

CHURCH HISTORY: FROM PENTECOST TO THE GREAT SCHISM
WEEK 5: ST. JEROME, SCRIPTURE, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CANON
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St. Jerome and the Vulgate – AD 331-420

Biography – born c. 331 to Christian parents in Dalmatia (modern-day Croatia); received superb education in Rome (studied Roman classics, languages, rhetoric), accumulated the largest private library of the time; baptized as a young adult; became a monk to be able to study and pray, eventually becoming an ascetic in Syria; became biblical scholar; wrote commentaries on Scripture and translated volumes of works by Eusebius, Origen, and others; secretary to Pope Damasus in Rome (382-384); lived in a cave in Bethlehem; corresponded with the leading theologians of the day, including St. Augustine

The Pope Commissions a Latin Bible – Latin was the language spoken by the majority of Christians in the West, but the only Bible available in Latin was a very poor translation, with the OT based on the Septuagint, not the Hebrew; Pope Damasus commissioned Jerome to make a standard translation into Latin because of his knowledge of Hebrew and Greek; the translation took more than 20 years to complete

The Vulgate – *vulgar* – “common” – the language of the people – became the standard translation of the Bible until the Protestant Reformation and is still the official Latin translation for the Catholic Church

The Development of the Old Testament

Tanakh – 46 Books in Roman Catholic Canon

Torah (Law) – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Nevi'im (Prophets) – Former, Latter (Four Great Prophets, The Twelve)

Ketuvim (Writings) – Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, etc.

Ezra – Torah recognized as authoritative Scripture; by 200 BC, the Prophets are collected and recognized as authoritative

Septuagint – Greek translation of Tanakh, made by tradition by 70 scholars in Alexandria in the 4th Century BC; included more books than traditional Hebrew collections; this is the version of the Tanakh cited by early Christians

Jamnia – the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70 forced the Jewish community to develop a sense of identity based solely on Scripture; a rabbinical

school in Jamnia (on the coast of Palestine) attracted Jewish scholars who worked to develop an authoritative list of scriptural books; the Law and Prophets were well accepted, but the Jamnia school addressed the Writings specifically

Criteria for Canonicity (at Jamnia)

1. Harmony with the Torah
2. Prophetic inspiration
3. Hebrew language origin (the language of prophecy)

Protocanonical Books – 39 – considered authoritative with little dispute

Deuterocanonical Books – Judith, Wisdom, Tobit, Sirach, Baruch, 1-2 Maccabees – great dispute on whether they are considered authoritative – even after Jamnia, never completely settled in Judaism; rejected by Jerome but accepted by Augustine; officially declared canonical at the Council of Trent

Christian canon of OT saw many versions, none definitive until Trent; Council of Carthage (397) included most Deuterocanonical books

The Development of the New Testament

27 Books in the universal Christian NT

Oral Tradition – stories told and retold by apostles and their followers

Letters – first NT writings (1 Thessalonians, c. AD 51)

Gospels – c. AD 60-100

Other writings – Acts of the Apostles, Revelation, Hebrews

Marcion (c. AD 100-160)

Rejected OT – considered the god of the OT a demiurge, the creator of this world, but inferior to the God of Jesus and the NT

Gnostic – believed Jesus was God but not human; rejected birth and childhood of Jesus; apostles and followers of Jesus had misunderstood him and corrupted his words

Accepted limited NT – 10 Pauline Epistles and the Gospel according to Luke (minus the first two chapters), all heavily edited to suit his understanding of God

Excommunicated by the Church in Rome in AD 144

Led the Church to serious consideration of the Canon of Scripture

The Canon of the New Testament

Criteria for Canonicity:

1. Apostolic Origin
2. Use by the Church
3. Conformity with the rule of faith

Lists developed by Irenaeus, Origen, Eusebius, Tertullian

Muratorian Canon – late 2nd Century Rome – 22 books, plus Wisdom

Athanasius – late 4th Century – 27 books; first list that corresponds to final canon

Council of Carthage – 397 – accepts canon of 27 books; regional council, not ecumenical

Council of Trent – 1545-1563 – officially recognizes as inspired and authentic the canon of 46 OT and 27 NT books; first official Church recognition of OT canon

What wasn't included?

Apostolic Fathers – Letters of Clement, Shepherd of Hermas, Epistle of Barnabas, (did not have apostolic origin)

Apocryphal Gospels and Acts – Gospels of Thomas, Peter; Acts of Paul and Thecla; Apocalypse of Peter (did not conform to the Rule of Faith)

Intertestamental Literature – Enoch, Jubilees, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (all written between 200 BC and AD 100); not accepted by either Jews or Christians

Lost Letters – St. Paul's Letter to Laodicea, another Letter to the Corinthians