

Making of the Bible P3

Exploring My Strange Bible

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Tim: Hey everybody! I'm Tim Mackie, and this is my podcast, Exploring My Strange Bible. I am a card-carrying, Bible, history, and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have.

On this Podcast, I'm putting together the last ten years' worth of lectures, and sermons where I've been exploring this strange, and wonderful story of the Bible and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith. And I hope this can be helpful for you too.

I also helped start this thing called, The Bible Project. We make animated videos, and podcasts about all kinds of topics on Bible, and Theology. You can find those resources at thebibleproject.com.

With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

Alright. This is the third of a three-part series on the Making of the Bible. I did this series of lectures all in one night. It was a Friday night event at a church that I worked at for a number of years. It was super fun to pack it all in together. But man, what a firehose. Here at least on this podcast you get it in three different doses.

This last episode is about the manuscript history of the New Testament which is really different than that of the Old Testament. Just the way that the manuscripts spread, the amount of manuscripts, and so on. And then also the history of manuscript discoveries, and the history of our English translations beginning back before King James but the effect of the King James and the modern debates about English translations so, so fascinating. We'll talk about that manuscript history of the New Testament.

And then the second half of this lecture is going to talk about the process and the dynamics at work in the collection of the books of the Bible into holes, what Bible nerds call the canon, with one n. C-a-n-o-n. Not like pirate cannons. But a canon meaning a collection. A measured collection. So how did collection process of the Biblical books take place? Again, always give an overview of that. Hopefully this whole lecture series has been giving you some new categories to think about. Where the Bible came from and what it is and what the implications that are, we'll just keep exploring that in different series that we do in the future on this podcast. But hope this one is helpful. Here we go.

This will be kind of familiar how we're tracing the other timeline here. Similar to what we did for the Hebrew Bible and there's a couple of things that make the

transmission story of the New Testament distinct from the Hebrew Bible though and that is this concept here. And if you read any, again I've given to you recommended readings some of which are on the table at the end of the New Testament handout and they'll develop this idea. So the Jesus movement, read through the Book of Acts and by end of the Book of Acts, it's gone from a 120 people in an upper room in Jerusalem to thousands of people, Jews and non-Jews all over ancient world spreading as far as Rome, right? That's where the Book of Acts ends. And you know, Paul is in Rome, in house arrest but living in a nice place with a patio and he's talking about Jesus freely to people.

And so you know the next 200 years of the Jesus movement, the theme is growth and spreading. Growth and spreading, growth and spreading. And so with that growth and spreading, the New Testament is spreading too. Because everywhere that a missionary or an apostle or people who go to start anew, Jesus community, they're going to take copies of the Scriptures with them of the Greek Old Testament and of the forming books that we have in the New Testament as well. And so big part of the copying history of the New Testament has to do the first real urban centers of Christianity. And so there's kind of four main ones in terms of places where Jesus movement became large and then a large established urban center. So, Alexandria Egypt, Antioch, and Syria and a number of different cities in around Asia Minor and a lot of these cities are the cities that Paul wrote to, like Ephesus and Colossae, so on, and then also of course, Rome. Think of how this works here.

And so Jesus movement starts here and then very quickly it spreads so that the main centers where there's the most numbers of Christians copying the New Testament and so on are in these places here.

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Now just think about how this is going to go within a hundred or 200 years is if you have a group of copyists who are working, copying New Testament manuscripts here, copying them here, and then they're going to extent to go plant churches here in North Africa and so on and these people are getting sent here and so on. This actually helps us in terms of reconstructing the history of the development of the New Testament. Because let's say group of scribes end up here and you one copy that's maybe the model for the others and there's like a

mistake or an error or a difference in that copy, then that's going to get spread over around here to these manuscripts from this part of the world, where's that error not going to be where that difference is not going to be? In any of the arrow, you know. But so they're all going, again, you tried writing out a copy on anything, there's going to be some mistakes of spelling, word order, you might skip a line or something. But the beauty of this organic spreading nature of the Early Jesus movement is that there's manuscripts being copied everywhere. And it makes a horribly difficult puzzle you have to figure out. But also because it's complex, it means that there was never anybody, a group of old men in white beard like doing this in a room by themselves, trying to trick everybody else. Like that story doesn't exist in history of the Bible. So this thing is public, it's spreading everywhere, and that helps us as well as creates complexity and problems. So here's our four like the animation, I kind of went through an animation phase in PowerPoint where like animated everything. I don't do that anymore, takes too much time but I used to do it. So we've got our four main copy centers here in these first centuries.

