

The Authority of Scripture: How We Got the New Testament

Mako A. Nagasawa, March 18, 2017

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INTRODUCTION: WHY BE CONCERNED?

Q: The DaVinci Code? The story where Jesus has a son by Mary Magdalene? Does Jesus have a skeleton or two in his closet?

A: ???

Q: What about the Gospel of Thomas, which Elaine Pagels writes about? Or the Gospel of Judas, which is being 'rediscovered'?

A: ???

Q: Wasn't the canon a conspiracy of the church hierarchy? A power move?

A: ???

PART ONE: CRITERIA FOR CANONICITY

1. Authorship
 - a. Who is supposed to have written this? And when?
 - b. What evidence do we have for authorship?
2. Historical Use
 - a. Did the Christian community broadly come to use this?
 - b. Do we have physical manuscript evidence for it?
 - c. Note: This is important because canonization was not a tops-down imposition achieved by power. Instead, it affirmed a bottoms-up recognition by the broader community, e.g. like a 'Hall of Fame.'
3. Content:
 - a. Claim to fulfill the Old Testament story
 - b. Jewish background, language, and ideas

Jewish Cultural Assumptions	Greco-Roman Cultural Assumptions
Our physical bodies are good	Physical bodies house the immortal soul, which wants to escape the body
Expected 'resurrection' – the renewal of the physical world, including our bodies; God's true humanity will be raised from the dead	Expected 'disembodiment' – the separation of soul from body
Caring for the poor is important	Caring for the poor is not important since the body is not important
Sexual ethics are important and are derived from the Genesis creation story	Have sex with anyone since the body is not important (e.g. Greek paganism, Epicureans)
Death is the enemy of God's good creation; it will be overthrown in a new creation	Death is inevitable and is the end; no one comes back from the dead (cf. Homer)
Our story is linear, based on an experience of God's promise and God's fulfillment	Our story is circular and repetitious; nothing new

PART TWO: THE CANONICAL GOSPELS

The Gospel of John: The New Creation

Old Creation	New Creation
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)	In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

	7 Miracles	7 Discourses	7 'I AM' statements
1	Emptiness to joy. Water into wine at Cana. (2:1 – 10)	Second birth with Nicodemus (3:1 – 21)	I am the bread of life (6:35)
2	Sickness to health. Healing of the royal official's sick son. (4:46 – 54)	Living water with Samaritan woman (4:1 – 42)	I am the light of the world (8:12)
3	Debilitation to wholeness. Healing the invalid man. (5:1 – 15)	The 'Son and Father relationship' debate with the Pharisees (5:16 – 45)	I am the door (10:7)
4	Hunger to satisfaction. Multiplication of bread. (6:1 – 14)	Bread of Life (6:22 – 71)	I am the good shepherd (10:11)
5	Fear to peace. Walking on water. (6:16 – 21)	Abraham debate with the Pharisees (8:12 – 59)	I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)
6	Blindness to sight. Healing of the blind man. (9:1 – 41)	Good shepherd (10:1 – 38)	I am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6)
7	Death to life. Resuscitation of Lazarus. (11:17 – 44)	Upper Room discourse (13:1 – 17:26)	I am the true vine (15:1)

Old Creation	New Creation
Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)	Jesus breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' (John 20:22)

FACTUAL ISSUE: Jesus' life, death, and bodily resurrection.

LITERARY ALLUSION: John is clearly echoing Genesis 1 – 2.

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS: Jesus is creating a new humanity, and a new creation. Jesus is God.

PART TWO: THE CANONICAL GOSPELS, continued

The Gospel of Matthew: The New Covenant

High Level Structure

- When Jesus had finished these words (Mt.7:28)
- When Jesus had finished giving instructions (Mt.11:1)
- When Jesus had finished these parables (Mt.13:53)
- When Jesus had finished these words (Mt.19:1)
- When Jesus had finished all these words (Mt.26:1)

Mountains and Inheritances

Eden, Creational Commission	Israel	Jesus
<p>Gen.1:27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth...”</p> <p>Gen.2:10 Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers.</p> <p>Ezk.28:13 Eden, the garden of God...14 the holy mountain of God</p>	<p>Dt.34:1 Now Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land... 4 Then the LORD said to him, “This is the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, I will give it to your descendants; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there.” 5 So Moses the servant of the LORD died there...</p>	<p>Mt.28:16 But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated... 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”</p>

Commandments

Creation	Israel	Jesus
<p>Gen.2:15 Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. 16 The Lord God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; 17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”</p>	<p>Ex.19:20 The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up....20:1 [God gave Israel the Ten Commandments]</p>	<p>Jer.31:31 “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make <i>a new covenant</i> with the house of Israel and... Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt...33 But this is the covenant...I will put My law <i>within them and on their heart</i>...for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”</p> <p>Mt.5:1 And when he saw the multitudes, he went up on the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 And opening his mouth he began to teach them, saying... 5:8 Blessed are the pure <i>in heart</i>. 5:28 He who looks on a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her <i>in his heart</i>. 6:4, 6, 18 [paraphrase] Your Father who is in heaven sees <i>your secret motives</i>. 6:21 Where your treasure is, there will <i>your heart</i> be also. 7:15 Beware of the false prophets, who...<i>inwardly</i> are ravenous wolves. [Matthew 8 – 9 narrates ten miracles Jesus does by his word]</p>

FACTUAL ISSUE: Jesus’ life, death, and bodily resurrection.

