

# How To Read, Study, and Understand The Bible

## *Theopneustos*

- ✓ The scriptures are not human in their origin
  - ✓ God is the principle author – II Peter 1:20,21
- ✓ The scriptures carry the creative power and authority of God
- ✓ Necessary for human life – Gen 2:7

# The History of the NT Canon

*Canon:* The list of *sacred* books that serve as the rule of faith and life for the Christian church



# *Delayed Parousia*

# Canonization

Event

Oral Delay

Written

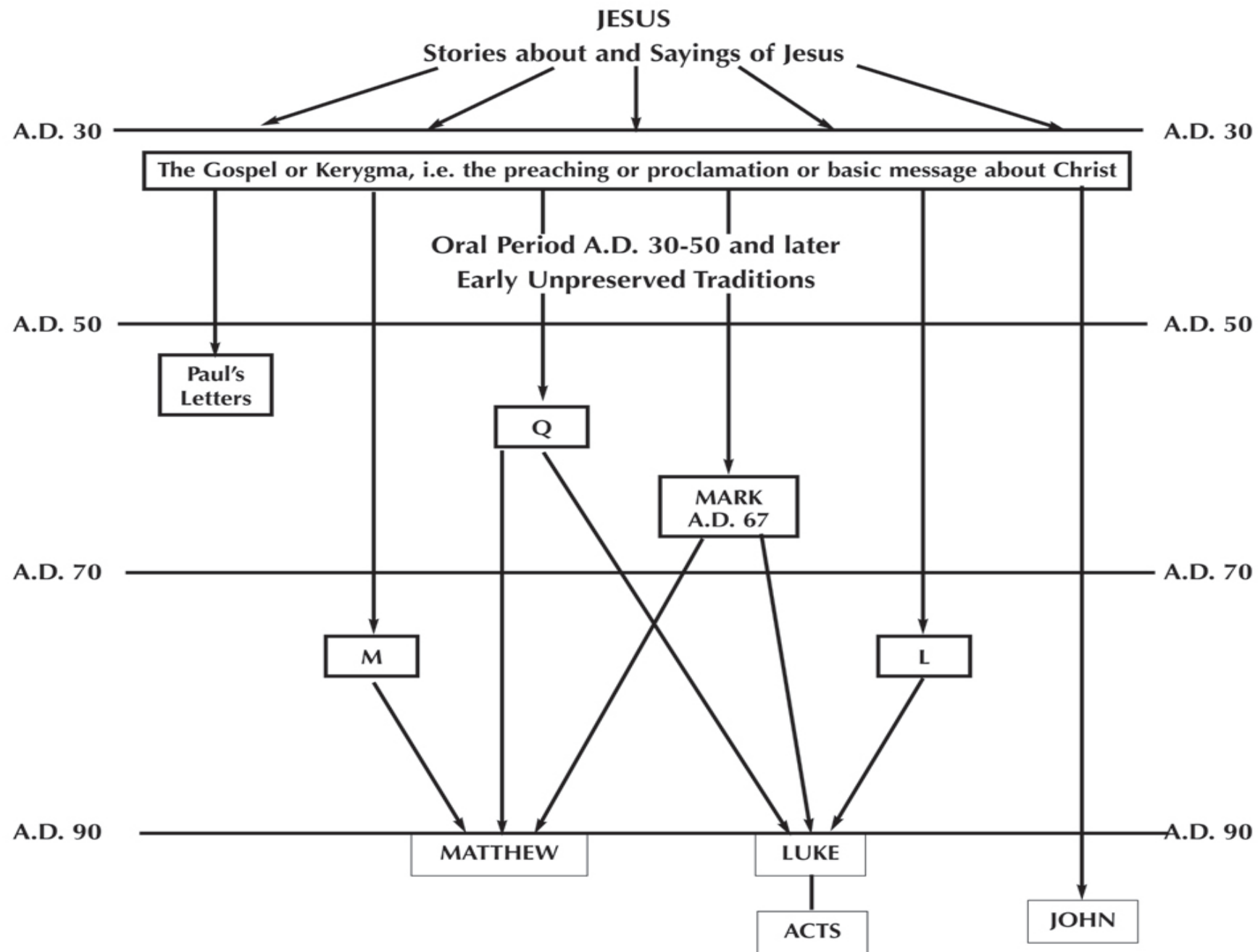
Scripture

Bible



# Formation of the NT

1. The Historical Jesus: The things Jesus actually did and said
  - *The Jesus Seminar*
2. Oral Traditions
  - People remembered what Jesus said and did and shared their stories, e.g. Peter
3. Early Written Sources
  - Paul's Letters, Mark
  - Matthew, Luke/Acts
  - Extra (Deutero)-canonical Gospels & Epistles, Johannine Literature



