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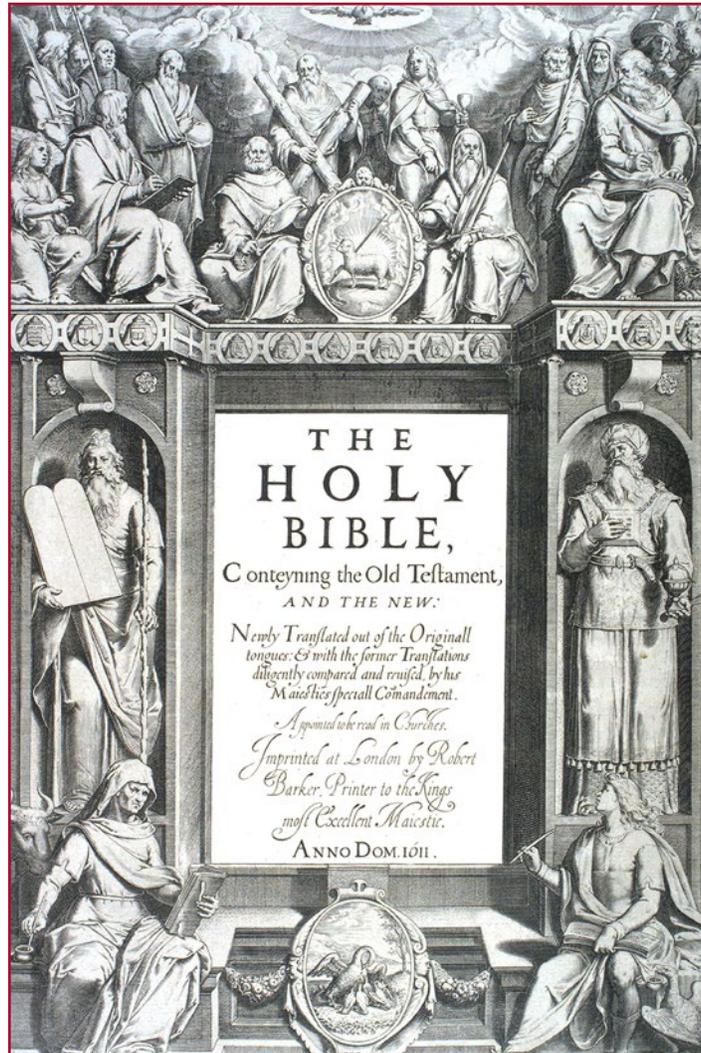
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How We Got the Bible—Part 2



King James Bible, 1611, First Edition

As is my custom, during the summer recess I will provide you with a weekly Bible study via email only. This is the second in a four part-series on how we got the Bible. May the Holy Spirit bless your understanding of this critically important subject—how God gave us His book. He didn't just drop it out of the sky.

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WEEKLY BIBLE STUDIES

Former Cabinet Members / White House Senior Staff: Wednesdays 7am, Zoom.

Senate Members: Tuesdays 8am, rotating offices, hot breakfast served.

House Members: Thursdays 8am, AG Hearing Room, Longworth 1302, hot breakfast served.



★ PUBLIC SERVANT ENDORSEMENT

Bill Cassidy

U.S. Senator, Louisiana



“Power is seductive. I was reading in Psalms how a political leader’s actions can wreak havoc over the lives of those who love the Lord.

“If a leader is not grounded in eternal biblical truths, she or he can get swept away by the sense that whatever they are doing is absolutely great. It is the way of leaders to lord that power over the people they rule.

“Leaders need to be grounded in the Word to keep that from happening.

“Thank you, Capitol Ministries for bringing the Word of God to those who lead, and for reminding us of who we are in Him. Thank you for your ministry to people like me in the Capitol.”

— BILL CASSIDY

We are praying for you, that this will be a significant time in the district as you catch up on your rest and relationships. We look forward to seeing you back in D.C. in September! Enjoy the studies!

