

## Glossary of Terms

**Apocalyptic Literature:** This style of literature developed after the exiles returned from Babylon (539BCE) in the 5 centuries before Jesus' birth. It became very popular with those early Christians who expected Jesus' imminent return. Apocalypse is a Greek word which means to unveil or reveal hidden things. This type of literature often tells a story, employs symbolic language and numerology and exposes what is wrong with the world as it careens towards the end. The Revelation of John is the most well known example. Scholars note that the Revelation of John both comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable, as it prepares its auditors (and readers) for Christ's return.

**Apostolic:** The term used to describe beliefs and practices traced back to the teachings of the first generation of Christians, many of whom were disciples of Jesus. It also can refer to a city or church founded or connected closely with one of the original disciples of Jesus, such as Ephesus and Rome. Tradition connects Ephesus with John and Rome is connected with Peter and Paul.

**Asceticism:** A way of Christian living that includes abstinence from almost anything that would give pleasure, and advocates strict discipline over how one lives, what one eats, where one lives, etc. Tatian was an advocate of this form of Christian living.

**Canon:** The term used to describe a defined, limited collection. The limited collection of authoritative writings that form our Old Testament and our New Testament is a Canon.

**Catechumenate:** An extended time of training for adults in the basics of the Christian faith. Scripture that was useful for this purpose, tended to end up in the Canon.

**Christendom:** Begun by Constantine, it is the period from the 4th to the 20th centuries in Western civilization, during which the church was very powerful in both civil and religious matters.

**Codex (pl. Codices):** The earliest form of what we would recognize as a book. A codex was formed by sewing multiple quire together at their folded edges, and bound by a hard cover. Early codices were made out of both papyrus and parchment. The early Christians preferred codices to scrolls because of their ease of use (flipping pages is much faster than unrolling long scrolls), affordability (you can use both sides of a piece of paper!), portability, and durability.

**Confessors:** Christians who did not abandon their faith in the face of persecution, but weren't killed for their faith.

**Diatesseron:** @170CE, Tatian wove together Matthew, Mark, and Luke into John (Tatian preferred John's 3 year chronology of Jesus' ministry), along with material from other gospels to form one continuous story of Jesus' teachings and life. It remained the preferred gospel for the ancient Syrian part of the church until the beginning of the 6th century.

**Docetism:** An early version of Christianity, that emphasized the divinity of Christ to the point that they denied the humanity of Jesus. Since this deviated from the received apostolic tradition which formed the Rule of Faith, it was branded as heresy.

**Gentile:** A non-Jew.

**Gnosticism:** An early Christian heresy that promoted an understanding of what the ministry of Jesus was intended to accomplish for believers. They believed that Jesus passed on secret knowledge (Gnosis is the Greek word for knowledge) that would enable those who had access to this knowledge to reconnect with the distant but supreme God after death. A lesser god was in charge here on earth, and special knowledge was needed to pass through the barriers to the supreme God after death. The impact for the life of a gnostic believer was either asceticism or hedonism, since what happened in this life wasn't of importance for eternal life with God.

**Greco-Roman:** A term that describes the Mediterranean world during the period when Greece, followed by Rome, ruled. It often includes language (Greek) gods, and customs (Greek and Roman).

**Hexapla:** Origen wrote this massive work to try to nail down an accurate Greek text of the Old Testament. It was 50 volumes, over 6500 pages, written in six columns per page. Each line of each column had only one or two words on it, in order to be able to compare the 6 different translations. The Septuagint formed one column, as did Origen's own translation. The other 4 columns were other translations such as Aquila's. No copy was ever made of the Hexapla, which moved from the library in Alexandria with Origen when he was forced to leave because of theological differences with his bishop. He took it to the library in Caesarea, where Eusebius would end up using it as the basis for the Old Testament in the 50 copies of the sacred Scriptures requested by Constantine in 331CE. Sadly, the Hexapla was lost in the fire that destroyed the library in Caesarea in 653CE when the Arabs captured the city.

**Hebrew Scriptures:** What Protestant Christians often refer to as the Old Testament.

**Heretic:** A Christian whose beliefs were in opposition to the orthodox traditions about Jesus that had been handed down since the time of the apostles.

**Incarnation:** The Christian belief that Jesus was indeed God. God chose to be present in human form by being born of the Virgin Mary.

**Inspiration:** Early Christians believed that God's promised Spirit was given to all who were baptized. In the book of Acts, the order in which those two events happened varies. What really got their attention in Acts was the fact that God's Spirit was given to both Jewish converts and Gentile converts! Therefore, everything that a baptized, Spirit filled, Christian said, did and wrote was inspired. This is why Inspiration was not used as one of the measuring sticks for a

book's inclusion in the evolving collection of sacred writings in the first four centuries of the church. Other criteria had to be employed.

**Lapsed:** Christians who renounced their faith in the face of persecution.

**Marcionism:** Marcion rejected all of the Scriptures (sacred writings of the Jewish community) as inferior to the teachings of Jesus. He carefully edited 10 letters of Paul, and the one gospel he believed was connected with Paul (Luke) and used these as Scripture for the churches he founded across the Greco-Roman world after he was excommunicated by the Roman bishop in 144CE. Unlike Gnosticism, Marcionism is not based on secret wisdom, but on the teachings of Paul, as interpreted by Marcion in these edited versions of what would eventually become books in the New Testament. Like Docetism, Marcionism denied the humanity of Christ, since this created world was part of the lesser god of the Scriptures and not the God who sent Jesus to save us from this world.