The early 300s are really important set of decades for the history of early Christianity namely that there was a Roman emperor, one of the first Roman Emperors to engage in widespread, systematic persecution and execution of Christians and the suppression of Christians. What this means is that there's going to be unique differences or additions or whatever errors have gone on, on one place won't necessarily be in another. So let's look at some examples of this.

So again, these are what I would call profound differences in the manuscripts. So to you they may not be profound but these are, you know, about the most significant as it gets. So go to First John Chapter 5 with me. This actually probably the most significant one in the entire New Testament. If it bugs you, the other ones won't bug you because this one is the most significant.

Chapter 5 verse 5. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

He is the one who came by the water and the blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. Now it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three are in agreement.

There's a lot of discussion among commentators; what is John talking about here? Is it water used in baptism in His blood and image of the crucifixion and then we testify to the truth of Jesus through baptism and through the word

supper, is that what he's getting at here? So you know, you have to unpack the symbolism but if you look in verse 8, you're going to see a footnote somewhere in verses 7 and 8. Do you see? Does anyone have a footnote there? So essentially there's a footnote, that there's some late manuscripts of the Vulgate which is a Latin translation, but it was based on some Greek manuscript somewhere, and they insert all of what you have there in the footnote into the text. So let's read verse 7 and 8 with the addition.

For there are three that testify. The, go down to the footnote. There are three that testify in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit: and these three are one.

And there are three that testify on the earth, backup, the Spirit, the Water, and the Blood: and these three are in agreement.

What just happened right here? The Trinity. Yeah, it's very nice. Those are very nice. So he said, "So we've introduced the contrast, three in heaven. The Father, the Word, the Spirit. Three on earth. The Spirit, the Water, and the Blood." So this addition happened in one set of manuscripts in Latin and ones connected to the manuscript that come from the Asia Minor tradition, eventually made their way to Rome. And so you can say, "Oh, here's an addition, but it was clearly an addition meant to help interpret theologically what's going on here, but we can isolate it, it's in one text tradition, it's not in the others. It's not original. Shouldn't be there."

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Discussion's over, you know. So it may bug you that some scribe put that in there. Again, so we could debate similar to Jeremiah, is this malicious tampering, are we introducing an idea that's not found anywhere else in the New Testament? No, the Trinity is found in presupposed in lots of places in the New Testament. But for one reason or another, somebody got creative and added this line, but we can totally spot it. To me, this is an extremely profound difference. An example from the Book of Acts. So this is a feature of the text history of the Book of Acts, that the manuscripts connected to what's called, the Western Manuscripts, which again are Asia Minor, some Asia Minor manuscripts, the Book of Acts has, you know, maybe a handful dozen, many dozen little additions, just like the one we're about to read.

So here's how it reads in most of our English translations. This is from the chapter where Steven, he is appointed as the spokesman for the Gospel, and there's a bunch of people arguing with Steven. But they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke. Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Steven speak words of blasphemy against Moses, and against God." There are a handful of manuscripts in the Western, this Asia Minor tradition, that have an extra line to the story of his. This is the way it reads in those manuscripts. They couldn't argue with Steven; they couldn't stand up against his wisdom or the spirit by whom he spoke because they were refuted by him with boldness. Therefore, when they were unable to confront the truth, they secretly persuaded some people say, "We've heard Steven." So what have we done with the additional material here? We've just made Steven more awesome, right? We've just made Steven, you know, more bold and we've made his opponents more stupid or something.

So, you could say this is a minor narrative embellishment. Does the truth of the story hang on this? No. Does this unpack from the story of anything that wasn't already there? No, not really. It's adding, we're airbrushing the painting or something here. I'd say we're photoshopping these days, people airbrush and photoshop in store. So you know, whatever the scribe thought that the thought he had the prerogative to do that but good for us that he was in one place in one time and we can spot his activity and recognize that it's not a part of the original.

So essentially what's going on here then is that in this time period, these first, basically 200 years of the New Testament, it's similar to that period we have for the Hebrew Bible. It's complicated, but that's okay. We should expect it to be complicated because there's people involved. God bless the people who have done hard work in the rest of this time period to sort out what was done during this complex period. And that for me is the fascinating detective mystery of the story of the New Testament. So we're going to power through this. You guys ready for action?