LITERARY ALLUSION: Matthew is clearly echoing the Torah.

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS: Jesus is renewing God’s covenant with Israel, bringing about the new covenant and new creation hoped for in the Torah.

PART TWO: THE CANONICAL GOSPELS, continued

The Gospel of Luke: Paradise Regained

Outline of Luke’s Crucifixion-Resurrection Narrative: Luke 22:39 – 24:53

1. Come out of Jerusalem; Jesus prays for disciples; disciples have sorrow. 22:39 – 46
2. Prophecies fulfilled: Judas and Simon Peter betray Jesus. 22:47 – 62
3. Jesus reveals himself obliquely as the Son of God. 22:63 – 71
4. Two people (Herod and Pilate) stuck in sin, not understanding Jesus’ identity. 23:1 – 25
5. Simon of Cyrene witnesses and shoulders the Cross. 23:23 – 26
6. Women, the daughters of Jerusalem, signifying Israel’s despair. 23:27 – 31
7. Jesus crucified. 23:32 – 34
8. Unbelieving Jews: The rulers of the Jews sneered at Jesus. 23:35
9. Unbelieving Gentiles: The soldiers mock Jesus. 23:36 – 38
10. Unbelieving Criminal: Criminal hurls curses at Jesus. 23:39
- 10’. Believing Criminal: Criminal believes Jesus, receives **paradise**. 23:40 – 43
- 9’. Believing Gentiles: The centurion praised God. 23:44 – 49
- 8’. Believing Jews: Joseph, a member of the council, cares for Jesus’ body. 23:50 – 52
- 7’. Jesus buried. 23:53 – 54
- 6’. Women, who had followed Jesus, signifying the church’s hope. 23:55 – 24:11
- 5’. Simon Peter witnesses the empty tomb. 24:12
- 4’. Two people experience **paradise/new creation**, understand Jesus’ identity. 24:13 – 35
- 3’. Jesus reveals himself as the risen Messiah. 24:36 – 43
- 2’. Prophecies fulfilled: Moses, Prophets, Psalms testify to Messiah. 24:44 – 49
- 1’. Come out of Jerusalem; Jesus blesses the disciples; disciples have great joy. 24:50 – 53

Creation and Fall (Genesis 1 – 3)	The New Creation (Luke 24:13 – 35ff.)
Had been commanded to spread over the earth to proclaim their rule over it	Under the rule of a foreign power, hoping for liberation
Two people, a couple	Two people, possibly a couple (we don’t know the gender of the other disciple on the Emmaus Road – could be Cleopas’ wife Mary)
Walking with God	Walking with Jesus
Knowing Him	Not recognizing him
They disobeyed God’s word and ‘gained wisdom’	They are told God’s Word, they understood and gained true knowledge
Eat what was forbidden	Eat what Jesus encouraged them to eat
Their eyes were opened	Their eyes were opened
They focused on themselves	They focused on Jesus
Fell into separation from God	Reunited with God
Recognized they were naked, then they clothe themselves	Clothed with power from on high
Could not eat with God as freely as before	Are encouraged to have table fellowship with God and eat with God often (communion)
Lost their rule to Satan	Commanded to spread over the whole earth to proclaim Jesus’ rule

FACTUAL ISSUE: Jesus’ life, death, and bodily resurrection.

LITERARY ALLUSION: Luke is clearly echoing Genesis 1 – 3.

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS: Jesus is creating a new humanity with a new mission, and inaugurating a new creation.

PART TWO: THE CANONICAL GOSPELS, continued

The Gospel of Mark: The Veil is Torn

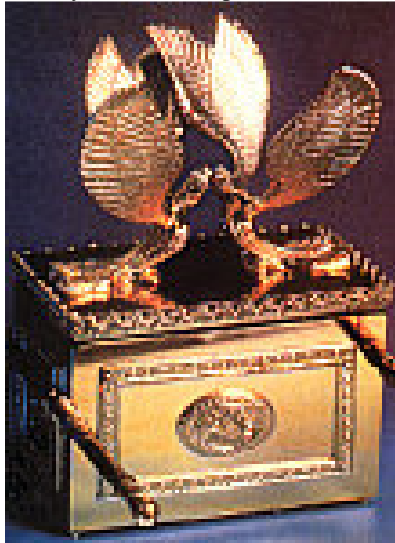
Access to God Closed

Genesis 3:23 Therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. 24 So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the **cherubim** and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

Access to God Closed to All But One

Leviticus 16:1 The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died. 2 The LORD said to Moses: Tell your brother Aaron not to come just at any time **into the sanctuary inside the curtain** before the mercy seat that is upon the ark, or he will die; for I appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat. 3 Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. 4 He shall put on the holy **linen** tunic, and shall have the **linen** undergarments next to his body, fasten the **linen** sash, and wear the **linen** turban; these are the holy vestments... 7 He shall take the **two goats** and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting; 30 For **on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the LORD.**

