

## About Me:

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## Our Two Big Questions:

**Last week:** How do we know that the New Testament has been transmitted to us with reasonable accuracy?

**Tonight:** How do we know that the New Testament is a reasonably accurate record of the things that Jesus said and did?

## Why the 27 books:

Before we can talk about the accuracy of the New Testament, we have to talk about what the New Testament is.

The concept of canon deals with the question of why we have the 66 books in the Bible that we have.

## The Old Testament:

**We affirm the 39 books of the Old Testament because Jesus did.**

- Jesus affirmed that the OT was inspired by the Holy Spirit. (*e.g. Matthew 22:43*)
- Jesus believed in the historicity of key OT events. (*e.g. Matthew 24:37*)
- Jesus confirmed the content of the OT: Law, Prophets, and Writings. (*e.g. Luke 24:44*)

## The Canon of the New Testament:

**Critics will say,** “The Bible wasn’t put together until very late, and the powers that be simply picked the books that agreed with them and excluded all the books that their opponents liked. This was done for religious and political power.”

The best evidence, however, indicates that the New Testament was put together over a period of about fifty years. As the Good News about Jesus spread throughout the known world, the New Testament was quickly compiled into what we have today.

## Chronology and Canon:

- 5 BC - Jesus is born.
- AD 30 - Jesus begins his public ministry.
- AD 33 - Jesus is crucified.
- Early AD 40s - The first book of the New Testament is written (James).
- Late AD 40s - The missionary enterprise begins.
- Mid AD 50s - The first Gospel is written.
- AD 66/67 - Paul is executed. There is evidence that his letters are collected and circulating.
- Late AD 80s - The last Gospel is written.
- AD 90 - The New Testament is finished.
- AD 125 - The Gospels have made their way around much of the known world.
- By AD 130 - Church Fathers are grouping the Gospels with the Old Testament and calling them "Scripture." There are only four Gospels.
- By AD 150 - The entire New Testament is clearly attested to (though 3 John is not specifically named yet) by the early church fathers.

## Canon Conclusions:

The New Testament was not blindly collected by a few, nor was there some church council that decided which books to include and which to exclude. The New Testament was ratified and assembled by God's church very early and possibly by the people who knew Jesus and his apostles.

## Criteria for Canonization:

1. Does the book have apostolicity?
2. Does the book contradict established books and are the contents of a spiritual significance which gave it this rank?
3. Was the book universally received?

## The Reliability of the NT:

Some people don't believe God exists.

The arguments for God's existence are beyond the scope of this talk, but they are many. Read the New Testament with an open mind, and you will be surprised at how good of a case it makes for the existence of God all by itself.

It is reasonable to wonder if what we read in the New Testament really happened, especially given the significance of the material. Nevertheless, it is possible to work to establish that the Gospels are a reasonably accurate record of the things that Jesus said and did.

## Toward Getting some Answers:

We need to establish that the New Testament records the ideas, events, and thoughts within with reasonable accuracy.

Specifically, we can look for **historicity, antiquity, and external corroboration**. And when we look, the Bible passes with flying colors.

## Challenges to Historicity:

- Historical Unconfirmables
- Apparent Contradictions
- “Guilty Until Proven Innocent”
- Conspiracy Theories

## What Can We Check:

- Archeology
- Culture
- Geography
- Language
- Laws
- Names
- etc.

## External Corroboration:

We don't have time tonight to work through all the ancient external evidence for Christianity, but . . .

-Most of it comes from Christianity's opponents.

-While typically not sympathetic, non-biblical references to Christianity frequently confirm what the Bible claims.

### **Babylonian Talmud (AD 70-200, the Tannaitic Period)**

“On the eve of the Passover they hanged Jesus the Nazarene. And a herald went out before him for forty days, saying: ‘He is going to be stoned, because he practices sorcery and enticed and led Israel astray. Anyone who knows anything in his favor, let him come and plead in his behalf.’ But, not having found anything in his favor, they hanged him on the eve of Passover.”

### **Tacitus (c. 56-113 AD) - *Annals***

“Therefore, to squelch the rumor, Nero created scapegoats and subjected to the most refined tortures those whom the common people called ‘Christians,’ [a group] hated for their abominable crimes. Their name comes from Christ, who, during the reign of Tiberius, had been executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate. Suppressed for the moment, the deadly superstition broke out again, not only in Judea, the land which originated this evil, but also in the city of Rome, where all sorts of horrendous and shameful practices of every part of the world converge and are fervently cultivated.”

### **Pliny the Younger (c. 110 AD) - *Epistles***

“They affirmed, however, that the whole of their guilt, or their error, was that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to perform any wicked deed, never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to make good; after which it was their custom to separate, then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.”

## Conclusion:

We dealt with the issue of Antiquity last week, and I hope you can see that when we test the New Testament for **historicity**, **antiquity**, and **external corroboration** it passes with flying colors.