

The Development of the Collection of Texts in the New Testament

Context

The 27 texts in our New Testament are not the only early texts out there

There are also texts written by the Apostolic Fathers

- Clement of Rome

and texts written by Gnostics

- The Gospel of Thomas

We will look at these three groups individually and as they relate to one another

Overview of the Texts in the New Testament

The New Testament, as a collection of texts, developed slowly, over the first three centuries of Christianity

The earliest of the texts to be written were likely Paul's letters, around the middle of the first century

Eight other authors—some Apostles, some early disciples—wrote the remaining texts before the end of the first century

And by the middle of the fourth century, the collection of the 27 texts now known as the New Testament had been widely accepted throughout the Mediterranean world

Overview of the Texts of the Apostolic Fathers

A second early group of texts were written in the first half of the second century by a half dozen authors known, confusingly, as the Apostolic Fathers

These texts are important as evidence of early Christian practice, and they also shed light on how the texts now in the New Testament were being read and used during the second generation after the Apostles

While each of the Apostolic Fathers seems familiar with one or two of the gospels and several other texts in the New Testament, apparently none had copies of all 27

Overview of the Texts of the Gnostics

A third group of early texts taught that salvation came through a secret knowledge, “gnosis” in Greek

For nearly two thousand years, the only record of these texts was in the writings that condemned them as heretical

In the last 120 years, fragments of the gnostic texts themselves have been found—*Gospel of Mary, Epistle of Peter to Philip, Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of the Egyptians,* and several dozen others

Which Texts are the Word of God?

The question, then, is which texts from these three groups are the inspired word of God?

Disclaimer: Since we have come to believe in Jesus through the texts in the New Testament, it is from these texts themselves that our investigation will begin, though it is important to be honest about that prejudice from the outset

Authors among the Apostles and the Following Generation

Jesus told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would give them the words to speak when they stood before rulers

- *Luke 12:11-12 (Mark 13:9-11 and Matt. 10:19-20)*

Jesus told the Apostles that the Holy Spirit would remind them of all that he had taught and guide them into all truth

- *John 14:25-26*
- *John 16:12-13*

Authors among the Apostles and the Following Generation

Miracles confirmed the teaching of the Apostles

- *Acts 8:5-7*
- *II Corinthians 12:11-12*

Paul wrote thirteen letters and gave his name

Romans 1:1, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus, and Philemon

Authors among the Apostles and the Following Generation

The Apostles John and Peter and early disciples James and Jude all wrote texts in which they are named

John 21:24, Revelation 1:1, I Peter 1:1, II Peter 1:1, James 1:1, Jude 1:1

It is likely that many of the Apostles and early disciples wrote other letters, which have not survived, perhaps of a personal nature like *Philemon*

Paul's letter to the church at Laodicea has not survived

- *Colossians 4:16*

Authors among the Apostles and the Following Generation

In eight other New Testament texts written by the Apostles and early disciples, the author is not named

Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews, I John, II John, and III John

The lack of named author was not a problem, since they were told to test the spirits anyway and make sure the message fit with what they had been taught

I John 4:1

Galatians 1:8-9

Authors among the Apostles and the Following Generation

Paul says that all “scriptures” are inspired by God, but he is explaining a process, not listing the specific texts

- *II Timothy* 3:14-16

Clearly “scriptures” includes the Old Testament, and would eventually apply to the texts of the New Testament, though they had not been written yet

Peter refers to Paul’s letters as wisdom given to him and as “scriptures”

II Peter 3:15-16

Authors among the Apostles and the Following Generation

Paul says that his teachings and writings have authority as the word of the Lord

I Corinthians 14:37

I Thessalonians 2:13

II Thessalonians 2:15

Authors in the Second Generation after the Apostles

Born in the 50s/60s, may have heard the last Apostles preach, definitely heard people who heard the Apostles

Christianity is illegal and Jerusalem has been destroyed, so there is no geographical center to the movement

- Clement of Rome, in Italy, 95
- Ignatius of Antioch, in Syria, 110
- Polycarp of Smyrna, in Turkey, 110
- Papias of Hierapolis, in Turkey, 120

Italy, Syria, and Turkey



Clement of Rome

Wrote *I Clement* to the church in Corinth, in Italy, in 95

Refers to letters Paul wrote to the Corinthians

Makes allusions to *Romans*, *Galatians*, *Ephesians*, and *Philippians*

Clear allusions to *Hebrews*

Records sayings of Jesus that could be from *Matthew*, *Mark*, or *Luke*—but he doesn't quote directly and doesn't seem concerned with who wrote it down