Cherubim on the 'mercy seat that is upon the ark' (Exodus 25:17 – 22):



Access to God Opened to All

As Jesus approaches the cross...	Motifs of Passover/Atonement appear
Jesus gets nearer to the cross at Gethsemane; the disciples fail (Mk.14:32 – 50)	On Passover, a young man flees naked after leaving behind the linen garments (Mk.14:51 – 52), suggesting that Jesus is a Passover Lamb or a sacrificial offering, or that Jesus is a high priest.
Jesus gets nearer to the cross at the trial by the chief priests; Simon Peter fails (Mk.14:53 – 72)	On Passover, Barabbas is released and goes free (Mk.15:1 – 15), suggesting again that Jesus is a Passover Lamb or a sacrificial offering
Jesus crucified and forsaken by God; Jesus dies (Mk.15:16 – 37)	The curtain of the Temple torn in two; the way to God is open; cleansing available; Jesus proclaimed to be God's Son (Mk.15:38-39); Jesus wrapped in linen and buried (Mk.15:40 – 47)

FACTUAL ISSUE: Jesus' life, death, and bodily resurrection

LITERARY ALLUSION: Mark is clearly echoing Leviticus 16, which itself echoes Genesis 2 – 3.

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS: Jesus is reopening paradise – access to God – again.

PART TWO: THE CANONICAL GOSPELS, continued

Some Conclusions

Methodology: Theological Interpretation of Historical Events in Literary Form

Treat and interpret each NT narrative as the Hebrew literature it is, observing the literary engagement with the Hebrew Scriptures

They are Hebrew Narrative Literature...

- Their literary properties and techniques are known¹
- They organize Jesus' history into clear literary themes; there is a reason for any inclusion or omission of historical detail; they may exclude some details, but they do not invent anything²

They Bring a Fitting Climax to the Authoritative Story (the Old Testament)

- They record Jesus' own engagement with the Old Testament
- They engage literary themes from the Old Testament, especially the themes of new covenant & new creation
- They bring to a climax literary themes developed in the Old Testament, viewing the Resurrection (new creation) as the climax of those themes

Why the Four Gospels Are Authoritative

- Historical Beliefs of Authorship: Authorship attested historically
- Historical Use: Used broadly in the earliest Christian communities
- Content & Literary Design:
 - Because they authoritatively narrate Jesus' life and teachings, including his own engagement with Israel's Scriptures
 - Because they are the climax of Israel's authoritative Scriptures

¹ **New Testament:** Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, *The Literary Guide to the Bible*; Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant, and Through Peasant Eyes*; Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*; Robert Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 2 volume set ; N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Studies in Pauline Theology, The New Testament and the People of God, Jesus and the Victory of God, The Resurrection of the Son of God*

Old Testament: Paul Borgman, *Genesis: The Story We Haven't Heard* ; J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis, Narrative Art and Poetry in the Book of Samuel, Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*; Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis*; Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and Written Gospel*; Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was*; Tremper Longman III, *A Literary Interpretation of the Bible*; Tremper Longman III and L. Ryken, *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*; John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative, Old Testament Theology*; Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*

² See also Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*

PART THREE: THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

The Gospel of Thomas (v.1-13, 29, 37, 114)

1 These are the secret sayings that the living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas recorded. 1. And he said, "Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death." 2. Jesus said, "Those who seek should not stop seeking until they find. When they find, they will be disturbed. When they are disturbed, they will marvel, and will reign over all. [And after they have reigned they will rest.]" 3. Jesus said, "If your leaders say to you, 'Look, the (Father's) kingdom is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the (Father's) kingdom is within you and it is outside you. When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you live in poverty, and you are the poverty." 4. Jesus said, "The person old in days won't hesitate to ask a little child seven days old about the place of life, and that person will live. For many of the first will be last, and will become a single one." 5. Jesus said, "Know what is in front of your face, and what is hidden from you will be disclosed to you. For there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed. [And there is nothing buried that will not be raised.]" 6. His disciples asked him and said to him, "Do you want us to fast? How should we pray? Should we give to charity? What diet should we observe?" Jesus said, "Don't lie, and don't do what you hate, because all things are disclosed before heaven. After all, there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed, and there is nothing covered up that will remain undisclosed." 7. Jesus said, "Lucky is the lion that the human will eat, so that the lion becomes human. And fowl is the human that the lion will eat, and the lion still will become human." 8. And he said, "The person is like a wise fisherman who cast his net into the sea and drew it up from the sea full of little fish. Among them the wise fisherman discovered a fine large fish. He threw all the little fish back into the sea, and easily chose the large fish. Anyone here with two good ears had better listen!" 9. Jesus said, "Look, the sower went out, took a handful (of seeds), and scattered (them). Some fell on the road, and the birds came and gathered them. Others fell on rock, and they didn't take root in the soil and didn't produce heads of grain. Others fell on thorns, and they choked the seeds and worms ate them. And others fell on good soil, and it produced a good crop: it yielded sixty per measure and one hundred twenty per measure." 10. Jesus said, "I have cast fire upon the world, and look, I'm guarding it until it blazes." 11. Jesus said, "This heaven will pass away, and the one above it will pass away. The dead are not alive, and the living will not die. During the days when you ate what is dead, you made it come alive. When you are in the light, what will you do? On the day when you were one, you became two. But when you become two, what will you do?" 12. The disciples said to Jesus, "We know that you are going to leave us. Who will be our leader?" Jesus said to them, "No matter where you are you are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being." 13. Jesus said to his disciples, "Compare me to something and tell me what I am like." Simon Peter said to him, "You are like a just messenger." Matthew said to him, "You are like a wise philosopher." Thomas said to him, "Teacher, my mouth is utterly unable to say what you are like." Jesus said, "I am not your teacher. Because you have drunk, you have become intoxicated from the bubbling spring that I have tended." And he took him, and withdrew, and spoke three sayings to him. When Thomas came back to his friends they asked him, "What did Jesus say to you?" Thomas said to them, "If I tell you one of the sayings he spoke to me, you will pick up rocks and stone me, and fire will come from the rocks and devour you."

