

10.4.09 / Luke 24:13-27, 44-49

Both of these passages come after Jesus' resurrection. The first comes immediately after several of the women have visited the tomb, found it empty, and been confronted by angels who explain to them what has happened. We are told that the male disciples did not believe their story, but that Peter went and checked and was at the least confused by the absence of the body. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus, then, have heard this strange story, but have not accepted it as true. Notably, we also stop before the Emmaus story is complete.

The second passage comes right before Jesus ascends into heaven, and constitutes his last words to the disciples before this action.

What did it mean for those who first heard it?**The Law and the Prophets**

The Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms feature, together or individually, heavily in these passages. The first two, at least, accord with modern Jewish divisions of the Old Testament. The Tanakh, the Jewish Scripture, is actually an acronym with vowels added for Torah, Nevi'im, and Kethuvim, or, in English, Law (of Moses, obviously), Prophets, and Writings. We have at least some attestation of the antiquity of this system. In the book of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus, the author refers in the introduction to the Law, the Prophets, and, various, "the others", "the other books", or "the rest of the books" to indicate the whole of Scripture. This would appear to be the modern system, without the current label "writings" applied to the "other" books. Sirach was written before the time of Jesus.

This system is a bit unfamiliar to us. For instance, the books of Kings are in the Prophets, because they reflect the views of the prophets of those times. Meanwhile, Chronicles, which covers nearly the same material as Kings, is Writings, probably because of its late date of composition. Daniel is also Writings, not Prophets, probably for similar reasons.

This gets us to the other strange thing about this system. It really is a tiered system. This is just tricky, and I want to be careful what I say. Short of writing an extensive essay on what it means to be canon, the process of canonization, and inspiration, I will stick to this: various Jewish groups appear to have decided that the canon "closed" at various times. The later a book, the more likely it is that some Jews would consider it a nice recent work, but no more Scripture than we would consider C.S. Lewis to be. There is also some system of rating the purpose of a book. Psalms, for instance, is songs. While no one seems to have doubted that Psalms includes some very early writing it's still a collection of songs, and so was relegated to a lower tier than God's covenant with Moses, or even His words through the prophets.

The clearest example of this appears to be the Sadducees, who, the Talmud relates, always wanted everything proved from the Law. In Matthew 22:23-33 (and in two parallel accounts in other gospels) the Sadducees question Jesus. They are said not to believe in the resurrection of the dead (see main document for this entire series), a doctrine which finds much of its support from books in the Prophets or Writings. Jesus also answers them by quoting from the Law. This suggests that, for the Sadducees, only the Law could define doctrine. Jeremiah might be a prophet, you might read what he said, but if you couldn't find a basis for his theology in the Torah you ignored what he said. This did happen to be remarkably convenient for the Sadducees in their daily lives, which probably had something to do with it.

So why would Jesus use the phrase "the Law and the Prophets" or some equivalent? It would denote nearly all the really old books of the Old Testament. The last prophet would have written nearly 500 years before. When Jesus adds the Psalms he is adding another very old body of work.

It's worth noting that Jesus doesn't reject the other Writings. He quotes pretty extensively from Daniel, for instance, down to the origin of his favorite self-description, "Son of Man". However, his focus is not, in these cases, a debate about canon. In some cases this may just be a way to avoid getting sidetracked in a debate. In today's passages it seems to be much more (as his inclusion of Psalms, sure to set off a good Sadducee, suggests).

Emmaus

The road to Emmaus is a fairly well-known story, but perhaps not so well understood. As covered in the introduction Cleopas and his companion have heard of Jesus' resurrection, but do not, at this point, believe it.

Until about halfway through verse 17 the scene is being set. The men are going somewhere, they are talking about Jesus, Jesus joins them but they are prevented from recognizing him, and He asks about their conversation. It is important that they do not recognize Jesus, but we will reserve speculation on why until we have discussed the whole of the story.

Cleopas' response appears to be somewhat exasperated – "Are you the only person who missed this?" Hello? Speaking to clueless? His explanation of what he and his companions hoped for, though, is quite valuable. Jesus was, they are still sure, a prophet, and a mighty one at that. Jesus was going to redeem Israel – which may or may not have involved, in Cleopas' mind, national freedom. But then he was killed, we've all waited a while, and then this crazy story surfaces.

Cleopas tells us two things here. First, he still believes something. Second, he's really confused. Jesus was someone, certainly – the question is what, given what's happened. And that leads into some of the confusion about the story he's heard. He's a man who needs things explained so his faith can congeal again around something solid. Amazingly, this thing is not, at this instant, the Lord Who stands next to him in the road.

What Jesus does, instead, is enter into a conversation with them, as if he were just another person. He does flip their exasperation back at them ("Oh foolish ones!"), but he explains, starting from the beginning, and covering a huge amount of text, that the Bible has predicted this. This is important – Jesus will, later, after we stop reading for today, reveal himself. But right now He is building a case from Scripture. His case appears to be that God has always said He will do this. That's why we step back into the oldest sections of the Bible and work forward. In fact, Jesus is, according to Jesus, the obvious conclusion of a lot of books we don't see anything very obviously Jesus-y in.

And, apparently, it's really a convincing case. That's the beauty of Jesus' hidden-ness. As Jesus he could have got them all to agree by saying, "Because I'm Jesus and because I said so," but as what appears to be a regular human, they are free to disagree with Him. They are free to have a conversation, work it out, and decide for themselves. Which they do, apparently deciding Jesus is correct. And then Jesus pulls the trump card and reveals Himself.

Luke 24:44-49

This passage involves a similar theme. Jesus gathers the disciples and teaches them about Scripture – the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Again the things he says are not things we generally think to find in these books, that the Christ should suffer, die, rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to everyone. That word "nations" is the same word as "Gentiles" – so apparently Jewish Scripture promises a mission to the Gentiles! This is what the disciples are witnesses of, in fact. ("Witnessing", as in being a witness to God's action and telling about it, is a hugely important theme for Luke's sequel, Acts. Those interested in this should read Acts.) The disciples are charged to go to the nations because the Old Testament says they should when the events they have witnessed have taken place. Finally, the passage concludes with Jesus instructing the disciples to wait until he has given them the power they will need.

As usual, the questions will be minimal (please refer to the document entitled [WeeklyQuestion_TheGospelUncut.pdf](#) for weekly application questions). The binding theme here is that Jesus is part of the Old Testament story all the way back. Some obvious questions to think about that follow:

- 1) Why is it important that Jesus fits into the Old Testament?
- 2) How does Jesus fit into the Old Testament?
- 3) Why would we read the Old Testament?
- 4) Why would we want to understand how Jesus fits into the Old Testament? Is it enough to stop with “this shows that God is right, so there”, or is there something more to be gained?