



The Catholic Letters Session 1

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The Catholic Letters

James
1 Peter
2 Peter
1 John
2 John
3 John
Jude

Interpretation of Scripture

- God's word is alive and meant to take root in each of our lives
- Scripture isn't intended to be history it conveys God's relationship with us through many literary forms
- It isn't all factually true and that doesn't matter
- The spiritual message is the key
- God speaks to us in different ways

What is the New Testament?

- What is a testament
- A view of testament as Old and New
- The OT is still actively in use by both the Jewish and Christian faith traditions
- There are some differences in content even among Christian faithful - 7 books are not considered scripture by most Protestants

NT Development

- Early Christian use of the New Testament
- At the time of Jesus, the Jews were conscious of sacred writings
- Slow development
 - No clear directive
 - Anticipation of the end of the world
- Letters became the first written elements – they were communication starting ~ 50 AD
- Second generation around ~60 AD

NT Development

- Early problems addressed by the letters dealt with false preachers, dissention, etc.
- Post 70's letters (Catholic epistles) addressed new and emerging problems
- The Gospels
 - Somewhere between 60 – 70 AD Mark was written
 - Matthew and Luke were written 10 – 20 years after Mark. Used Mark and "Q"
 - John, from around 90 – 100 AD

Gospel Facts

- No Gospel mentions the author's name and in fact it is possible that none were written by the person they are named for
- The name was attached to each Gospel at the end of the 2nd century
- The name constitutes a claim that Jesus' life is interpreted as the named author would
- There were many Gospels but only four are canonical (in the Bible)

Other NT Books

- The other books have various literary forms
 - Acts of the Apostles – history of the early church
 - Revelation – apocalyptic literature – assesses what is happening on earth and in heaven at the same time and often focuses on end times (like Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah)
 - Hebrews – a different style letter but are more of a homily

Development of the NT Canon

- All the books were written somewhere between 50 AD and 150 AD
- They were preserved and placed at the same level as Jewish Scripture
- Factors in preserving some but not all books
 - Apostolic Origin – real or putative
 - Importance of the addressed Christian Community
 - Conformity with the rule of faith

Development of the NT Canon

- Paul's letters were likely preserved after the fame he received from Acts
- The Gospels – 3 reasons for canonicity
 - Apostolic Origin – real or putative
 - Widely accepted and read
 - Proclaimed the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus
- The Canon of Scripture proclaimed by Council of Trent on April 8, 1546
 - Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures

Sections of the NT

- The Gospels
 - Matthew
 - Mark
 - Luke
 - John
- Acts of the Apostles

Sections of the NT

- The Pauline Epistles
 - Romans
 - 1 & 2 Corinthians
 - Galatians
 - Ephesians
 - Philippians
 - Colossians
 - 1 & 2 Thessalonians
 - 1 & 2 Timothy
 - Titus & Philemon

Sections of the NT

- The Letter to the Hebrews
- The Catholic Epistles
 - James
 - 1 & 2 Peter
 - 1,2 & 3 John
 - Jude
- Revelation

The Catholic Epistles

- Paul's letters were directed to specific communities with specific problems
- The Catholic Epistles are directed to the Church as a whole
- The term "Catholic" in this sense means letters written to the Universal Church, not the Latin or Eastern rite Churches

The Catholic Epistles

- Protestants refer to them as the General Letters
- Less is known about their background
- They all have an “epistolary formula”
 - Sender, Addressee, Greeting
 - Thanksgiving
 - Body of Message
 - Concluding Formula – good wishes

The Catholic Epistles

- Several don't appear to be letters in the modern sense of the word
- Ancient "Open Letters"
- The niche they fill is intended to do three things:
 - Provide Inspiration and hope
 - Give practical insights into Christian morality and living
 - Connect with our lives today

For Next Week

- Read the Book of James
 - Take note of the vivid imagery in the first chapter. Which seems most powerful to you?
 - Can you accept James' advice to ask for wisdom (1:5) and be confident God will give it to you?
 - James says Abraham and Rahab show faith in action. Who else in the Bible and in our day do that?
 - How does that lesson apply to us?
 - In 3:6-12 the power of words is described, do you agree?
 - How does James' letter apply to us today?