29. Jesus said, "If the flesh came into being because of spirit, that is a marvel, but if spirit came into being because of the body, that is a marvel of marvels. Yet I marvel at how this great wealth has come to dwell in this poverty." 37. His disciples said, "When will you appear to us, and when will we see you?" Jesus said, "When you strip without being ashamed, and you take your clothes and put them under your feet like little children and trample them, then [you] will see the son of the living one and you will not be afraid."

114. Simon Peter said to them, "Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life." Jesus said, "Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven."

Criteria for Rejecting the Gospel of Thomas

1. Authorship
 - a. Authorship dubious; there is no historical attestation that Thomas wrote this 'Gospel'
2. Historical Use
 - a. Historical usage by early Christian community missing
 - b. The Indian Christian community claims that Thomas was their founder in 52 AD. But we have no evidence that the Gospel of Thomas was ever there. By contrast, we have a report from the second century from Pantaenus of Alexandria that he met Christians in India who used the Gospel of Matthew (Eusebius, *Church History*, book 5, chapter 10). Would Thomas have brought Matthew's Gospel, but not his own? The more natural conclusion would be that Thomas did not write a Gospel.
3. Content
 - a. Content not in agreement with other Four Gospels, nor the Old Testament
 - i. Jewish Messiahship
 - ii. physical bodies
 - iii. female gender
 - iv. new creation
 - b. There is no cross & resurrection narrative!
 - c. It is not even a narrative, just isolated teachings (Israel affirms history; Gnostics do not).
 - i. It's like stripping *Return of the King* of story and reducing Aragorn's part to monologue, and a distorted monologue at that. How unsatisfying!
 - ii. Like T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland* being a reflection of Eliot giving up on the story of the West, the Gnostics do not have a story in which they can hope. Thus, they have a philosophy disembodied from materiality and disconnected from history.

PART FOUR: THE GOSPEL OF JUDAS

An excerpt from 'JESUS LAUGHED'

In the "Gospel of Judas," the renegade is redeemed.

by ADAM GOPNIK

Issue of 2006-04-17

Posted 2006-04-10

http://www.newyorker.com/critics/content/articles/060417crbo_books

...It certainly makes for odd bedside reading. "The Gospel of Judas" isn't actually a gospel by Judas, or, really, a gospel at all in the sense that we might expect: an account of the life of Jesus, from birth to death and rebirth. It is, instead, a mystical riff on a life already assumed to be familiar. It begins just before Jesus' last Passover in Jerusalem, as the disciples are offering a prayer to God over the dinner table. Watching them, Jesus laughs. "Why are you laughing at us?" the nettled disciples ask, and Jesus says that he is laughing not at them but at their strange idea of pleasing their God. (One of the unnerving things about the new Gospel is that Jesus, who never laughs in the canonic Gospels, is constantly laughing in this one, and it's obviously one of those sardonic, significant, how-little-you-know laughs, like the laugh of the ruler of a dubious planet on "Star Trek.")

The disciples are furious at Jesus' condescension, except for Judas, who thinks he knows what the laughter signifies. "I know who you are and where you have come from," Judas says, standing before him. "You are from the immortal realm of Barbelo." Apparently startled by his insight, Jesus tells Judas, "Step away from the others and I shall tell you the mysteries of the Kingdom."

The true mystery, as Jesus unveils it, is that, out beyond the stars, there exists a divine, blessed realm, free of the materiality of this earthly one. This is the realm of Barbelo, a name that gnostics gave the celestial Mother, who lives there with, among others, her progeny, a good God awkwardly called the Self-Generated One. Jesus, it turns out, is not the son of the Old Testament God, whose retinue includes a rebellious creator known as Yaldabaoth, but an avatar of Adam's third son, Seth. His mission is to show those lucky members of mankind who still have a "Sethian" spark the way back to the blessed realm. Jesus, we learn, was laughing at the disciples' prayer because it was directed at their God, the Old Testament God, who is really no friend of mankind but, rather, the cause of its suffering.

