

Canon, Continued

As we start today, let me open us in prayer. Then we will do a devotional in Matthew before we go back to talking about the canon. Let us pray.

Father, as we come before You today, we ask for Your great wisdom as we look at the profound mysteries of Your Word. We will look at not merely what it means, as we will do shortly in some small passages, but also at its implications as your canonical, inspired Scripture. It is that which is the revelation of God Himself to humankind and the revelation that, especially in the New Testament, speaks of the truest revelation, namely Jesus Your own Son, as divinity incarnate, the One Who we desire to worship in all of our days. Make this class a small aspect of that worship even as we talk about You and about Your Word in the next few minutes. In the name of Jesus our Savior we pray. Amen.

Last time we talked about Matthew, we talked about the Sermon on the Mount. We talked about the Beatitudes: blessed are the poor in spirit. We also emphasized the last Beatitude, which receives the greatest emphasis in Matthew's text. "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness." We also moved on to talk about the statement Jesus makes, "Do no think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill [...] For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." In light of the rest of what is going on in Matthew 5, Jesus is stating a kingdom ethic. This is an ethic for His people. In particular, it internalizes the Law. You may have been tempted before to think that the law, "Do not murder," simply had to do with staying your hand at the last second when the knife was actually at someone's throat. You might have thought that the law forbidding adultery was simply about preventing cohabitation between two people when one, or both, is married to someone else. You may have thought that the idea of "whoever sends away his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce," could be done any time you please. But Jesus says no to all of the above. All of them speak not to the externals of the situation but to the very internal heart of the people. We talked about this.

As we go back earlier to Matthew 5, we have to ask what Jesus means when He says, "Do no think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." That word "fulfill" is very important in the Gospel of Matthew. It occurs almost a dozen times. In each of those instances it is a very important word that comes out. Most of those instances that use "fulfill" have to do with Old Testament Scripture and how Jesus fulfills Old Testament Scripture. This starts prior to the Sermon on the Mount, in the opening passages of Matthew.

I am especially interested in the series of passages in Matthew 2. Those of you who have Bibles like mine that set off Old Testament quotations will note that starting in Matthew 1:22 there is a quotation saying, "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel'—which means, 'God with us.'" That announces this fulfillment theme that we have throughout the book of Matthew. It also lets us know that every so often Matthew is going to give us an Old Testament Scripture that he is going to specifically apply to Jesus.

The next Scripture that we have applied to Jesus does not use the word "fulfill." This is probably pretty important. It comes on the mouths of the chief priests and scribes when Herod asks them in Matthew 2:5 where the Messiah is to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah.'" The next time we meet the fulfillment formula is in Matthew 2:15, which is where Jesus has just been

taken to Egypt to escape Herod's attempt to slaughter Him. Matthew says, "He stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'" One further example is found in Matthew 2:17-18 when Herod slaughters the babies of Bethlehem. Matthew says, "Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: 'A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.'" The point is there is a series of Old Testament quotations at the beginning of the book of Matthew.

I remember doing apologetics as a college student, especially among some Jewish people. One of the ways that we would go about presenting the Gospel is by saying, "Here are some Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. Look how they are fulfilled in Jesus." That is the first thing we would say. I also used Josh McDowell's book *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. It is a very fine book and a fine collection of evidential apologetics. He has a small section on this. It is in keeping with others before him, and a lot of people continue this teaching. He says that if you look at the prophecies of the Messiah and you calculate the probabilities of all these prophecies coming true in any one person, the probabilities are absolutely astronomical. Therefore the idea that Jesus fulfills all these prophecies clearly makes Him the Messiah. On the surface that seems like a knockdown argument for Jesus being the Messiah. How many people were born in Bethlehem, went to Egypt, were persecuted by Herod, had all the babies in their hometown slaughtered, and were born of a virgin? How many people can you put into that category? Only Jesus fits, therefore He must be the Messiah. You would think that if you just presented that to anybody it would knock him or her over right there. I would love to go with that, but unfortunately I do not think we can. Matthew is working with a much deeper understanding of fulfillment than "Here is a prophecy about the Messiah: He is going to be in Egypt." Therefore when the Messiah comes, we just have to check on a few things. "Did you go to Egypt? Then you could still be the Messiah." This is not a Messianic checklist. It is something much more sophisticated.