So here's what happens in essentially 300 and here's how I used to animate PowerPoint here. Here we go, watch. There's a guy named Diocletian. Okay, there was a Roman Emperor named Diocletian who began systematically, actively suppressing the Jesus movement and killing lots of Christians, burning churches, and burning their copies of their New Testament. And so what essentially happened is there were a large number of churches in Asia Minor that escaped or that were not subject to these persecutions by Diocletian. So just a quote here to spell this out.

Persecution of the Christians by Diocletian was characterized by the systematic destruction of the church buildings, and any manuscripts that were found in them were publicly burned. Church leaders were required to surrender for burning all holy books in their possession. I mean, we were just sitting now reading the stories of people who are in these kinds of situations. This is not a new thing in the history of Christianity. The result then was a widespread scarcity of New Testament manuscripts which became acute when the persecution sees. Does that make sense? They're saying that once the persecution's over, Diocletian passes, new emperor, you know, embraces new policies. Then we need to copy the New Testament like mad, right? And so when Christians could again engage freely a missionary activity, there was a tremendous growth in the size and number of new churches and so there followed certain demands for large numbers of New Testament manuscripts in all the provinces. This growing need could only be met by large copying houses.

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And so any text used as the exemplar, and by that they mean the foundation text that a bunch of copies were made off of. And such a copying center would naturally be widely distributed and have a great influence. Does that make sense what they're saying here? So as it goes, it was a group of text that we can now locate to the tradition of one copying center in Asia Minor. And this became the form of the biblical text that got spread all over the world as Christianity and then literally over the next 12 centuries, it spread west, right to Celtic Christianity and the 700s when missionaries go to Ireland and so on, and spread throughout Europe the conversion of the tribes and so on, Germanic tribes and so on. And the copies of Bible being made into Latin everything, all comes from manuscripts based on one group here.

So 1516, a guy names Erasmus. Have you heard of him before? It's kind of an important figure in pre-Luther. It's a pre-reformation. He was a scholar and he tried to compile the first scholarly edition of the New Testament and he had access to a few hundred biblical manuscripts which seemed amazing at that time, right? No one ever tried to do this before. But all—we now know all of the manuscripts he found were basically getting lots of manuscripts from this one chain of tradition here. So, he based his text entirely on these things here. This is

now called the majority text. To think, 1200 years this one tradition of text is being copied and copied. How many copies are going to be existing today? The majority. Which is why it's called the majority text. So you can't count numbers when you're doing New Testament text studies because the majority are going to be these text right here, and then the majority because there were the only ones that people had for a really long time. So here's a picture of Erasmus' edition and got Latin over here, the Greek text over here, and a lot of crazy medieval graphic art.

The tradition goes forward. People begin to use Erasmus' text as the scholarly edition that all further additions should be based on. Just a few years later again, a guy named William Tyndale who speaks English, and he has a passion that's not just priests and scholars should be able to read the Bible in Greek or in Latin, but that everybody should be able to read the Bible in their own language. So what does William Tyndale do? He does something that's illegal. He translates the Bible into English and his life is in endangered for it. And so he produced the first English translation from the best Greek and Hebrew manuscripts that he had. So here's from the Gospel of John, SYR and then S, S are in classic German, the first chapter. If you look at the beginning, that S, isn't that great? In the beginning was that word, and that word was with God, and God was that word. The same was in the beginning with spelled with a Y, isn't this great? There you go. So early 1500s English. So this English translation has had an enormous amount of influence on English Translation still today. So how Tyndale phrased things into English begin then when it influenced the next major English translation that became the dominant English Bible for the last 400 years or so which is the King James version. But can you see—again, what are all these based on in terms of New Testament manuscripts? Just one manuscript tradition. And how widely read is the King James Bible? Really, really, really widely read. Even still today. And so here's the page from the early edition of the King James. They attribute the letter to the Hebrews here to Paul even though it doesn't say that anywhere.

So here's what it comes down to is that we're talking about a well over 1,000-year period of time that the New Testament is being passed on and translated now but based off one manuscript tradition after the Diocletian persecution. So lo and behold we enter a new age when the British Empire, when the sun never sets on the British Empire, and so that's essentially when modern archaeology took off. It was modern British people going in to all these places that they have now conquered and began to dig up ruins. That's essentially the history of modern archaeology. You have all these British scholars cruising around the world going

into ancient monasteries or ancient mosques or churches and so on and just digging out old manuscripts. And so they're traveling all over the ancient world, and lo and behold what do they find?