What gives "The Gospel of Judas" a peculiar pathos is the sacrificial role that Judas must play in the divine story. Jesus is going back to Barbelo, and to get there he must "sacrifice the man that clothes me"; that is, his mortal body. The only way to do this is to accept his own death, and he urges Judas to become the agent of it. (Presumably, self-slaughter would not get him back.) But Judas has reason to worry that if he obeys his Lord he will be stuck with a bad reputation forever. "In a vision," he says, "I saw myself as the twelve disciples were stoning me." Jesus assures him that though "you will be cursed by the other generations . . . you will come to rule over them." At the end, he supplies Judas with a beatific vision of a luminous cloud, and, in this Gospel's one truly poetic note, tells him, "Lift up your eyes and look at the cloud and the light within it and the stars surrounding it. The star that leads the way is your star." Judas accepts the bargain—temporal libel in exchange for eternal luminosity—and agrees to turn Jesus over to the high priests. The Gospel's very last lines have an extraordinarily modern feeling of Hemingwayesque understatement, achieved perhaps inadvertently, by textual omission: "They approached Judas and said to him, 'What are you doing here? You are Jesus' disciple.' Judas answered them as they wished. And he received some money and handed him over to them."

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PART FIVE: THE WRITING AND CANONIZATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Christian Traditions: Oral

There was a strong Christian oral tradition.

- Luke – Acts
 - ‘Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of *the word*...’ (Lk.1:1 – 2)
 - ‘And they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak *the word of God* with boldness.’ (Acts 4:31)
 - ‘But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of *the word*...*The word of God* kept on spreading...’ (Acts 6:5 – 7)
 - ‘Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching *the word*.’ (Acts 8:4)
 - ‘*The word* which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)...’ (Acts 10:36)
 - ‘Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received *the word of God*.’ (Acts 11:1)
 - ‘And I [Simon Peter] remembered *the word of the Lord*, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ (Acts 11:16)
 - ‘A woman named Lydia...was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to *the things spoken* by Paul.’ (Acts 16:14)
 - ‘For I did not shrink from declaring to you *the whole purpose of God*.’ (Acts 20:27)
- Galatians
 - ‘You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes *Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?*’ (Gal.3:1)
- 1 Corinthians
 - ‘And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you *the testimony of God*. For I determined to know nothing among you except *Jesus Christ, and him crucified*.’ (2:1 – 2)
 - ‘For this reason I have sent to you Timothy...and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, *just as I teach everywhere in every church*. (4:17)
 - ‘But to the married *I give instructions, not I, but the Lord*....’ (7:10)
 - ‘And so *I direct in all the churches*.’ (7:17)
 - ‘So also *the Lord directed* those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.’ (9:14)
 - ‘To those who are without law, [I become] as without law, though not being without the law of God but under *the law of Christ*. (9:21)
 - ‘Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to *the traditions*, just as I delivered them to you.’ (11:2)
 - ‘For *I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you*, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread...’ (11:23 – 25)
 - ‘The things which I write to you are *the Lord’s commandment*.’ (14:37)
 - ‘Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received*, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...’ (15:1 – 4)
- Ephesians
 - ‘Now this I say, and *affirm together with the Lord*...’ (Eph.4:17)

Thus, Paul is saying, ‘I know everything that Jesus taught. It was passed on to me. I’ve reflected on it, allowed it to saturate my mind and heart, and allowed it to completely inform me. Everything Jesus taught in his context, I pass on to others.’ Jesus did not address the situation of mixed marriages between Christian and non-Christian while he was on earth. So in 1 Cor.7:12, Paul says, ‘I say, not the Lord,’ but he claims authority in the Spirit in 7:40, ‘I have the Spirit of God.’ Paul is not just sharing ‘his personal take’ on things. He was a brilliant, trained rabbinical theologian now serving Jesus in the power of the Spirit. So this material is just as binding as anything else Jesus

taught explicitly. He is saying, 'If a situation comes up that Jesus did not address or give specific teaching about during his time on earth, I am in the position to deduce from the vast body of knowledge already there what Jesus would say. In fact, I have the Spirit of God as my authority.'

Christian Traditions: Written

The authors of the New Testament documents clearly viewed their own writings as authoritative for the Christian community.

- The Gospel writers wrote
 - to preserve the memory of Jesus' teachings and actions
 - to present Jesus as the climax of the story of the Old Testament
 - to be continuous with the literary tradition of the Old Testament.
- The writers of the Epistles viewed their own writings as authoritative for the Christian community because of their connection with Jesus and their explanation of Jesus.
 - Paul repeats the teachings of Jesus (see above)
 - James quotes from the teachings of Jesus, overlapping with Matthew 5 – 7 over 20 times.
 - John viewed his task as passing on what was given to him (1 Jn.1:4 – 5ff.)
 - Peter viewed his own writings as possessing more authority and clarity than the Hebrew Prophets (1 Pet.1:10 – 12). So did Paul (Eph.3:4 – 5)
 - The author of Hebrews urged his audience to receive his exhortation (Heb.13:22)

Here is some evidence about how New Testament authors viewed other New Testament writings

- Paul attests that Jesus' teachings, in some written form (Luke), are 'Scripture.'
 - 'For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" (1 Tim.5:18, calling both Dt.25:4 and Luke 10:7 'Scripture'; I assume this refers to Luke's writings, as it is the only place it is found.
- Peter called Paul's writings 'Scripture'
 - 'Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.' (2 Pet.3:15 – 16)
- John implicitly considered Revelation to be 'Scripture' (Rev.22:7; 18 – 19; see below) and thought that reading his Gospel would help bring readers to spiritual 'life' (Jn.20:30 – 31).
- Luke endorses Paul as a missionary leader and, implicitly, as a writer.