If you want some evidence of that, then let us look at the saying that shows up in Matthew 2:15. It says, "Out of Egypt I called my son." This was a fulfillment of that prophecy. That comes from Hosea 11:1-3. Let us read Hosea 11:1-3 carefully,

When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.
But the more I called Israel,
the further they went from me.
They sacrificed to the Baals
and they burned incense to images.
It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
taking them by the arms;
but they did not realize
it was I who healed them.

The son is Israel in Hosea 11. That is very important to recognize. Matthew applies this same verse to Jesus and says, "Out of Egypt I called my son." One possibility is that Matthew ripped the verse wholly out of context because it seemed to fit. But we are not comfortable with that. That is not what happened. It is very important to understand the New Testament use of the Old Testament. Usually when the New Testament authors use the Old Testament, they are very aware of the context of any one passage that they cite. They do not take passages out of context and stick them in. They are usually bringing the whole context with it. They assume that the early Christian community knows where the passage is from and what it is talking about. It is not that hard to figure out what Matthew is saying. He is saying that

Israel is God's son, but all the more so the Messiah is God's son. This is because the Messiah represents true Israel. He represents all of Israel. In Matthew when he says, "Out of Egypt I called my son," he is signaling to you something about Jesus' makeup. As the Messiah He constitutes true Israel.

Let us try another passage and turn to Matthew 2:17. It says, "Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: 'A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.'" This is from Jeremiah 31:15. Let us turn back there. The context is about Jeremiah's prophecy that the Lord will come down and take His people into exile. If you go back to the beginning of chapter 31 it says,

"At that time," declares the LORD, "I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they will be my people."

This is what the LORD says:

"The people who survive the sword
will find favor in the desert;
I will come to give rest to Israel."

Then he goes on and talks about Israel being brought back from being outcast. He eventually comes back to this. At that point the people could say in verses 15-20,

This is what the LORD says:

"A voice is heard in Ramah,
mourning and great weeping,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because her children are no more."

This is what the LORD says:

"Restrain your voice from weeping
and your eyes from tears,
for your work will be rewarded,"
declares the LORD.

"They will return from the land of the enemy.

So there is hope for your future,"
declares the LORD.

"Your children will return to their own land.

"I have surely heard Ephraim's moaning:

'You disciplined me like an unruly calf,
and I have been disciplined...'

Is not Ephraim my dear son,
the child in whom I delight?

Though I often speak against him,
I still remember him.

Therefore my heart yearns for him;

I have great compassion for him,"
declares the LORD.

The reference to Rachel and her child weeping is about exile and return. Israel is in exile, and that is something that causes great weeping and sorrow. In a similar way, right after the Messiah is sent out of Israel, Israel, in the form of Bethlehem, is laid waste in terms of the slaughtering of the infants. There is

yet again weeping in Israel until the return and the blessings that come through the Messiah.

When Matthew says “fulfill,” he is not saying that there was a whole series of Messianic proof texts that people knew in the first century. They were not just waiting for the guy to come along. Instead he is saying that if we understand theologically who the Messiah is, it is much deeper than you and I realize. The Messiah is not just a man; He is a man who is God’s chosen vessel who represents Israel. That is at least two of the verses there.

The other fulfillment citations all have similar interests. The one that I said is most peculiar is the one in Matthew 2:5, which says, “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah.” That is the one that most directly did refer to the Messiah, so much so that the chief priests and scribes were aware of it. They said this is where the Messiah had to come from. That is the one that Matthew does not put with the word “fulfill.” It is more obvious. “Fulfill” for Matthew is to take the Law and the Prophets and show how they point to the Messiah, namely Jesus. Therefore as much as I would otherwise like to use the probabilistic argument, we have to step back and say it is not appropriate.

You have to wonder anyway how those calculations were done. Usually there was a huge number, in the billions or trillions, that came out at the end of a calculation. For instance, it was a one in several trillion probability. Presumably if you are doing probabilistic calculations correctly, you are taking the probabilities of someone being born in Bethlehem and then correlating that with the probabilities that someone born in Bethlehem went to Egypt, etc. I have always wondered how in the world they calculated the probabilities that someone would be born of a virgin. The uniqueness of the virgin birth is a glory in and of itself. You do not have to calculate probabilities about it. More importantly, if that is your approach to Matthew, you are going to miss what he is trying to do there by setting up some associations that you otherwise would not have.