# New Testament Timeline

Epistles: Pauline & General by 65AD

Gospel Accounts & Acts by 90AD

Revelation 93 AD

By the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century

- ✓ The Hebrew Bible is canonized
- ✓ Torah, Nevi' im, Kethuvim are appropriated by the Christian Church as scripture

The OT scriptures were used by Jesus, appropriated by the early church, incorporated into the theology and church governance of Paul, referenced by the Gospel writers and were generally accepted as a part of the foundation of Christianity before the formation of the NT

## By the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century

- ✓ The Hebrew Bible is canonized
- ✓ Torah, Nevi'im, Kethuvim are appropriated by the Christian Church as scripture
- ✓ Paul's Letters are being circulated beyond their intended audience – II Peter 3:15,16; Colossians 4:16
- ✓ Other gospel accounts have been written
- ✓ Non-Pauline epistles exist and are circulated



# Deutero-Canonical Writings

Extant, fragments, referenced in other writings

Gospels: Infancy, Passion, Gnostic

Acts

Epistles

Apocalypses

Over 200

By the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century

Paul's *specific* letters were viewed as having lasting value and significance for other churches

An anthology of Pauline letters was collated in various churches

No *true* canon existed

The development of a formal canon is facilitated initially by individual religious leaders and then finally by church councils in the 4<sup>th</sup> century

## Marcion (140 AD)

Was a wealthy member of the church at Rome:

- Rejected the entire OT and Christianity's rooting in Judaism
- Believed the the Apostles misunderstood the true teachings of Jesus

## Marcion (140 AD)

Developed a canon of only 11 books:

- 9 Epistles of Paul

- 1 Pastoral (Philemon)

- Gospel of Luke (Paul's traveling companion)

# Gnosticism (2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries)

A heretical philosophical movement that gained great popularity in the early church

Produced a substantial body of writing preserved in *Nag Hammadi Library* (discovered in 1947)

Favored a much larger canon (40+ books)

By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century the Church was faced with some critical questions: How do you distinguish between the writings? Which ones should be taken seriously and which ones rejected? Which should be read in the Church? Which ones are to be used for doctrine?

# Muratorian Canon

Discovered by Ludovico Muratori in 1740

Books accepted by Rome in late 2<sup>nd</sup> century

Mtt, Mk, Lk, Acts, Paul's epistles & 2 pastorals, two letters of John, Apocalypses of John and Peter, book of Wisdom



By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century four criteria seemed to be operative in the development of the NT Christian canon

## Four criteria in NT development

1. Orthodoxy – is this writing consistent with the basic doctrines already recognized by churches?
2. Apostolicity – is this writing presumed to have apostolic authorship or association?

## Four criteria in NT development

3. Acceptance – is this writing being used in the church universal and cited by reliable bishops and theologians?
4. Antiquity – the older the writing the closer it was considered to be to the historical Jesus

# Eusebius (early 4<sup>th</sup> century)

Three kinds of writings in the church:

1. Universally accepted: four Gospels, Acts, Pauline epistles, 1 John, 1 Peter, Hebrews
2. Disputed but recognized: James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2-3 John
3. Spurious: Acts of Paul, Shepherd of Hermas, Apocalypse of Peter, Barnabas, Gospel of Hebrews

Revelation???

The Muratorian and Eusebian list show that there was general consensus about most of the books and consistent “fuzziness” about some others

## Athanasius – 367 AD

In his festal Easter letter affirmed the 27 books that we now have in our Bible, “in these alone is the teaching of true religion proclaimed as good news; let no one add to these or take anything from them.”

In 397, Augustine affirmed the OT and the  
same 27 books of the NT

The first official Church pronouncement came through the Council of Hippo (393) and then Carthage (397) – so that by 400 AD the 27 books of our NT canon were recognized as sacred writings that should serve as our rule of faith



## Martin Luther (16<sup>th</sup> century)

- Objected to any writing that did not promote Christ
- Challenged: Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation
- Re-ordered his NT and placed these at the end
- Raised the issue of “the canon within the canon”

The Council of Trent (1546) reaffirmed the 27 books and the content of the Bible was made an article of faith for the first time – “if anyone does not receive these books in their entirety... as sacred and canonical...let him be anathema”

## 27 Canonical Books Reaffirmed

Protestant Confessions of Faith –

French Confession of Faith (1559)

Belgic Confession (1561)

39 Articles of the Church of England (1563)

Westminster Confession (1647)

London Baptist Confession of (1689)

*Next:* Catholic v. Protestant Bible