Christian Traditions: Rapid Circulation

Did the New Testament authors want their writings to be circulated?

- Matthew
 - 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...' (Mt.28:19 – 20)
 - And Jesus said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old.' (Mt.13:52) This statement appears to be the center of Matthew's Gospel, the center of a large chiasm. This statement refers to physical reproduction of the written Gospel by a scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom.
- John
 - 'These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name.' (Jn.20:31)
 - 'Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book... I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.' (Rev.22:7, 18 – 19)
- Thessalonians
 - 'I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.' (1 Th.5:27)

- Colossians
 - ‘And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.’ (Col.4:16)
- Ephesians
 - The best and oldest manuscripts have a blank addressee, saying, ‘To the saints at _____’ (Eph.1:1). This fact, as well as the content of the letter, suggests that Paul meant this to be a widely circulated letter. He probably intended this letter to come to the Colossians via Ephesus and Laodicea.

Christian Traditions: Further Repetition and Circulation

Note: ‘Tradition’ in the ‘apostolic fathers’³ and ‘patristic writings’⁴ meant ‘teaching which the Lord committed to the church through the apostles, orally or in documents,’ as Paul used the term ‘tradition’ in 1 Corinthians. ‘Tradition’ is not contrasted with Scripture, but rather, is virtually identical to it.

Ignatius of Antioch

- Wrote seven letters written just before his martyrdom in Rome (between 110 – 117 AD) with quotations, though not by name, from: Matthew, Luke, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians⁵
- Early collections of New Testament letters and Gospels are generally recognized to have existed in such centers as Antioch⁶

Polycarp of Smyrna

- Born 69 AD, became ‘bishop of Smyrna’ (Izmir, Turkey), martyred 155 AD
- Wrote one letter with ~100 quotations and allusions to Christian writings, though not by name, including: Matthew, Mark, Luke – Acts, John, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 John, 3 John⁷
- Polycarp’s protege, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, quoted from all later canonized New Testament material except Philemon and 3 John.

³ Authors of nonbiblical church writings of the 1st and early 2nd centuries. These works are important because their authors presumably knew the Apostles or their associates. The first list of the Apostolic Fathers was made by 17th-century scholars; it comprised Clement I, Hermas, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, and the author of the Epistle of Barnabas. Later, other writers such as Papias of Hierapolis and the authors of the Epistle to Diognetus and of the Didache were also considered Apostolic Fathers.

⁴ This group of individuals included a number of teachers and bishops: e.g. Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Origen, Polycarp, Tertullian. They spanned an interval from about 100 to 170 AD.

⁵ See Glenn Miller, <http://www.ntcanon.org/ignatius.shtml>. Robert Grant finds forty-six allusions to 1 Corinthians, suggesting he knew the letter ‘practically by heart.’ Ignatius’ knowledge of John is sometimes conceded: Corwin, *Ignatius*, p.67 – 68; J.N. Sanders, *The Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943) p.11 – 14.

⁶ Donald Hagner, *Clement*, p.314 – 322

⁷ <http://www.ntcanon.org/Polycarp.shtml>; Polycarp quotes from Matthew, Mark, and Luke; allusions to John’s writings, including the Gospel, are present: ‘he that hath love is far from all sin’ (Phil.3; 1 Jn.3:5 – 6); ‘lusts that are in the world’ (Phil.5; 1 Jn.2:16 – 17); ‘for whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is antichrist’ (Phil.7; 1 Jn.4:3); ‘the first-born of Satan’ (Phil.7; Jn.8:44; Rev.3:9); ‘that we might live in him’ (Phil.8; Jn.5:25 – 26; 14:19 – 20; 1 Jn.4:9).

Cross Reference Table: Writings and Authorities⁸

Each symbol in the large table below corresponds to a specific authority and a specific writing. The symbols summarize the opinion of the authority about the writing. The symbols have this meaning:

Symbol	Opinion of Authority
✓	accepted; true; scriptural; or quoted from very approvingly
✓	possible approving quotation or allusion
✕	acceptable, but only with changes
?	dubious; disputed; or useful for inspiration
✕	spurious (in the classification of Eusebius)
✕	false; heretical; heterodox; quoted from very disapprovingly
.	not mentioned or quoted from; opinion unknown

