

# *How We Got The Bible*

Understanding the Process  
& History of the  
Canonization of the Bible

Part XIII

# The Gospels:

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

# The Gospels

The term gospel literally means “*good news*” and in Christianity what that *gospel/good news* is has developed over time.

# *The Good News*

1. What Jesus himself talked and taught about God (Mark 1:14)
2. Early Christian preaching about the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 1:1-5; I Corinthians 15:1-8)

## *The Good News*

3. Preaching that included both what Jesus had taught about God and what Christians had said about Jesus and the events of His life (Acts 10:34-43)
4. Books that offer in written form what had been proclaimed orally within communities.

# *The Good News*

To what genre of literature does a Gospel belong?

The Gospels are “sermons in story” (Howard Kee).

- ✓ Biographical and historical
- ✓ Written with an intended goal of effecting definitive changes in the way we think and believe (John 21:25)

## *The Authors*

- ✓ Most of the gospels were written one generation after Jesus Christ sometime around the beginning of the deaths of the Apostles
- ✓ Most of the writers were anonymous and ascribed the authorial names to their works
- ✓ Used literary devices that were meant to be rhetorically effective (Mk. 5) to their readers as opposed to be concerned with chronological accuracy - this accounts for the inconsistency among the gospels

# Materials in the Gospel

- Sayings: memorable quotations – legal, prophetic, wisdom, autobiographical
- Stories: biographical, controversy, didactic, commissioning
- Parables
- Miracles: exorcisms, healings, resuscitations, nature, feeding
- Hymns
- Genealogies

# Dynamics of the World Behind the Gospels

- ✓ Religious: The dominant characteristic of the Gospel world was the religious diversity with Judaism.
  - ✓ Sadducees
  - ✓ Pharisees
  - ✓ Essenes
  - ✓ Samaritans

# Sadducees

- The Sadducees were the small ruling aristocracy of the Jews. They comprised the vast majority of the Sanhedrin Council, controlled the Temple, and provided the High Priest
- Mark 12:18-27
- They denied: resurrection, angelic intercession, Pharisaical oral interpretation of the law, immortality of the spirit

# Pharisees

- The Pharisees were the larger, more popular, religious leaders whose main function was the interpretation of the Law
- Their main contention with Jesus was around religious purity, the Sabbath, and Jesus' rejection of their status (Mark 7, John 9)
- Acts 23

# Dynamics of the World Behind the Gospels

- ✓ Political: Jerusalem was conquered by Pompey in 64 BC and remained Roman occupation during the life of Jesus.
  - ✓ Roman rule required the imposition of a King or governor to represent Cesar but also allowed for native/indigenous authority – Sanhedrin Council
  - ✓ This two-fold leadership left the question of authority under constant debate

# Dynamics of the World Behind the Gospels

- ✓ Social: First century life was greatly impacted and influenced by Greek and Roman culture, better known as *Hellenism*.
- ✓ *Hellenism* emphasized: individualism, acquisition of knowledge and wealth, dualism which supported the beliefs of *Gnosticism*
- ✓ *Judaism* emphasized: community, obedience, and evil spirit possession

# From Jesus to Us

Transmission of the Gospel  
Traditions

# Transmission of the Gospel

## 1. The Historical Jesus: The things Jesus actually did and said

- *The Jesus Seminar*

## 2. Early Traditions

- Written Sources – people wrote down what Jesus said and preserved them
- Oral Traditions – people remembered what Jesus said and did and shared their stories, e.g. Peter

# Transmission of the Gospel

3. Redaction of the Gospel: The Gospel writers compile their books by taking, merging, and editing the early traditions. This was done by more than the four gospel writers of our New Testament

# Other Known Existing Gospels

- ✓ Gospel of James (stepbrother of Jesus): focuses on Mary and then follows Matthew and Luke
- ✓ Infancy Gospel of Thomas: The lost years, 5-12, of Jesus' life
- ✓ Gospel of Peter: Descriptive account of Jesus' death and resurrection
- ✓ Gospel of the Hebrews: Quoted in other works but not found in itself

# Other Known Existing Gospels

- ✓ Gospel of Thomas: A collection of Jesus' sayings, accepted as accurate by most scholars
- ✓ Gospel of Mary (Magdalene): Emphasizes the role and place of women as disciples
- ✓ Apocryphon of James: Conversation of Jesus with Peter and James before His ascension
- ✓ Dialogue of the Savior: Debate between Jesus, Matthew, Judas, and Mary

# Transmission of the Gospel

4. Preservation of the Manuscripts: People made copies of the completed Gospels and shared them around the world
5. Translation: Scholars translate copies of the Gospels into other languages
6. Reception: We read about what Jesus said and did in our modern editions of the Bible
7. Proclamation and Paraphrase