⁷ He listed recognized books as: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, 13 Epistles of Paul and Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation; disputed books (i.e. not rejected) as: James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2,3 John; spurious books: Acts of Paul, Shepherd of Hermas, Apocalypse of Peter, Letter of Barnabas, Didache, Revelation of John if this view prevails. His purpose in presenting this list was to document what the church as a whole was saying about these books. He was heavily dependent on the writings of Origen from a century earlier.

Athanasius' Easter Letter (367 AD) from the east

This letter supplies us with the first formal, ecclesiastical description of the limits of the NT canon that corresponds to ours. Some areas of the church, like the Syrian church, didn't accept this. This letter gives expression to a growing consensus of the church as a whole over the centuries.

400-499 AD (5th Cent.)

During this period there were a number of official gatherings that agree with Athanasius' list. In the Western Church (Latin Speaking) the question of the canon was basically closed after 400 AD. In the Syrian church disputes continued over minor catholic letters. But by 550 AD the matter had been resolved.

Conclusions

The information we have from the 2nd and 3rd Centuries presents us with a picture of how the immediate generations following the apostles used and viewed the writings from the Apostolic period, especially in light of the controversy surrounding heretics like Marcion and Montanus. Based on the writings of Irenaeus and the Muratorian Fragment, it is generally agreed that by the end of the 2nd century (c. 180 AD) the four gospels, Acts, the thirteen letters of Paul, 1 Peter, and 1 John were widely accepted throughout the church as canonical (20 of the 27).⁵⁸ Eusebius and Athanasius (4th Cent.) present us with our earliest testimony as to what the church as a whole was saying about the writings from the Apostolic period. The Canon of the NT as we have it today was settled by the end of the 4th Cent. in the Western, Latin speaking, church and by the middle of the 6th Cent. in the Syrian church.

⁵⁷ Eusebius. *The History of the Church*. Penguin, 1989. pgs. 88-89.

⁵⁸ Richard B. Gaffin Jr. "The Canon of the New Testament" in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, edited by Harvie M. Conn, Baker, 1990. pg. 166.



Table 1: Manuscript evidence for the New Testament⁵⁹

There are presently 5,686 Greek manuscripts in existence for the New Testament. If we compare the number of New Testament manuscripts to other ancient writings, we discover there is by far more manuscript evidence for the New Testament than any other ancient document.

Author	Date Written	Oldest MSS	Approximate Time Span between original & copy	Number of Copies
Pliny	61-113 A.D.	850 A.D.	750 yrs	7
Plato	427-347 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200 yrs	7
Demosthenes	4th Cent. B.C.	1100 A.D.	800 yrs	8
Herodotus	480-425 B.C.	900 A.D.	1300 yrs	8
Suetonius	75-160 A.D.	950 A.D.	800 yrs	8
Thucydides	460-400 B.C.	900 A.D.	1300 yrs	8
Euripides	480-406 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1300 yrs	9
Aristophanes	450-385 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200 yrs	10
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1000 yrs	10
Livy	59 BC-AD 17	300 A.D.	300 yrs	20
Tacitus	circa 100 A.D.	1100 A.D.	1000 yrs	20
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1400 yrs	49
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	1000 A.D.	1400 yrs	193
Homer (Iliad)	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500 yrs	643
New Testament	1st Cent. A.D. (50-100 A.D.)	2nd Cent. A.D. (c. 130 A.D. f.); Oldest complete MSS, 4 th C.	less than 100 yrs to 200 yrs	5600

In addition to the Greek manuscripts, there are over 19,000 copies in the Syriac, Latin, Coptic, and Aramaic languages as well as over a million quotations from the church fathers.⁶⁰ The total New Testament manuscript base is over 24,000.

Furthermore, another important piece of information is the fact that we have a fragment of the gospel of John that dates back to around 34 years after the original writing. If we date John's gospel to c. 95 A.D., which is widely recognized as the latest gospel, then it means all the gospels were written between the early 50's (Matthew, c. 60; Mark, c. 50; Luke, c. 60) and mid 90's (John, c. 85-95) of the 1st Century. This means the four gospels along with the rest of the New Testament was written 20 to 70 years after the life of Jesus,

⁵⁹ Adapted from <http://www.carm.org/evidence/textualevidence.htm> and J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace. *Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss The Real Jesus And Mislead Popular Culture*. Kregel, 2006. p. 71.

⁶⁰ "Besides textual evidence derived from New Testament Greek manuscripts and from early versions, the textual critic has available the numerous scriptural quotations included in the commentaries, sermons, and other treatises written by early Church Fathers. Indeed, so extensive are these citations that if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament." Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. Oxford, 2005. p.126.

which is within the lifetime of eyewitnesses to Jesus' life, death and resurrection (re: 1 Cor. 15:6; 1 John 1:1-3).⁶¹

Below is a chart with some of the oldest extant New Testament manuscripts compared to when they were originally written. Compare these time spans with the next closest which is Homer's Iliad where the closest copy from the original is 500 years later. For the New Testament, the closest copies date from 34 to 150 years after the originals. The point of the comparison is to show the relatively short time span from original writing to extant manuscripts.