	Ignatius of Antioch	Polycarp of Smyrna	Marcion	Tatian the Assyrian (of Syrian Church)	Valentinus	Justin Martyr of Rome	Muratorian Canon	Irenaeus of Lyons	Clement of Alexandria	Tertullian of Carthage	Origen of Alexandria	Eusebius of Caesaria	Codex Sinaiticus	Athanasius	Dydimus the Blind, of Alexandria	Latin Vulgate	Peshitta (Bible of Syrian Church)
Date	110	140	144	150	150	160	170	180	190	200	225	324	~350	367	380	384	400
Matthew	✓	✓	✕	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mark	.	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Luke	✓	✓	✕	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
John	.	✓	✕	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Acts	✓	✓	✕	✓	.	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Romans	✓	✓	✕	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
I Corinthians	✓	✓	✕	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
II Corinthians	.	✓	✕	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Galatians	.	✓	✕	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ephesians	✓	✓	✕	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Philippians	.	✓	✕	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Colossians	✓	.	✕	✓	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
I Thessalonians	✓	✓	✕	✓	.	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
II Thessalonians	.	✓	✕	✓	.	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
I Timothy	.	✓	✕	✓	.	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
II Timothy	.	✓	✕	✓	.	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Titus	.	.	✕	✓	.	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Philemon	.	.	✕	✓	.	.	✓	.	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	.	✓	✓

⁸ modified by Mako A. Nagasawa from <http://www.ntcanon.org/table.shtml>; for more information, see <http://www.bible-researcher.com/canon3.html>

Hebrews	.	✓	.	.	.	.	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
James	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	.	.	?	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
I Peter	.	✓	.	.	✓	.	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
II Peter	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	.	.	?	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	.
I John	.	✓	.	.	✓	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
II John	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	✓	.	.	?	?	✓	✓	✗	✓	.
III John	.	✓	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	?	?	✓	✓	✗	✓	.
Jude	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	.
Revelation of John	.	.	.	.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	.
Gospel of Thomas	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✗	✗	.	.	.	.	.
Gospel of Truth	.	.	.	.	✓	.	.	✗	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Gospel of the Twelve	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✗	.	.	.	.	.	.
Gospel of Peter	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	?	✗	.	.	.	.	.
Gospel of Basilides	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✗	.	.	.	.	.	.
Gospel of the Egyptians	.	.	.	.	.	.	✗	.	✓	.	✗	.	.	.	.	.	.
Gospel of the Hebrews	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	.	?	✗	.	.	.	.	.
Gospel of Matthias	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✗	✗	.	.	.	.	.
Traditions of Matthias	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Preaching of Peter	.	.	.	.	✓	.	.	.	✓	.	✗	.	.	.	.	.	.
Acts of Andrew	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✗	.	.	.	.	.
Acts of Paul	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✗	?	✗	.	.	.	.	.
Acts of John	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✗	.	.	.	.	.
Epistle to the Laodiceans	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	.
I Clement	.	.	.	.	.	.	?	✓	✓	.	?	.	.	.	✓	.	.
Epistle of Barnabas	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	.	?	✗	✓	.	✓	.	.
Didache	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	.	?	✗	.	?	✓	.	.
Shepherd of Hermas	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	✓	✓	?	?	✗	✓	?	✓	.	.
Apocalypse of Peter	.	.	.	.	.	.	?	.	✓	.	.	✗	.	.	.	.	.

Conclusion: Within the first half of the second century, across four major cultures (Jewish, North African, Greek, Roman) and three languages (Hebrew, Greek, Latin), there was already a near-consensus view about the Four Gospels, Acts, the thirteen letters of Paul, and Hebrews attributed to Paul. In other words, the core of the canon was already in place. The letters of 1 Peter and 1 John were also broadly accepted, with James winning broad acceptance a bit later.

Disputed Books of the New Testament⁹

The table below shows which of the disputed New Testament books and other writings are included in catalogs of canonical books up to the eighth century.

KEY TO BOOKS

Heb. - Epistle to the Hebrews
 Jas. - Epistle of James
 Jn. - Second and Third Epistle of John
 Pet. - Second Epistle of Peter
 Jude - Epistle of Jude
 Rev. - Revelation of John
 Shep. - *Shepherd of Hermas*
 Apoc. - *Apocalypse of Peter*
 Barn. - *Epistle of Barnabas*
 Clem. - *Epistle of Clement*

Y indicates that the book is plainly listed as *Holy Scripture*;

N indicates that the author lists it in a class of *disputed* books;

M indicates that the list *may* be construed to include the book as Holy Scripture;

X indicates that the book is *expressly rejected* by the author.

S indicates that the author does not mention the book at all, which implies its rejection. See notes on the authorities and books following.