Let us come back to Matthew 5 and look at verse 17: “Do no think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.” Jesus came to bring them to their fullest purpose. He takes that which was already signaled about the Messiah and shows that in Jesus all promises found in the Old Testament are yes. One person has compared that in the past to the difference between the old manual typewriters and Apple iBook. The old manual typewriters had the ribbons, and you had to push them exactly right or else the “f” would be brighter than your “q.” Suddenly you have in front of you instead the Apple iBook. This is an example where there is one thing that is a vague shadow of the glory that is yet to be revealed. That is what is going on with the fulfillment formulas in Matthew. We have met another theme in Matthew, and it shows us just how glorious our Messiah is. The word “fulfill” means “to bring it to its goal and completion.” That is what it means generically. In Matthew it means “in salvation history to bring the Old Testament redemption of God to its completion and goal.”

Let us get back to our discussion of canon. We are close to being finished. I introduced the canon academically by sharing what is going on at professional conferences. I also talked about what is being taught in colleges and universities today. There is an argument that Orthodoxy and heresy are the viewpoints of the victors. Those who argue this would say there were other options in Christianity, which are represented by other scriptures that were later excluded by the Orthodox community. I cited a very contemporary expression of that in *The Da Vinci Code*. Dan Brown says there were 80 gospels and that the whole selection of the gospels was left until the time of Constantine. Historically both of those are factual errors. There are not that many gospels. Brown claims that some of these gospels have been found at Nag Hammadi. That is true; there are Gnostic gospels that are found there. They are very different from the Gospels that you and I have before us. Second, he says that gospels were found at

Kumron. Sorry Dan! There are no gospels at Kumron. All the scrolls are currently published, and there are no gospels there. There has been a slight debate coming out of an Italian group over a very fragmented document that came from Kumron. They argue that it was a fragment of the Gospel of Mark. Most scholars disagree, and I do too. That would require retroverting Mark into Hebrew, and Mark was undoubtedly written in Greek. Then they would need to find individual words from it. This thing is extremely fragmentary; there are just a few lines of characters on one side, the whole middle is missing, and there are a few lines of characters on the other side. They are trying to correlate supposedly retroverted Hebrew with all of this. It is very sketchy and improbable. In any case, even if you said that Mark was found at Kumron, no other gospels were found there. There is another factual error. *The Da Vinci Code* is full of factual errors.

The general claim still holds out there: at what point were the Gospels recognized as Scripture? Can we trust them? I made some general points having to do with the way that the canon developed. It developed on analogy with the Old Testament canon. It is important to recognize that the Old Testament canon was already in tact. The Old Testament canon was predicated on prophecy that God Himself performed through His people in the retelling, not just of their history, but also in the prophetic acts of the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.). That sense of prophecy and sequence of prophets ended in the time of Haggai and Malachi. When that sequence ended, history continued and people kept writing history. That history was not regarded as being of the same authoritative level as the history that was written by the prophets. The time of the New Testament is with the coming of Jesus the Messiah. He is the One who Himself is the great prophet par excellence. He reopened this sense of revelation and rightly so. Instead of writing things down Himself, He delegated that to a band of witnesses whom we call the apostles. One of the great hallmarks of which is that they witnessed His ministry from beginning to end and especially His resurrection, according to the book of Acts. Therefore they were given a special apostolic status and were given the promise that the Holy Spirit would reveal and bring back to their memory all truth. Prophecy reopened with the New Testament, and it closed shortly after the demise of the apostles themselves.