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Some of these guys are just really incredible. These are stories of great biographies to read and they were definitely introverts so I'll just read a couple.

This is a guy who found that manuscript I told the story at the monastery in Sinai, Sinai Peninsula. Frederick Constantine von Tischendorf. He said, "I have become impassioned to seek and utilize the most ancient witnesses to reconstruct the purest form of the Greek scriptures. I have dedicated myself to this sacred task, the struggle to regain the original form of the New Testament." Can you imagine what an exciting time that was, right? Another guy, Samuel Trigue (SP?), "I've devoted myself to a lifetime of meticulous labors upon the text of the New Testament as an act of worship undertaken in the full belief that it will be for the service of God and His church." Unbelievable people. They dedicated their whole lives to this task. And here's essentially like these animations. Essentially what happens is that these guys start traveling the known world and just digging up everything they can and they're just discovering loads of manuscripts and many of them are New Testament manuscripts. Now you can put two and two together here. Can you see where this is going here?

So all of a sudden we have not only the majority text, we're discovering text in Egypt, text buried in ancient Catholic churches, and libraries in Rome, you know what I mean? It's just so exciting. I think it would be exciting. In old churches that are in what we call Syria here today. And so essentially here's the kinds of things we start finding. So we have a traditional King James of the Lord's prayer, yeah?

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

So how scandalized would you be, you've grown up saying this that there would be discovered more ancient, more reliable manuscripts simply don't have the little bit at the end there? Now look at the bit at the end. What is that little bit at the end? This is like Jeremiah chapter 10, it's a little praise, it's a little hymn of praise at the end. Now here's what this tells us here. This is actually interesting is that very quickly we know from document from the early 120s or so called the Didache, it's the earliest form of catechism in the early church, what early converts were taught. We're told that the Lord's prayer was basic. Every Christian learns it, you memorize it, this is a part of your daily prayer life. It's just the way it went in the early Jesus movement. And you can imagine how in those first century or so that the Lord's prayer, you're saying it every day, you say it every gathering like your house church has a group here together and worship. You can see someone would say, "You know, we need a more proper ending at the beginning of the prayer. Not just deliver us. Let's end it with a hymn." And then you can imagine a scribe who is raised saying this version of the Lord's Prayer and then when he comes, he becomes a scribe, the scribe of the Book of Matthew. And he is copying down and he's like, "Wait a minute. This isn't the right version of the Lord's prayer. It needs the ending that I learned growing up as a kid." Then there you go, in it goes. But it's not original. It's in the text of Matthew. So again, this isn't malicious tampering, this isn't somebody trying to twist the Bible or something like this is an addition that comes to the Lord's Prayer and it arises out of the worship life of the church which is kind of precisely what we would expect, wouldn't it? But for some people, this is deeply scandalous. Don't mess with my King James. Why are these scholars taking out all of these important stuff of the Bible? This is deeply controversial in these early 1800s and 1900s.

Here's just a few pictures of some of these early manuscripts of the New Testament. They're just awesome. So this is the oldest piece of New Testament that we've got. It's a fragment from John Chapter 18 and by the handwriting, it's dated to the early decades of the second century. So we're back in 40 years or something here. It's just outstanding. I don't know, I get chill in my spine with this kind, how awesome is this. Some are much better preserved. So this is a collection of Paul's letter to the Philippians. And then can you see right here there's a break, and then a little heading, and then new things begin. So what that says this past Colossae to the Colossians. It's the beginning of the next letter, Philippians and Colossians. So notice this is different. This is an animal skin is it? Yeah, this is papyri which is reed straw that is wet down and then flattened together.

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So these earlier papyri and then there's the next main set of manuscript witnesses this is again, this is the one that was found in the monastery in Sinai.

So we have the entire New Testament represented in some of these early books, codex forms of the New Testament. We have the majority of the New Testament in these early papyri here. This was just an exciting time I think in the history of the church. So here's where we're at today then is that a group of scholars led by these two German scholars Erwan Nestle and Kurt Alan, they got together in the 1960s, they started to put together the state-of-the-art, here's everything we know in one place. And that is the form of the New Testament. It's called the Nestle Aland New Testament, and it's now in the 27th edition. So they updated and published a new edition based on new findings about every 5 to 10 years and they've just been doing that since the 1960s.