1. Greek & Latin	Date	Heb.	Jas.	Jn.	Pet.	Jude	Rev.	Shep.	Apoc.	Barn.	Clem.
Muratorian Fragment	170	S	S	M	S	Y	Y	X	N	S	S
Origen	225	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	S	S	S	S
Eusebius of Caesarea	324	Y	N	N	N	N	N	X	X	X	S
Cyril of Jerusalem	348	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S	S
Cheltenham list	360	S	S	Y	Y	S	Y	S	S	S	S
Council of Laodicea	363	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S	S
Athanasius	367	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	X	S	S	S
Gregory of Nazianzus	380	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S	S
Amphilocius of Iconium	380	Y	N	N	N	N	N	S	S	S	S
Rufinus	380	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	X	S	S	S
Epiphanius	385	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S
Jerome	390	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S
Augustine	397	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S
3rd Council of Carthage	397	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S
Codex Claromontanus	400	M	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S
Letter of Innocent I	405	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	X	S	S
Decree of Gelasius	550	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	X	S	S	S
Isadore of Seville	625	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S
John of Damascus	730	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S
2. Syriac	Date	Heb.	Jas.	Jn.	Pet.	Jude	Rev.	Shep.	Apoc.	Barn.	Clem.
Apostolic Canons	380	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	S	S	S	S	Y
Peshitta Version	400	Y	Y	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Report of Junilius	550	Y	N	N	N	N	N	S	S	S	S

⁹ <http://www.bible-researcher.com/canon5.html>

Conclusion: It appears that the Christian writings that were the most Hebraic were either slower to be disseminated abroad and/or more slightly difficult for the Greek and Latin Christians to understand. They won broad acceptance, however, not too long after the Gospels, Acts, the letters of Paul, 1 Peter, and 1 John. Significantly, the greatest theologians (Cyril of Jerusalem, Council of Laodicea, Athanasius of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Epiphanius of Salamis) accepted them.

PART SIX: DISCUSSING THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

Q: Wasn't the canon a conspiracy of the church hierarchy? A power move?

A: What hierarchy? The church was much closer to a flat community in its beginnings, not a hierarchical organization. Here's evidence:

- Referring to an independent exorcist that was not part of the band of twelve disciples, Jesus said, 'He who is not against you is for you.' (Lk.9:49 – 50). Apparently this confused the disciples who thought that this exorcist should 'report' to them. The fact that Jesus took a 'loose' view of organization is important to notice. He did not want the disciples to think that formal organization is what guarantees unity or success. In fact, common commitment to Jesus' mission is what gives a basic sense of unity to the disciples, not some formalized relation of power. Even more important is the fact that Luke carries the saying into the life of the early church. Why would a Gospel writer circulate that statement if the early church had all kinds of authority questions about which leader they were going to follow?
- The apostles had a collective, not an individual, authority. The apostles didn't 'carve up the world' and set up hierarchical 'realms' that were impermeable to one another. Hence, Peter (in 1 Peter) addressed the Galatians after Paul did; John (in Rev.2) addressed the Ephesians after Paul did; the author of Hebrews writes from Italy all the way to the Jewish Christians in Judea; the late first century work 1 Clement was apparently written from the elders at Rome to the church at Corinth; and the other patristic writings demonstrate this dynamic all the time. There were no 'realms' of individual jurisdiction. They didn't get into debates of, 'Don't step into my part of the organization.' Nor did the early Christians say, 'You're not my apostle.' Thus, their authority was a collective authority that they shared together. This means they did not see the church as an organization, but as a flat community where one section was permeable to others.
- The apostles' way of managing themselves was decentralized: They do not give any evidence that they 'reported' to Simon Peter (they were not centrally organized). Simon Peter appears to be a spokesperson for, but not an authority over, the other apostles. No central leader sent Barnabus and Paul out from Antioch; Barnabus and Paul parted ways on their own discretion. Paul respects the other apostles as colleagues and checks on himself, but he doesn't refer to their formal authority over him.
- The need for a council in Jerusalem in Acts 15 gives evidence of a decentralized community. If a hierarchical organization was already in place, it would have been used, and the decision making process would have been hierarchical, not consensual.
- House church governance seems fairly decentralized, e.g. Romans 16, 1 Corinthians 16, Philippians, etc. Local elders (1 Timothy, Titus plus scattered references in Heb.13, 1 Th.5, 1 Pet.5) are subject to the apostles but otherwise work independently, respecting other churches.
- The process of writing the New Testament and its canonization were both decentralized. The apostles do not appear to have consulted each other before writing.
- The need for subsequent church councils in Nicea, Chalcedon, etc. is also evidence. If a hierarchical organization was already in place, it would have been used, and the decision making process would have been hierarchical, not consensual.
- Later competition between Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch suggests that there was no clear understanding of church hierarchy. Edessa's independence (i.e. the Syrian Church) is also revealing. At the end of the sixth century, Gregory the Great, Bishop of Rome, denounced John the Faster (Patriarch of Constantinople) for his assumed title of 'Universal Patriarch.' In A.D. 606, Boniface III claimed he was 'Universal Bishop' over all the churches, though this was never actually true.

Q: So wasn't the canon a tops-down move?

A: Not really; it was a bottoms-up development. More like a grass-roots community consensus. Or like a 'Hall of Fame.'

Q: But the Greek, Latin, and Syrian branches of the church had different New Testaments, didn't they?

A: There were slight differences, but only with regards to 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. Not much hangs on those books alone. But the core of the New Testament was set. The Syrian church developed into East and West, and the Western Syrian church adopted the 27 books of the Greek and Latin New Testaments. The Eastern Syrian church continues with 22 books.