Ralph Drollinger

I. INTRODUCTION

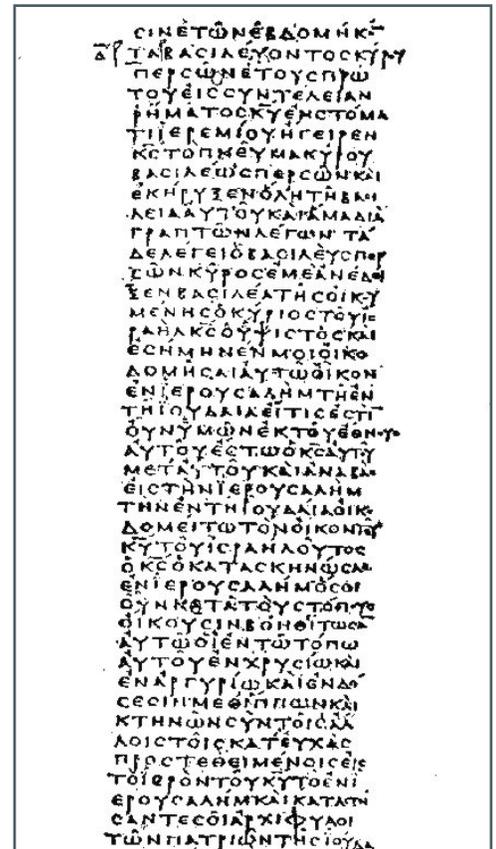
This study was written by, and is used with permission from the late Dr. Robert L. Thomas, one of my favorite seminary professors and an expert in this field. I have converted his format into ours.

II. INFLUENCES THAT LED TO A CANONICAL COLLECTION

The collection of New Testament writings began at a very early date. It is helpful in such a survey as this to list the influences, which provided motivation for this collection.

A. THE EXISTENCE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON AND THE SEPTUAGINT

One might easily assume that the existence of an Old Testament canon would discourage efforts to put together another canon. After all, the Old Testament was accepted by early Christians as God’s word, and they did much of their preaching and teaching on the basis of it. This could have been viewed as making another canon unnecessary. Such a



Fragment from a Septuagint

response was not the reaction, however. Instead, the Old Testament became a pattern which the early church followed in formulating its own canon. Consciousness of new revelation through Christ and His followers caused them to seek to supplement the Old Testament with something new.



An additional contribution to their motivation to use the Old Testament as a model was the existence and widespread use of the Septuagint. The Septuagint was the Old Testament translation into Greek used by the New Testament writers and by the Christian church. Since Greek was the lingua franca of the Roman Empire and since the language barrier of the Old Testament had already been removed, it was natural to supply a Greek New Testament as a companion of the Greek Old Testament.¹

B. THE AUTHORITATIVE CHARACTER OF THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITINGS

Public worship services of the early church were patterned after Jewish synagogue services of the day. The central part of such a service was the reading of Scripture. There were strict guidelines on what could be read. These included the restriction that nothing be read except the authoritative writings of the Old Testament. The use of the Old Testament carried over into Christian worship where it received the same recognition. In addition to this, however,

New Testament writing were also being read in Christian services. In fact, they were read alongside the Old Testament and thereby were given the same respect as the Old Testament.

By virtue of this practice the New Testament writings were commonly acknowledged to possess the same authority and to hold a canonical status.

C. THE NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES THAT INDICATE THEY SHOULD BE READ PUBLICLY

“And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea” (Colossians 4:16).

“I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren” (1 Thessalonians 5:27).

“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near” (Revelation 1:3).

While these verses do not explicitly claim a place in the canon, this implication is inevitable due to the prominence public reading gave a book.²