So it's very similar here, you can see the text, and then you see all those little squiggles symbols that are highlighted there. Those are little footnotes directing you down here and then this is like reading a phone book or something, you know. It's just like a complex code telling you the types of variants that are in the manuscripts. And again this is sort of like, this is even more than a Hebrew Bible, I'd say 99% are insignificant. The word that was left out. Greek spell things in different word order. They don't need word order like we do. So the words are in a different order or something. And so most of it has virtually no significant effect on translation, and so on. There's some that do, like we saw earlier, but most don't. So that's kind of where we are today.

Every English translation that you go to Barnes and Nobles and look at are based off of this Greek text right here. So the reason why the translations are different is different philosophies of translations not a different Bible underneath it, something. Something like that. They're all working off this basic text right here. Great. This is a good time to bring out this handout that's on the front here. How many Hebrew Bibles are there that our English Translations are based off of? There's just one. Oh, I didn't put it out there. But it's this guy up here I showed you a picture of it. It's just one text. One Hebrew Bible that everybody's working out off. How many Greek New Testaments are there that all our translations come off of? So the question is, is why all of the different English Translations? And that

is what this little thing is about right here. And so essentially, translations, the way it works is a group of scholars get around, and they say, we think we need English translation that just slavishly sticks to basically trying to mimic Greek and Hebrew in English. It's English like nobody speaks it. But that's okay because that's what this translation is about. And so the most extreme end of that would be like interlinear if you ever seen that words, literally you see the Hebrew and then the English words underneath it, and it's garbled English. It doesn't make any sense because Hebrew doesn't have all the same word order as English.

But then going along down, you see things like NASB, that's the New American Standard, and New American Standard is English as it's never been spoken before. But it's a very—its translation to stud—to do word studies. You want to read very closely, you know. If you want to learn Greek or Hebrew, you read the next best thing. The NASB is a good way to go. A couple down from there, you'll see the ESV, yeah? In terms of NASB and you see the next Bible, then the ESV. So in terms on the spectrum the ESV places—I find it to be difficult English. What they're trying to do is map closely under the word order and consistency translations from the Greek and the Hebrew. So for some people, they love that. The mistake that people make is, formal equals more faithful to the text of the Bible. That's a mistake. That's the philosophical choice driving the translation. So on this end, you'll see, instead of translating word for word, one English word for every Greek word, some Greek and Hebrew words are more complex, and so we need like a whole English phrase to really unpack and communicate what the author was intending. So that's called a dynamic approach. And so you'll get translations that I would say are the grateful reading on the bus, the grateful reading whatever and at certain points. They're not the most helpful for studying. If you really want to dig in to study, get a study Bible and something like that. I would say that that's not really what these are designed for.

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These are designed to help you read as if you're reading the Bible in modern English which is what most of us are trying to do. So most translations fall somewhere on this spectrum. I try to put as many contemporary ones as I could. But again, dynamic doesn't mean less faithful. It does mean that there will be interpretative choices made by the translators as they render in the English. But

there are also interpretative choices being made by these people too on the formal end. So all translations are going to be in an interpretation of some kind. So my two cents about translations is, there's no such thing as a bad translation. The best translation is the ones you actually read. And I encourage people to read multiple translations over the years of your journey. I think it's good to change up every year or so the translation that you're reading the Bible in because new language just gets new ideas into your mind in different ways. All translations are a form of interpretation because no one language is identical to another. You have to make some choices. We have one Hebrew Bible, one Greek Bible, and a million English versions of it, right. So what does it mean to say is, my Bible is God's word. So does my translation convey the meaning that the author had in mind and that's what I get from the translation then I'd say that, that is God's word, you know. And part of it too is that if you ever read the Bible very long, sometimes things will strike you and the Holy Spirit's doing stuff on you that may or may not be related to the main point in the passage that you're reading, you know what I mean? There might be something else that strikes you or something you've never thought of, you know. And so God's word works in a lot of ways over and above, it's rooted in the wording and the meaning of the words, but also over and above what the words are doing. And so I feel totally confident saying the Bible is the word of God and this NIV—if by Word of God we have in mind this whole thing that I'm talking about, not the golden tablets view. And that's usually what people think of when they hear the Word of God. A term I have come to use more widely is, the Sacred Scriptures or the scriptures, God is speaking through the scriptures. And I find that to be language that tends to communicate a little better to folks, but okay.