**Martyrs:** Christians who were killed for their faith.

**Millennialism (Latin)/Chiliasm (Greek):** A belief system that stresses God's ultimate victory over evil and the return of the world to a state of affairs that will be based on God's justice and not greed/power/military might, etc. While this belief system has resurfaced time and again right up to the modern era, it gets its name from the book of the Revelation of John in the New Testament.

**Montanism:** About 170CE, Montanus, along with two prophetesses, Prisca and Maximilla, began teaching. They believed that Christians were far too lax, and that what was needed to prepare Christians for Christ's imminent return was revealed to him by the paraclete promised in the Gospel of John. In part based on his interpretation of apocalyptic literature such as the Revelation of John and of Peter, Montanists practiced strict asceticism, allowed female clergy, encouraged the use of all the gifts of the spirit, and welcomed martyrdom. Due to the Montanist's preference for the gospel of John, some orthodox teachers, like Gaius, advocated dumping that gospel! Since the Montanists used the Revelation of John to prove that new prophetic work was to be expected, the Syrian and Eastern parts of the early church began to reject all apocalyptic literature. It would take until the 10th century before Revelation begins to make a comeback in the Eastern part of the church!

**Nicene Creed:** The only ecumenical creed in the Christian community, since it is recognized as authoritative by all modern major divisions of the church. It was the result of the work of two councils, held in Nicea and Constantinople in the 4th century, in order to combat a movement in the church now known as Arianism. It was during these regional councils that lists of books that comprised the New Testament/Old Testament were approved.

**Orthodox:** A term used to describe the beliefs of part of the church that most closely aligned with the traditions and teachings handed down from the first followers of Jesus. Another way

of saying this would be to note that orthodox beliefs aligned with the Rule of Faith. Beliefs not in alignment with the Rule of Faith were labeled heretical.

**Papyrus:** The plant by the same name was found in the Nile delta in Egypt, cut and used to make writing material by pressing contrasting layers of papyrus reeds together into thin sheets. The paper it formed was almost pure white, and very durable. We have papyrus fragments of the New Testament dating from the second century CE!

**Parchment:** Rather than using papyrus for paper, untanned animal skins were used. These skins would be folded in half, and typically 4 were nestled inside each other to be sewed together to form a quire, which in turn could be sewn together at the folded edge to form a codex (book). Our earliest whole Bibles from the 4th century are made of parchment.

**Patristic Period:** This period of the Christian church begins immediately following the death of those who had known Jesus (100CE) and ends roughly with the 7th century (debated). It is often divided either between those who lived/taught/wrote prior to or following the Council of Nicea (325CE), or by the language they wrote in (Greek or Latin).

**Quire:** Typically four parchment or papyrus sheets were folded in half, nestled inside each other, and then sewn at their folded edge. This formed one quire. Two or more quire were then sewn together to form a codex.

**Rabbinic Judaism:** Of all the various versions of Judaism we meet in the New Testament, the only ones that survived were the Christian Jews and the Pharisaic Jews. The latter becomes known as Rabbinic Judaism after the completion of the Babylonian Talmud in the 6th century. The system of worship and living forms the core of modern Jewish groups.

**Rule of Faith:** Also known as the Canon of Truth. It was the core set of beliefs handed down from the earliest times of the Christian movement, that most accurately reflected the oral teaching of the apostles and their first disciples. It became the measuring stick, or canon, that was used to determine if a teaching was orthodox (in agreement with this Rule of Faith or Canon of Truth) or heterodox (not in agreement with this Rule of Faith or Canon of Truth).

**Scripture:** These sacred writings of the Jewish community served as the sacred writings of the first Christians as well. The first two parts (Torah and Prophets) were closed, but the third part (Writings) was an expanding collection at the time of Jesus. When the New Testament writers refer to Scriptures, these are the documents they had in mind.

**Torah:** You know it as the first five books of the Bible; Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. For the Jewish community it is the most sacred part of their Scriptures; everything else is in some sense commentary on Torah. For the first Christians, it was the core of their Scriptures, along with the Prophetic literature. Remember there was no New Testament at this time! Torah is much more than a set of laws. It includes the story of God's intervention in our world, and how the faithful are called to live as God's saved and covenant people.

**Uncial:** Early manuscript writing style consisting of large letters with 5 letters rounded rather than square. Modern readers would recognize this style as “writing with capital letters.” The earliest Bibles from the 4th and 5th century were written in this style.

**Veterans:** These were the followers of the disciples/apostles who had known Jesus. They were living voices that connected believers with what the disciples/apostles taught about what Jesus had said, did, and meant for their lives. As the veterans died off, the church realized it needed to safeguard the authentic stories/traditions about Jesus. That became the Rule of Faith, or Canon of Truth. Centuries later, it would become the New Testament.

**Vellum:** This style of parchment is superior and of a much finer quality because it is made from the skins of young animals, rather than old ones.