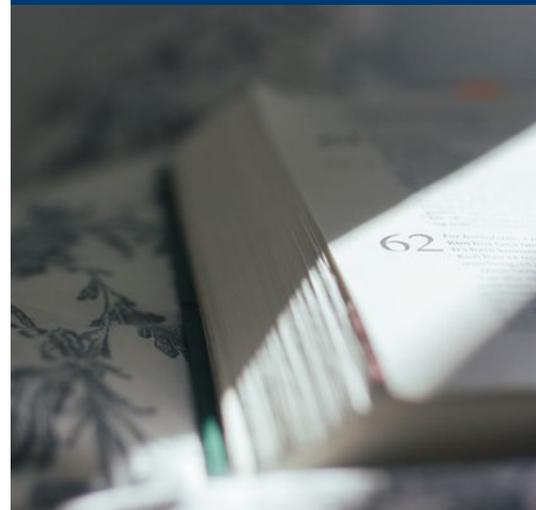
D. THE PLACE OF NEW TESTAMENT WRITINGS IN DOCTRINAL CONTROVERSIES

As disputes about doctrine began to arise among early Christians, both sides appealed to the highest authority they knew to prove their points of view. Surprising to some perhaps, the earliest among these appeals to refer to New Testament writings as “Scripture” came from outside the orthodox church. Basilides of Alexandria, the founder of a Gnostic sect around the beginning of the second century A.D., is the first one known to introduce New Testament quotations in this manner. Other heretics followed his lead as they appealed

♥ VERSE OF THE WEEK

1 Timothy 4:13

Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.



Get the word out!





John Adams



“I have examined all religions, and the result is that the Bible is the best book in the world.”

— John Adams, second president of the United States, signer of the Declaration of Independence, judge, diplomat, one of two signers of the Bill of Rights.

John Adams, *Works*, Vol. X, 85, to Thomas Jefferson on December 25, 1813.



more and more to the authority of the New Testament.

This tactic of the heretics forced orthodox Christianity to do the same. Since the heretics through their appeals were in effect marking out the books they considered to be canonical, it was incumbent upon orthodox Christians to define the body of truth, which they considered to be authoritative.³

E. THE CANON OF MARCION

In about A.D. 140 a heretic named Marcion published his own list of authoritative New Testament writings. He included a shortened Gospel of Luke and only 10 epistles of Paul (excluding the Pastoral Epistles). This canon was widely received because there was already a great hunger on the part of Christians to tie down the limits of a New Testament canon. Marcion recognized this hunger and moved to give his answer first. Because of the widespread appeal of Marcion’s canon, the orthodox church had to respond or many books would have been excluded. Hence, the mainstream church was forced to deal with this issue and answer the question, “Which books should be included?”⁴

F. THE PERSECUTION FROM ROMAN EMPEROR DIOCLETIAN

In A.D. 303, because of his determination to be worshiped exclusively as god, Diocletian issued an edict that all sacred books be destroyed by being burned. Those who refused to comply were punishable by death. This was an

empire-wide effort which caused Christians to give an even closer look at which books they considered to have canonical authority. If a person chose to obey God rather than man, he was forced to hide the canonical works at the risk of losing his life if discovered, to preserve them from destruction in this widespread book-burning.



Laureate head of Diocletian

The carrying out of this edict is probably responsible for the scarcity of New Testament documents that have survived from the first three centuries of the Christian era. Whether Christians chose not to run the risk of concealing their copies or did attempt concealment but were discovered, we cannot say. The fact remains that copies of the New Testament books from before A.D. 303 are not very numerous.⁵

A very significant figure that lived through this persecution was Eusebius of Caesarea (A.D. 270–340). As a well-



known church leader and historian, he had a lot at stake personally as he wrestled over how to respond to this edict. It is not surprising, therefore, that he devoted a great amount of attention to the subject of the canon in his Church History.

G. THE COPIES CONSTANTINE ORDERED EUSEBIUS TO MAKE

Eusebius also lived under the reign of the Roman Emperor who followed Diocletian, the Emperor Constantine. In A.D. 313:

Constantine declared Christianity to be a legal religion. After this he requested Eusebius to make for him 50 copies of the New Testament. Here is further incentive, an even more direct influence, to settle the question of which books are authoritative and which are not.

It is assumed that Eusebius complied with the request, but none of the 50 has survived to the present day.

H. THE DEVELOPMENT OF LARGE CODICES

The suggestion has come that the capability of producing a codex large enough to contain all 27 books of the New Testament was a fourth-century development. Some suggest that this was influential in making the church of the fourth century

think in terms of a complete canon that could be preserved permanently “under one cover.” Until this time the New Testament was circulated in multiple codices.⁶

This influence is questionable. At best, it was only a convenient way of circulating the books that had been adopted by a consensus of Christians who were driven by much more basic influences. The existence of lists of books and complete codices of the New Testament before the earliest councils met to endorse a New Testament canon is clear proof that the decision would have been reached if there had never been a codex big enough to contain them all.