So just to make sure we're not talking about cannonball canons, the word canon is actually Greek word spelled in English letters that means rule or measure or list. So when we're talking about the biblical canon, we're talking about the authoritative list of books that constitute God's communication to the human race. So you know, a light matter. But that's what we're talking about here. The collection, canon, collection. The authoritative thing I think that's okay, let me just summarize what I'm trying to get at here is I think it's very important to recognize that if I'm a Christian, what I know about Jesus is mediated through the scripture, but it's important to recognize the Bible isn't trying to draw attention to itself. The Bible is trying to draw our attention to a person, right? Who exists right now we believe and who lived and died and rose again. And so Jesus is super clear at the end of Matthew that authority does not belong to the Bible and on itself. The Bible belongs to Him, to Jesus. And so what this is means is that the Bible is one

of the ways that the authority of Jesus is working itself out in the world and what is the authority of Jesus all about? It's about starting a movement of His followers, people who are becoming new kinds of humans, it's about the movement of the Gospel, it's about the Kingdom of God, and it's about the new thing that's happened in the resurrection that's spreading throughout the human race through the spirit and during the story of the gospel. That's what Jesus is doing with His authority. The authority of Jesus isn't like to bash people over the heads, right? The authority of Jesus is to spread the message of the healing, transforming power of the gospel and of His resurrection. And so I think this is important is that the authority of the Bible we hear that phrase and we think, "Oh the biblical canon, it's the list of books that tell me how to behave and have the power to tell me how to behave." That's what we think of when we think when we hear this word. And in my mind, that is not a biblical view of authority. A biblical view of authority starts right here, and it's that all authority is in Jesus and His mission that he's commissioned us towards. And so, if our view of the Bible doesn't help serve us in this mission, then I think we've gone astray from what Jesus is trying to tell us to do, does that make sense? So the Bible is not trying to point us to itself, it's trying to point us to the person of Jesus. And so for me, this has been a helpful way to think about all this issue of canon here.

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That's why I'm camping out on it is that the scriptures are telling us a story, right. And I've done it right down the line here, tried to summarize the storyline of the Bible. Here we go. And of all the moments in the story, this one for Christ followers, this is primary, Jesus. Everything revolves around Him, everything is about Him, about what He accomplished for us, about what He's doing now in the world through us. So Jesus.

Why do we read the Old Testament? Not because it's easy or because I like it, you know what I mean? I read the Old Testament because I was Jesus' Bible and that's where He discovered who He was and that was the God He said He came to embody and represent and so on. And so that's why I read the Old Testament, and that's why I read the New Testament which is about Jesus. So think about this then, scriptures are text that tell the story right here. The authority of the Bible is in the events, is specifically in Jesus, and Jesus is the culmination of this

story right here. So scriptures, things that retell the story or unpack the meaning of the story like Paul's letters do and they're text that guide the community in living out the story. And in many ways, I think that's what Paul's letters, what Hebrews, what James is trying to do. You heard the story leading up to Jesus, the Old Testament. You now know the story of Jesus, Paul, and Peter, and James, and John are guiding the early Jesus communities on how to rightly live out the story of Jesus. How to live out the gospel. So we have all this. This is in the production of the New Testament. What that leaves to question is once all these guys pass from the scene, Jesus and the first generation of apostles, there were a lot more text produced in the first century than just the ones that we have in the Bible. And so then there's discerning process, a sifting process. Which text that come from this early period are the ones that rightly tell the story. Do you see why I have in bold and underlined rightly? Because there could be a lot of text out there that have misunderstood Jesus or that passed on a version of Jesus' teaching that have distorted, that are not right, or ways of following Jesus that are actually now out of sync with what Jesus would have actually wanted. And so this is the process of discerning the canon right here.

Which of these writings are the ones that rightly protect and preserve the Gospel in the story? Does that make sense? So all I'm trying to give you is cosmic map here. That this is not again about a room of old men with white beards trying to trick everybody here. This is a process the whole Church had to go through in those first couple of hundred years after Jesus and the apostles passed from the scene. Which text are going to be the ones that rightly guide?