Ignatius of Antioch

Wrote seven letters to churches on his way through Turkey to be executed in Rome, in 110

Uses Paul's phrasing from *I Corinthians*, *Romans*, *Ephesians*, *Philippians*, *Colossians*, and *I Thessalonians*

Echoes of *Hebrews* and *James*

Clear allusions to *Matthew* and multiple allusions to *John*, though not by name

Polycarp of Smyrna

Wrote *Letter to the Philippians* as a cover letter introducing Ignatius's letters, in Turkey, soon after 110

Clear borrowings from *Matthew* and *Luke*

Allusions to 8 of Paul's letters—*Romans, I Corinthians, II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Galatians, Ephesians,* and *Philippians*

Also allusions to *Hebrews*

Papias of Hierapolis

Wrote *Expositions of the Sayings of the Lord*, in Turkey, around 120. Only fragments survive, but later writers quote it extensively

Allusions to *John*, *I John*, *Revelation*, and *I Peter*

Refers to *Matthew*, “Matthew composed the sayings in a Hebrew dialect”

Refers to *Mark*, “Mark, having become Peter’s interpreter, wrote down accurately all that he remembered, without, however, recording in order the things said or done by the Lord”

Papias of Hierapolis

Was a friend of Polycarp and had heard the Apostle John preach

“If anyone came who had been a follower of the presbyters, I inquired into the words of the presbyters, what Andrew or Peter or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord’s disciples had said, and what Aristion and the presbyter John, the Lord’s disciples, were saying. For I did not think that information from books would help me so much as the utterances of a living and surviving voice.”

Summary of Authors in the Second Generation after the Apostles

They don't quote books by name, but there are abundant allusions to 19 of the 27 books in the NT

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Romans, I Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Hebrews, James, I Peter, I John, and Revelation

No clear references to *Acts, II Corinthians, Titus, Philemon, II Peter, II John, III John, and Jude*

Each author seems familiar with one or two gospels and several other texts, but none appears to have had all 27

Authors in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Generations after the Apostles

Born after the Apostles had died, they are more dependent on written sources than earlier generations

Christianity is still illegal

Regional traditions are developing

In the West: Rome, France, and Tunisia

In the East: Greece, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt

Write denouncing heretical groups (Gnostics, Marcionites, and Montanists) and their texts

Western Authors: Mid-2nd Century to Mid-3rd Century

Justin of Rome (Justin Martyr), Italy, 135-160

Hermas of Rome, Italy, c. 150

Hippolytus of Rome, Italy, 200-235

Irenaeus of Lyon, France, 175-200

Tertullian of Carthage, Tunisia, 200-240

Italy, France, Tunisia, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt



Eastern Authors: Mid-2nd Century to Mid-3rd Century

Aristides of Athens, Greece, 150

Athenagoras of Athens, Greece, 175-190

Dionysius of Corinth, Greece, 150-170

Melito of Sardis, Turkey, 170-180

Theophilus of Antioch, Syria, 170-185

Serapion of Antioch, Syria, 200-210

Tatian of Assyria, , Iraq, 165-180

Pantaenus of Alexandria, Egypt, 180-200

Clement of Alexandria, Egypt, 195-215

Origen of Alexandria, Egypt, 200-250

Summary of Authors in 3rd, 4th, & 5th Generations after Apostles

They are quoting books by name, and all 27 books that are now in the New Testament appear to be accepted, with regional emphases

In the East, some mistrusted *Revelation* because of its popularity with the Montanist heretics

In the West, *James*, *II Peter*, and *III John* are not quoted, while some authors regard the texts of the Apostolic Fathers / *Clement* and the *Shepherd of Hermas* as scripture

Summary of Authors in 3rd, 4th, & 5th Generations after Apostles

Texts by endorsed by the Gnostics were flatly rejected

Gospel of Mary

Epistle of Peter to Philip

Gospel of Thomas

Gospel of the Egyptians

4th Century Authors

Christianity is no longer illegal

In fact, the Emperors, after Constantine, are showing favor toward Christians, making power within regional churches appealing

Rome and Constantinople emerge as the power centers

Athanasius of Alexandria, Egypt, 367

- He notes that only the 27 books are read from during worship in all churches

Summary of 4th Century Authors

Codices containing all 27 books survive from the 4th century

Synod of Hippo in 393 says that the canon is the 27 books we still have today, but this is a recognition of common practice, rather than a controversial decision