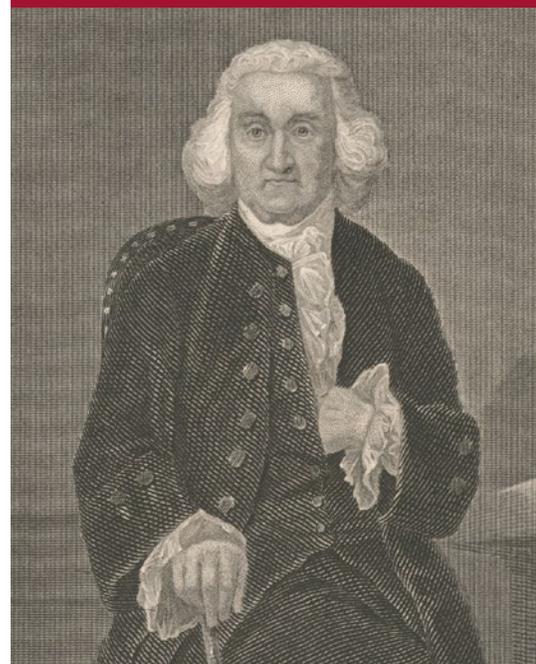
III. INDICATIONS FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT ON A CANONICAL COLLECTION

The New Testament itself does not contain a list of the books within its own canon. It does, however, contain several indications that demonstrate the probability that there was to be such a collection.

A. THE AUTHORITY CLAIMED BY THE WRITERS

First Corinthians 14:37 says, *“If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment.”* John writes in Revelation 22:18–19, *“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone*

Jonathan Trumbull



“The examples of holy men teach us that we should seek Him with fasting and prayer, with penitent confession of our sins, and hope in His mercy through Jesus Christ the Great Redeemer.”

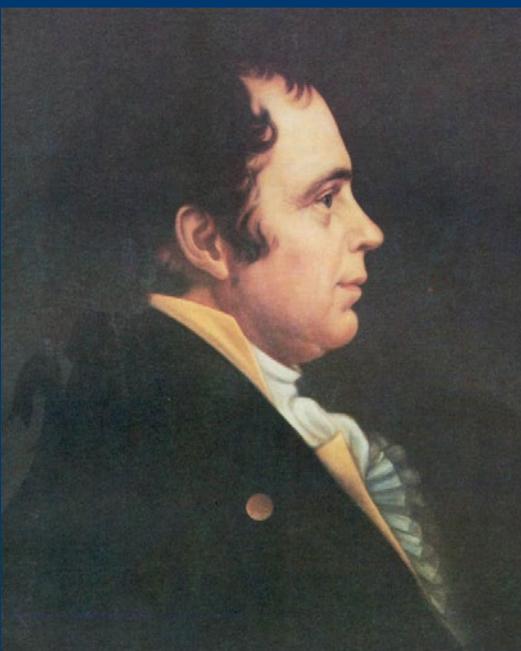
— Jonathan Trumbull, judge, legislator, governor of Connecticut, confidant of George Washington who called him “Brother Jonathan.”

Jonathan Trumbull, *Proclamation for a Day of Fasting and Prayer*, March 9, 1774.





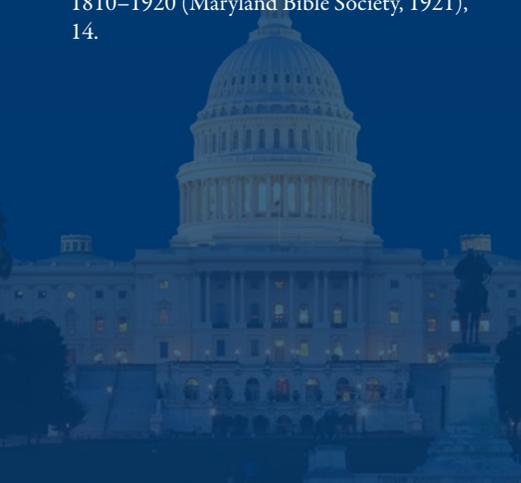
James McHenry



“Bibles are strong protections. Where they abound, men cannot pursue wicked courses and at the same time enjoy quiet conscience.”