So for the Hebrew Bible, I'll say this right here, is that the Hebrew Bible has a shape, a three-part shape to it that's different from our English translations, and that's what you see at the bottom of page 6 there. You have some passages here. This is will be a great cup of coffee one morning to read those passages, but essentially the earliest form of the Hebrew Bible as we know it, it's all the same books that we have in our English Bibles, but it was arranged in a different order and the biggest bang for the buck is that this is clearly the shape and the order that Jesus Himself read the Hebrew Bible in. So in Luke chapter 24, He talked about everything that is written about Me in the Law of Moses, which is the first part of the collection of the Torah. The prophets and the Psalms and the, if you look at the collection of what Jesus is talking about here is the Torah, the prophets, and the third collection of—called the writings (**239:07**) but what's the first book in the third collection? It's the Book of Psalms. So Jesus is saying, the entire Hebrew Bible was written in a way that's pointing towards me.

So again, why are we reading the Hebrew Bible? Because it's easy? Because it's a fun read? No, because Jesus believed the story that it's telling was pointing towards Him.

In the Catholic tradition, a group of books that are in Catholic Bibles that are not in Protestant Bibles, most of us are probably aware of this in some form, and so there you go, there's a list of those extra books there. These are writings, Jewish writings from the pre-Christian period and right around the period of Jesus. They somewhat are about the same type of events and stories that are in the Old Testament.

[40:00]

But here's the basic rundown, is that they were declared to be a part of the Bible, so they were floating in and around the church but it was a Papal decision to include them in the Christian Bible in 1546. And let's see, were there any significant debates going on in 1546? Well yeah, Luther was challenging some of the teachings of the Catholic church and lo and behold, some of those teachings were based off of passages in these books. And so this is fully a move of reformation politics essentially for why these books are in Catholic Bibles today. Again, that's my view. You ask someone from Catholic tradition and they'll have a different view, namely that the decision of the Pope was God's words. But that's a different view of authority that Protestants have.

The other piece is that neither Jesus or any of the apostles ever quote from these books. They quote from the Hebrew Bible a lot. But they never quote from any of these books or talk about them as if they are scripture. So there you go, that's in three minutes. That's the canon of the Hebrew Bible. So for the new Testament, there's a few pieces.

First of all, when the early Jesus Movement is going, is there any New Testament that's being written? So what is the Bible of the first generation of Christ

followers? It's what we call the Old Testament. And the stories, the quilt pieces, whatever quilt pieces or letters of Paul that they might have.

And so here's what's super interesting though about the New Testament. So we have a passage like this in Second Peter. This is—would be mind boggling to anybody when Peter wrote this. He's writing to a large group of people and he says: "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him." Oh great, he's talking about Paul. He writes in the same way in all of his letters. So Peter is aware of a collection of Paul's letters that's floating around. Very early. Very early. Speaking of them—in them, of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand. And if you've never tried to read Paul, you would say Amen to that. Paul is a very difficult read in some places. And he says those things that are hard to understand, ignorant, and unstable people distort just as they distort the other scriptures to their own ruin, to their own destruction. So in other words, Paul—so he's making a different point about people distorting what Paul is saying. But notice what he's done here in this passage. What other scriptures are we talking about here? We're talking about the Old Testament right here, the other scriptures. Whose writings has he put alongside the Hebrew scriptures? Paul's letters. Do you see that right there? It's right there. This is in the New Testament itself.

So the New Testament is aware that what's happened in Jesus, and the movement of Jesus, and the closest circle of followers around Jesus, the apostles, that what they're doing is a new work of God that continues the story of the Old Testament, and therefore Paul and Peter, their writings—I mean this will be flabbergasting to you know... when Peter's writing this. But then, there you go. I mean it's just right there. And this is right in the smack of the first century.

And so here's essentially what happens is that, as lots of books are out there, there's lots of letters, remember Paul wrote to the Laodiceans and these—there are discussions the early Church Fathers about what types of books are going viral, what types of books are raising to the top in the worship and the spreading of the Jesus movement.

And the first one of course is that it's connected to the original circle around Jesus of twelve. Then Paul who was not one of the twelve, and that was a whole matter of dispute actually if you read Paul's letters. But connection right to those original apostles.