We need to discuss the early church canonical lists and their reasons for such. I want to look at excerpts from a few key larger documents. The Muratorian Canon is a second-century document that comes from the West, perhaps from Rome. It is one of the first formulations of what exactly constituted canonical Scripture. That is what it sets out to do; it says what they accept as canonical. It talks about what they read, what they do not read, what they read but do not hold onto with the same authority as the other books that they read. When Eusebius wrote his *Church History*, he attempted to summarize the discussion that had gone on before his time with regard to canon. Later in Athanasius' Festal Letter, we end up with the exact 27 books that we have in the New Testament as Athanasius' final decision. Then in the two synods those books are declared to be the canon of the whole church. There is a truth that it was not until the fourth century that everything was absolutely settled. That is not to say that the discussion was not already happening. It is also not to say that the bulk of what we consider to be the New Testament was recognized as authoritative, canonical, inspired Scripture from its very inception. Indeed, that was the case. Authoritative Scripture was seen as such from its very inception. We get a clue of that from 2 Peter 3:16 where Peter himself looks back on Paul's writing. He refers to it in keeping with "the other Scriptures," the Old Testament Scriptures in particular. He recognizes that Paul's writing has scriptural status. This is a discussion that predated Constantine by a long time. Only after Constantine was the church in a position to make a church-wide declaration of what they considered to be canonical Scripture.

Let us look at the excerpts from Eusebius' *Church History*. First I want us to look at what he considers to be definite, authoritative, and recognized. I also want us to look at the kind of argumentation that he

and others employed in arriving at the conclusion of what is canonical and what is not. Eusebius considered the Gospels, Acts, and Paul's letters to be recognized. He did not list exactly what constitutes the epistles of Paul, but by this point we have had a number of important early manuscripts that indicate the Pauline letters that we would consider to be the general letters of Paul. The epistles from Romans to 1 and 2 Thessalonians were widely distributed. The pastoral epistles were not as widely distributed, which is not a surprise because they were written to individuals, namely Timothy and Titus. They were also collected fairly early on.

The main dispute in terms of Paul's letters has to do with the book of Hebrews. Very early on it was considered to be written by Paul even though it does not say Paul's name. It is possible that when Eusebius counted the epistles of Paul he also included the book of Hebrews. Eusebius also recognized 1 John and 1 Peter as canonical books. Then he quibbled with Revelation. He put it in the first category of recognized books, but deep down he almost wanted to put it in the category of books he did not like to have in the canon.

Then we come to the disputed books, which are nevertheless known to most. People are still discussing these books, but the vast majority of the church is using them. They are the epistle of James, that of Jude, the second epistle of Peter, and "the so-called second and third epistles of John, which may be the work of the evangelist or some other with the same name." We will come back to this comment about 2 and 3 John toward the end of this course. Eusebius' list of books is a lot of the canon that we have today. It is interesting that he already broke them down into recognized and disputed books. It may make you a little uncomfortable that these books are still disputed, but it adds comfort to me. It says that the church took this decision extremely seriously. They were very careful, and they did not rush in and decide on the canon based on what books they or others liked. There had to be a church-wide consensus.

I am very interested in looking at some of the argumentation regarding whether a book is accepted, disputed, or rejected. Those making these decisions looked at phraseology and the style of usage, whether it sounded apostolic or not. They looked at whether the content was distinctly Christian and different from other writings. The authorship needed to be accepted. The issue had to do with whether the people were actually writing them themselves or not. That was somewhat acknowledged by Eusebius, but it is very evident in the Muratorian Canon. The texts needed to be referred to by the early fathers. This is especially a concern of Eusebius because that is what he did. He correlated for us what the church recognized in light of the history of the church up to then. The texts needed to resonate with true Orthodoxy. We will talk in a minute about what determined true Orthodoxy. The early church asked whether things were Orthodox or whether they were outside the bounds of Orthodoxy. I would agree with Bart Ehrman, and I would even agree implicitly with some of the assumptions that Dan Brown makes in *The Da Vinci Code*. The Orthodox made this decision. They made it in keeping with their own theology. The question is whether or not their theology was right. More importantly, did their theology go back to Jesus and to the early apostles? That is a major test of them.

There is one last thing that I want to talk about in Eusebius' *Church History*. It goes on under the surface, but I want to make sure it is in our minds. The terms "recognized" and "disputed" meant that part of the decision matrix people had was whether or not all the churches agreed with the canon. Did some of the churches disagree about some of these books? This was a large consensus decision, but that should also give us comfort. It was not just made by a handful of men in a smoke-filled room. That is another issue. There is even more evidence in the Muratorian Canon about why these decisions were made in the early church to recognize some books as canonical and some as not.

