



**Intro to the New
Testament:**
New Testament Canon
Session One, Part One

The Canon

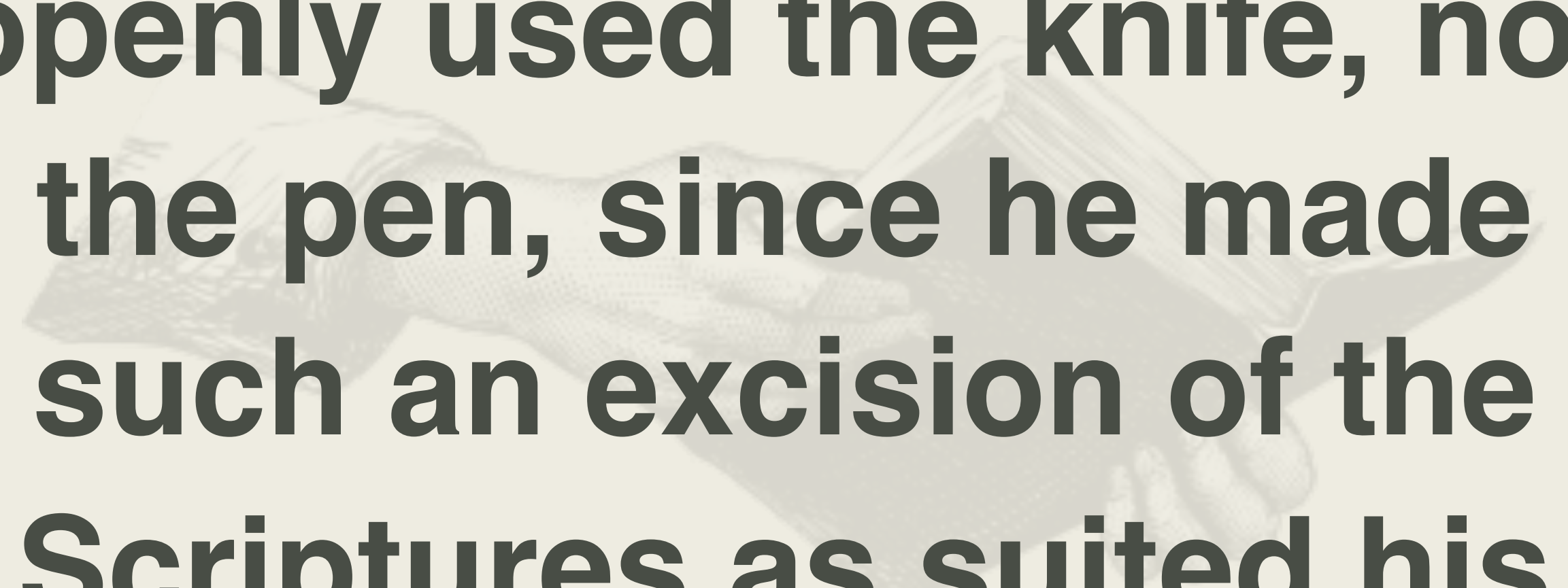
- NT canon (KAN-uhn) are books accepted by early church as divinely inspired
- Canon originally meant “measuring reed” and came to mean “standard”
- Can refer to a list of titles of several different documents or to the assembled documents themselves
- Applied to NT canon is books accepted by the church as the standard that governs Christian belief and conduct

Precanonical Period

- **Homologoumena** [ho'muh-leh-GOO-meh-nah] (*Greek for “confessed”*)
- **Antilegomena** [ahn'tee-leh-GAW-meh-nah] (*Greek for “contradicted”*)
 - Most churches came to possess and acknowledge a canon that included:
 - 4 Gospels, Acts, 13 letters of Paul, 1 Peter, 1 John
 - Seven books lacked general recognition:
 - Hebrews, James 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, Revelation
 - Several other Christian writings were accepted by some, but rejected by most
 - 1 Clement, Letters of Barnabas, Shepherd of Hermas, Didache (AKA Teaching of the 12 Apostles)

Canonization

- **Marcion** [MAHR-shuhn], an early Gnostic heretic, taught that a harsh God of the OT and Judaism and a loving God opposed each other. Jesus came as a messenger of loving God, that Jesus was killed at instigation of harsh God, Jesus entrusted his 12 apostles with his message from loving God, they failed to keep it from corruption, and Paul was made into sole preacher of uncorrupted message



**“Marcion expressly and
openly used the knife, not
the pen, since he made
such an excision of the
Scriptures as suited his
own subject matter.”**

Criteria

- Various criteria for canonicity have been suggested: moral effect and agreement with oral tradition of apostolic doctrine
- The most crucial criterion was *apostolity*; meaning authorship by an apostle or their associate, thus having a date of writing within the apostolic period
- Traditionally, the other authors were themselves apostles: Matthew, John, Paul, and Peter (NOTE: modern criticism casts doubt on some of the traditional ascription of authorship)

Rationale

- The canon of the NT consists of the authoritative record and interpretation of God's self-revelation through Jesus Christ
- This is an interpretive record authenticated by Jesus himself who viewed his words and deeds now written and expounded by the apostles and their associates as on par with the OT as God's word
- The closing of the canon by limiting it to apostolic books grew from a recognition that God's revelation in Christ needs no improvement



**Intro to the New
Testament:**
New Testament Text
Session One, Part Two

Writing

- Papyrus (puh-PI-ruhs) was the writing material for most, maybe all the NT
- Most, maybe all NT writers used scrolls, though some may have used codices (KOH-duh-seez)
 - Codex is a book with pages bound together in modern style
- Copies used codex and gained popularity among Christians
- Typically authors dictated to a writing secretary called an amanuensis (uh-man'yoo-EN-sis)
- At times the author gave the amanuensis freedom to a varying degree in the choice of words

Copying

- The original documents are called autographs (we don't have any surviving)
- Originally copies were made one by one as churches or individuals desired them
- As demand increased, a reader dictated from an exemplar (excellent model) to a roomful of copyists
- As the church grew richer and increasingly regarded the text of the NT as sacred they used more durable writing materials such as vellum (treated calfskin) and parchment (treated sheepskin)
- Earliest manuscripts modern scholarship has date from second century

Textual Criticism

- **Important rules for evaluation:**
 - Reading in oldest, most carefully copied, geographically widespread manuscripts and versions
 - Reading that reflects the author's style and theology as seen elsewhere and best explains development of other readings
 - More difficult reading (on assumption that more probable that copyists made expression easier to understand rather than harder)
 - Shorter reading (assuming copyists liable to add to text rather than delete, except where omission seems accidental)

Textual Criticism

- **Example:** angels regularly speak but not eagles so this would explain a change from eagles to angel in Revelation 8:13. But a change from angel to eagle would not likely occur.
- **Another:** some texts of Mark 11:24 read “you receive” (present tense) or “you will receive” (future tense) because “you received” (past tense) was too bold [compare Matthew 21:22]