Second one is books that were widespread continuously working here. They went viral so to speak. And how did they go viral? Missionaries, planting new churches, getting copied, and so on. Books that are being read and reread and reread the most. So this is actually pretty important. I'll just read to you quotes here so you'll not just be getting my opinion. These are reputable New Testaments scholars. So Bruce Metzger. He says, "What is really remarkable is that though the fringes of the New Testament canon remain unsettled until the 4th century," well talk about that in a second, "a high degree of unanimity concerning the basic core of the New Testament, Gospels Acts, Paul, John, Peter, was attained very early among that diverse and scattered churches not only in the Mediterranean, over an area extending from Western Europe to East Asia."

[45:00]

How easy is it to get Christians to agree on very many things today? You know what I'm saying? So how amazing is it that's spontaneously across not just Mediterranean but in Western Europe and East Asia the same books are rising to the top among different churches. They were the most important. Do you see what he's saying here? This is very significant what was happening in those early centuries. So are they rising to the top in terms of usage? And this is very organic to come back to the phrase, this is very organic, and messy, and spirit-led, and you know, if you learned anything about the Spirit in the New Testament, it's that things are messy when the Spirit gets involved and there you go.

The last criteria is talked about the rule of faith and it's essentially this, do these books represent an aberration from the basic core message of the gospel? Is there anything in this book that just goes totally different direction? And were those books out there? Totally. Totally. In fact, those are the books that tend to make all of the headlines here. So these, you know, this is Dan Brown, The Da Vinci Code, Lost Gospels and so on. There's a reason why they were lost. Is because they were produced by one group down in Egypt that went down a very different road than the core gospel that most of the universal church embraced and so they died out, and they were lost in the sands of Egypt for 1800 years, you know. So there's a reason why they were lost. They were never in the Bible in the first place. And so this is the misnomer that often gets out there, why did some people take the books out of the Bible? Maybe you heard this before, and then

it's conspiracy theory, you know, old men and white beards taking books out of the Bible that didn't promote their agenda and so on. That's total nonsense. It's not how it went at all. These were lost because no one read them anymore because they were an aberration.

And so what we have in the New Testament represents books that conformed and were statements of the basic rule of faith, rule of the gospel. So here's the bottom line, we'll end with this and then a couple of quotes. There was never any official council that decided what was in the New Testament. If there's anything that you remember, it's that's the most important thing. It's to know one place that anybody sits down and say, "Here's what's in and here's what's out." The canon was an organic growth out of the church spreading throughout the ancient world and books being copied and recopied and certain ones over those early centuries rose to the top. And so there was a council in the last 300s that made in the declaration of the books that we have in the New Testament today, the ones that we have. But it's very clear that they're not making anything up. What they're doing is they're recognizing what was already being practiced in all the churches. Just a couple quotations so you know I'm not making this up.

The councils of the church played little part in deciding what was in the canon of scripture. When councils did speak to the subject, their voice was a ratification of what had already become the common practice of the churches. Does that make sense what he's saying here? This guys in particular, he is, again, he does not have a theological axe to grind, he's not an evangelical scholar, he's a historian just talking about what we know about these councils.

So in many ways, we can just kind of conclude with this, it's the letters that we have in the New Testament, organically rose to the top as the letters that preserve the core statement about the gospel of those closest to Jesus in the first century. And the process was messy. But the product makes all the sense in the world. When you read the New Testament, there's lots of differences but they're all basically doing the same thing. You know, James has his way of putting things. Paul has his, John the Revelation, writers have some really strange way of putting things. But they all are basically cohere around the death and resurrection of Jesus in the gospel and so on. So this was super helpful to me. No men in white beards in the secret room. That's basically what this amounts to. And that the Bible didn't drop out of heaven. The Bible arose out of the mission of God at work in the world, and out of the church spreading, and growing, and spreading, and so the Bible has very close relationship to the church. It didn't drop down out of heaven. It actually arose out of the history of God's people. And so its

messiness in my mind is beautiful because it speaks to what God's doing in the world which is going to be messy because it involves us.

[50:00]

Alright. There it was you guys. So many questions left unanswered. But there's value in drinking from a firehose and just getting the big picture, the overview of thousands of years of history in the formation of the Bible. I hope there's some new angles, some new ways of thinking about the history of making of the Bible that you haven't thought about before. Why this is still an active area of research for me personally, probably will be until the day I die, and I'm quite happy about that because it's so interesting. So we're going to be talking about these issues more in future episodes of The Strange Bible Podcast. But for now onward and upward, thanks for listening you guys.

[End of transcription 51:01]