Some of what Eusebius says at the end of his *Church History* is very interesting. It says, “Paul also wrote out of affection and love one that is a letter to Philemon, one to Titus, and two to Timothy. These are held sacred in the esteem of the church catholic [the church as a whole] for the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline. There is also current an epistle to the Laodiceans and another to the Alexandrians, forged in Paul’s name to further the heresy of Marcian, and several others which cannot be received into the church catholic for it is not fitting that gall be mixed with honey.”

At some point in the late second or early third century there arose epistles to the Laodiceans and the Alexandrians. They clearly saw in them the teaching of a heretic, Marcian, who pitted the God of the Old Testament against the God of the New Testament. He said the God of the Old Testament was a God of Law and was a demi-god. He was not the full-fledged thing. The God of the New Testament is the real God who has come in to set things right and to establish grace. That is what Marcian taught. It would be very easy to ferret out in some of these books. This statement shows that there was already a sense of what was honey. They knew what was truly of Paul and what was truly in the Gospels. They compared these other books to the stuff that was already recognized to see if they fit. That is different from excluding them just because we do not like those people. They saw if they fit with what was known to be apostolic from the very beginning, known to be from Paul and in the Gospels. That is how the church is thinking about this.

Eusebius goes on to discuss other books that are read in the church. I would encourage you to go through the Muratorian Canon and look at what books they accept and what their rationale is. I think you will find it comforting in some respects.

Let me move onto some closing comments about how to conceive of the canon. First, there was a core of books from their very inception that were understood to be of Scripture. This core included the works of the apostle Paul and also the four canonical Gospels. Let me give you some rationale for that. We can make lists of what books people accepted as canonical books going from Matthew to Revelation in the New Testament. Certain authors referred to some books, and there are a few authors who already stated what books they received as canonical. There are some books that are disputed or not mentioned, either because of the fragmentary nature of the canon or because they were still in discussion in the early church. There is a core that everybody recognized, except for Marcian.

The early church quickly recognized that Marcian’s theology was a heresy. Jesus’ Bible was the Old Testament; Jesus preached the God of the Old Testament. Moreover, if you read Paul carefully you see that he has the same view. Marcian accepted some of the Pauline books, except for the pastoral epistles, which he may not even have known. He accepted part of the Gospel of Luke, but he rewrote the Gospel of Luke for himself. He cut some of it out. It is important to note that Marcian accepted all the Pauline letters, even though some of them make a great argument against his case. He accepted at least one of the Gospels. Irenaeus wrote to refute Marcian and especially other writers who were clearly Gnostic, and he accepted the Gospels and all the writings of Paul. The core of what everybody agreed on from the very inception was the four canonical Gospels, with the exception of Marcian who only held Luke, and the major writings of Paul to the general churches. That is the core. That is the honey that became the central understanding of what constituted Orthodox Christianity. Anything that was in variance with that could not be accepted as canonical. People knew what Jesus taught, and they knew what came through the apostles, especially Paul.

Most of the rest of the discussion in terms of expanding the core came over whether or not 1 and 2 Peter were really written by Peter. If Peter wrote them then they were apostolic, and they needed to include it.

They looked at whether or not it cohered with the core of Paul and the Gospels that they knew to be true. Historically there was a core that got bigger within limits; it expanded within limits.

The next point is about the most debatable book. There are a few different books that could claim to be the most debated book, but perhaps the one that most stands out to me is the one that Eusebius wrestled over: the book of Revelation. It was in his category of recognized books, but then at the end he wanted to take it out of that category. This has to do with the early church and debates that were going on then. In particular, there was teaching known as chiliasm. It comes from the Greek word *chilias*, which means “thousand.” Chiliasm was the teaching about a thousand years. In particular there was a strand of teaching in Asia Minor in the first century that argued that the Christian should expect a millennium. They should expect a thousand-year reign of Christ before He comes again to completely finalize the final judgment. They get this from the book of Revelation. The churches in Asia Minor were very comfortable with that teaching, but some of the churches elsewhere, especially around Caesarea where Eusebius was, thought that it was wrong. They held what was closer to what today we would call an amillennial position. Those were the two main millennial positions in the ancient church. Therefore the churches that did not like this Chiliast or millennial position were much more interested in doing away with it, even to the extent that they were uncomfortable with the book of Revelation. That is a fact of church history. Eusebius was one of the main leaders of the anti-Chiliast group. Therefore it comes as little surprise to us that he was uncomfortable with the book of Revelation. Ultimately even he was forced to acknowledge that the church recognized it, even if he was uncomfortable with it. In the midst of this ongoing theological debate the apostolic status of the apocalypse of John, the book of Revelation, was so established that they had to accept it as canon. There is an example of a highly debated book. You can understand some of the reasons that underlie such a debate.