Important Manuscript Papyri	Contents	Date Original Written	MSS Date	Approx. Time Span	Location
p⁵² (John Rylands Fragment)	John 18:31-33, 37-38	c. 96 A.D.	circa 130 A.D.	34 yrs	John Rylands Library, Manchester, England
p⁴⁶ (Chester Beatty Papyrus)	Rom. 5:17-6:3, 5-14; 8:15-25, 27-35, 37-9:32; 10:1-11, 22, 24-33, 35-14:8, 9-15:9, 11-33; 16:1-23, 25-27; Heb.; 1 & 2 Cor., Eph., Gal., Phil., Col.; 1 Thess. 1:1, 9-10; 2:1-3; 5:5-9, 23-28	50's-70's	circa 200 A.D.	Approx. 150 yrs	Chester Beatty Museum, Dublin & Ann Arbor, Michigan, University of Michigan library
p⁶⁶ (Bodmer Papyrus)	John 1:1-6:11, 35-14:26; fragment of 14:29-21:9	c. 96 A.D.	circa 200 A.D.	Approx. 105 yrs	Cologne, Geneva
p⁶⁷	Matt. 3:9, 15; 5:20-22, 25-28	60's	circa 200 A.D.	Approx. 135 yrs	Barcelona, Fundacion San Lucas Evangelista, P. Barc.1

The point of the two charts included in this document is to show the substantial historical data in favor of the historical reliability of the New Testament documents, especially in comparison to other ancient documents. On historical grounds, we have much more reason to affirm the historical reliability of the New Testament than we do for any other ancient document.⁶²

⁶¹ F.F. Bruce. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Eerdmans, 1981, p. 9,10. "[T]he time elapsing between the evangelic events and the writing of most of the New Testament books was, from the standpoint of historical research, satisfactorily short. For in assessing the trustworthiness of ancient historical writings, one of the most important questions is: How soon after the events took place were they recorded?"

⁶² Ibid. p. 10 "The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning."



Table 2: Dating The Documents Of The New Testament

Book	Approx. Date of Original	Earliest MSS Evidence ⁶³
Matthew	60's	P64 & P67 (late 2 nd C.); P45 (c. 200-250)
Mark	Late 50's/Early 60's	P45 (c. 200-250)
Luke	Early 60's but before Acts	P75 ⁶⁴ (A.D. 175-225); P4 (late 2 nd C.); P45 (c. 200-250)
John	c. 80-95	P52 ⁶⁵ (c. 125); P75 (A.D. 175-225); P45 (c. 200-250); P66 (c. 200)
Acts	Early to Mid 60's	P45 (c. 200-250); P74 (7 th C.)
Romans	c. 57	P46 (c. 200)
1 Corinthians	55	P46 (c. 200)
2 Corinthians	56	P46 (c. 200)
Galatians	c. 48	P46 (c. 200)
Ephesians	Early 60's	P46 (c. 200)
Philippians	Late 50's/Early 60's	P46 (c. 200)
Colossians	Late 50's/Early 60's	P46 (c. 200)
1 Thessalonians	c. 50	P46 (c. 200)
2 Thessalonians	c. 50	P46 (c. 200)
1 Timothy	Mid 60's	Ⲙ ⁶⁶ (4 th C.)
2 Timothy	Mid 60's	Ⲙ (4 th C.)
Titus	Mid 60's	Ⲙ (4 th C.)
Philemon	Late 50's/Early 60's	Ⲙ (4 th C.)
Hebrews	60's	P46 (c. 200)
James	Mid 40's	Ⲙ (4 th C.); P74 (7 th C.)
1 Peter	Early 60's	P72 (3 rd C.); P74 (7 th C.)
2 Peter	Late 60's	P72 (3 rd C.); P74 (7 th C.)
1 John	Late 80's/Early 90's	Ⲙ (4 th C.); P74 (7 th C.)
2 John	Late 80's/Early 90's	Ⲙ (4 th C.); P74 (7 th C.)
3 John	Late 80's/Early 90's	Ⲙ (4 th C.); P74 (7 th C.)
Jude	B/w 65-80	P72 (3 rd C.); P74 (7 th C.)
Revelation	Mid 90's	P47 (c. 250-299); P115 (Late 3 rd / Early 4 th C.)

⁶³ See Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. Oxford, 2005. p. 52-136.

⁶⁴ Earliest known copy of the Gospel of Luke. Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. Oxford, 2005. p. 58.

⁶⁵ "Although the extent of the verses preserved is so slight, in one respect this tiny scrap of papyrus possesses quite as much evidential value as would the complete codex. Just as Robinson Crusoe, seeing but a single footprint in the sand, concluded that another human being, with two feet, was present on the island with him, so P52 proves the existence and use of the fourth Gospel during the first half of the second century in a provincial town along the Nile, far removed from its traditional place of composition (Ephesus in Asia Minor). Had this little fragment been known during the middle of past century, that school of New Testament criticism which was inspired by the brilliant Tubingen professor Ferdinand Christian Baur could not have argued that the fourth Gospel was not composed until the year 160." Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. Oxford, 2005. p. 56.

⁶⁶ "Codex Sinaiticus is the only known complete copy of the Greek New Testament in majuscule script." Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. Oxford, 2005. p. 62.



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