The next point is about other possible contenders. There were only a few other possibilities of canonical books. If you read through the Muratorian Canon you will see a few other books that were possibly there for consideration. Eusebius immediately mentioned the need to reject the so-called epistle to the Laodiceans from Paul. There is a question about the apocalypse of Peter or the Shepherd of Hermas. Some would argue for 1 Clement, the book of Barnabus, or the teaching of the twelve apostles, the Didache. We have those books today. They are collected in a selection known as *The Apostolic Fathers*. They were written shortly after the time of the apostles. They are some wonderful books to read, but they are a limited number of books. Ultimately they were not deemed to have been of apostolic status. They were Orthodox; the theology was fine (for the most part). It was not a theological decision. It had much more to do with the apostolic status of the authors.

There are a couple of things to learn from that. Dan Brown runs around claiming that it was Orthodoxy versus heresy. Orthodoxy was not the only decision matrix. A lot of it had to do with apostolic status. He also claims that there are 70 or 80 gospels out there, that there were all these other books that could have been considered that were simply thrown out. From the point of view of the early church, aside from some very strange Gnostic sects at the end of the fourth century, there were really only a few possible other candidates. It is not like you should have a feeling about your canon that it is 27 books, but there could have been 150. It was 27 books and at most there could have been maybe 32. The church wisely recognized that these other books should not be accepted as canonical. There is another historical fact.

The fourth point is about the process of recognition and the locus of authority. It is very important for us to understand in our time how we should speak about the canon. In Catholic circles and Orthodox circles, they will talk about the church deciding on the canon. They say ultimately it was the church and the Holy Spirit working through the church that made the canon the canon. There is some truth to that. But Protestants have rightly added into that the term “recognition.” When we are talking about the canon

we are talking about what the church recognized as already having canonical authority. It is not that the letters of Paul gained canonical authority or an inspired status when the church made the decision. They already inherently possessed that status. They were already authoritative and inspired, and it was up to the church to recognize that fact under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The locus of authority is not in the church councils. The locus of authority is in Jesus, who reopened revelation and, in the history of redemption, designated a certain set of apostles and a few that the apostles themselves designated who were going to recall to others His truth.

The last point is about the redemptive history and the New Testament canon. There are two ways to look at the canon. I have tried to engage you in both of these ways. There is the horizontal way in terms of looking from a very human perspective at how and when these decisions were made. From a very human perspective you look at this and see the concept of an expanding core increasing over time to a certain limited set of books. The few other debatable candidates were eventually ruled out by the church. That is the history of what went on. We can see that as a very sane way to conduct all of this. From an historical perspective we can take some confidence in our canon.

The other way to view this is from a vertical dimension, from the eyes of God. God worked through this process of understanding and recognizing the canon. I would term that in consonance with the notion of the history of redemption. On a vertical level, this gets back to the human point I made earlier about how the canon reopened. There was a sense of Old Testament revelation that was closed because prophecy had ceased. New Testament revelation opened with Jesus and the apostles. From a vertical level we can see that. From a horizontal level, we see that it is true and new revelation from God. It comes with the advent of His Messiah, and redemption came to its furthest measure in Jesus, who died on the cross for our sins and was raised again and in the people designated to bear that message. In that regard we see the history of redemption unfolding into the history of the development of the canon. The canon becomes not something added to God's redemptive intent but the continuation of that redemptive intent until it had been fully revealed in all of its glory for future generations to read. That is what I mean by the history of redemption and the New Testament canon.

Let us look at the end of Mark 16 for a moment. If you read in the New International Version or New American Standard it will have a little footnote or brackets around part of the text that says that it is not in the earliest manuscripts. In fact, it is not in the earliest manuscripts. Without going into a whole lot of detail, the fact that it is not in the earliest manuscripts seems to indicate that at some stage somebody was unhappy with how Mark ended. Otherwise it ends very abruptly. They felt a need to, analogous with some of the other Gospels, provide some material that provided a sounder ending for them. This is later in the church. I do not deem it to be canonical. As far as it relates to canon, if it was not penned by an apostolic author or his delegate, then I do not hold it to be canonical. That is a very short comment, but we might get back to that at some point.

The Gospel of Hebrews that Eusebius mentioned is a gospel that was titled "the Gospel of the Hebrews." It was a fairly early work that a number of the church fathers refer to. We do not have a full extent copy of that. We have some fragments that are quoted by early church fathers. I have given a whole seminar on the Gospel of Hebrews and its relationship to early Jewish Christianity. It mostly shows up in Jewish Christian circles early on. It principally seemed to recount most of what we find in our canonical Gospels with a few additions. It is those additions that the church fathers passed on in the form of little quotations of it. It is different from the book of Hebrews. (By the way, Eusebius' *Church History* was written shortly after the Council of Nicaea in the beginning of the fourth century.)

These early works that were possible contenders that seemed to have largely Orthodox theology were not ultimately accepted because of the apostolic status of them. For instance, the epistle of Barnabus was not recognized as actually having come from the hand of Barnabus. Therefore it was not received with apostolic status. Clement is very careful to indicate that he is not among the apostles in 1 Clement. He does not specifically refer to himself in that regard, but he speaks of the apostles as a wholly different group from himself. It is a wonderful work to read, but he does not claim that same authority. Wisely the church said it is not canonical.

If you go through most of the other works that I am referring to, they were either anonymous, such as the Shepherd of Hermas, or recognized as not coming from the apostles, such as the Didache, the teaching of the twelve apostles. The Didache, though edifying, was a later writing. Those things led to some doubt as to whether they should be deemed canonical, even though they are edifying to read. Reading Augustine would be edifying too.

The passage about the woman caught in adultery in John is a similar issue as the end of Mark 16 in that it is not in the earliest manuscripts. The John passage is even more complex because later church fathers refer to it as a separate work from what is known in John. I think it is even less likely that it was original to John. I would not consider it canonical. It is very edifying; I love reading it. I would not preach on it, though, because I do not deem it to be of inspired status.

The Catholic Bible has books that are not in the Protestant Bible, but none of those are New Testament books. The New Testament canon was decided, and the Orthodox Church, which is the church in the theological tradition that developed through what we would consider the real church throughout history, has never varied from that canon. The disputes have all had to do with the Apocrypha of the Old Testament. These are books that are written in the intertestamental period after Malachi, up until the time of the opening of the New Testament canon. It includes 1 and 2 Maccabee and some other books. There was a lot of dispute early on in the Catholic Church. Jerome translated everything into the Latin Vulgate, which became the Latin Bible that was used by the Catholic Church. He wanted to set the Apocrypha off separate from the fully recognized Old Testament. Everybody knew that the Jewish people did not accept those as recognized either. It was a wise decision of the Protestant church to revisit that and say that the Old Testament Apocrypha was not acceptable. The New Testament canon has not been seriously debated since the fourth century.

There is an issue with regard to the recognition of the book of Hebrews because it is difficult to know who wrote it. There was a popular view in the early church that it was written by Paul. On an historical level, that probably helped its reception by some churches into canonical form, even though I do not think it was written by Paul. I will admit some tension in that regard. Its status as being consistent with the theological teaching of that core was so recognized early on that it was widely deemed on that merit alone to be canonical. Origen, who is an early church father and author in the third century, would argue against the Pauline authorship of the book of Hebrews. But he argued that it should be considered inspired and authoritative along with the rest of the canonical New Testament. That was even before these discussions came to a head and were finalized.

The Nag Hammadi gospels are very different from what we would conceive of a Gospel. The Gospel of Thomas is a series of sayings that supposedly go back to Jesus. There is no biography of Jesus connected with it. It lacks life context. There are some very interesting comments in there, especially about women.