— James McHenry, American Revolutionary War officer, signer of the Constitution, ratifier of the U.S. Constitution, secretary of war under Presidents George Washington and John Adams.

Bernard C. Steiner, *One Hundred and Ten Years of Bible Society Work in Maryland, 1810–1920* (Maryland Bible Society, 1921), 14.



takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.” New Testament writers were clearly conscious of the authority inherent in their writings. Thus, they had to be preserved and collected. This eventually led to a canonical set of writings.

B. THE COMMANDS TO CIRCULATE THESE WRITINGS

These commands would lead to collecting the writings. Revelation, Galatians, 2 Corinthians, and probably Ephesians were letters of this type. Letters from an apostolic source which were to govern the lives of Christians in different cities would naturally be sought, collected and used for guidance by an even larger group than the immediate recipients. Such a widely acknowledged group of writings would inevitably become a collection with canonical authority.

C. THE INSTRUCTIONS ON PUBLIC READING

These instructions were an indication that canonical recognition was to follow. Having been read alongside the Old Testament, there could be no other result. As previously quoted, three such passages with these instructions are: Colossians 4:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:27, and Revelation 1:3.

In addition to these three passages, 1 Timothy 4:13 says: *“Until I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to teaching.”* While *reading* could be construed as referring to private read-

ing, this seems unlikely. The other two exercises, exhortation and teaching, are for public services in the church. Thus, there is a strong probability that *reading* is also a public exercise. If it is public *reading* in view, then it must be the public *reading* of Scripture. Nothing else was allowed in the Jewish synagogue or early Christian services.

If this analysis is correct, a relevant question is, what did Paul include under the heading of “Scripture?” A helpful answer is given in 1 Timothy 5:18: *“For the Scripture says, ‘YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,’ and ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’* The former of these scriptural quotations is from the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 25:4, but the latter is not found there. Paul would have been expected to treat the Old Testament as Scripture or *hē graphē* but what is the source of the latter quote? After considering a number of options, one is driven to the conclusion that this is a citation of the teaching of Jesus given verbatim in Luke 10:7. Apparently Paul’s concept of *graphē* was wider than just the Old Testament (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16).

Here then is a further indication that an authoritative new testament canon was in process. A saying of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke is placed alongside an Old Testament quotation.

It was considered authoritative enough to be included among the literature that was to be read publicly in Christian gatherings (1 Timothy 4:13).



D. THE TESTIMONY OF 2 PETER 3:15–16

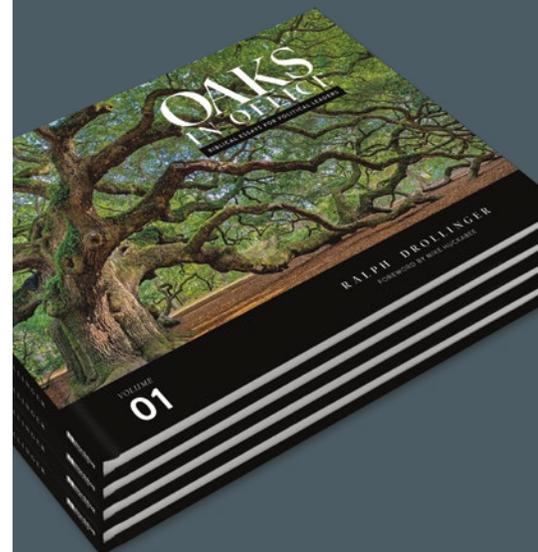
What has just been stated regarding an authoritative canon in connection with 1 Timothy 5:18 can be repeated even more dogmatically in connection with 2 Peter 3:15–16: *“and regard the patience of Our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.”*

The collection of Paul’s epistles with which Peter was familiar (probably at

least six of them; perhaps as many as 10) is here accorded an authority equal to that of the Old Testament; *tas graphas* can have no other meaning in this passage. That the Pauline collection was so recognized is another way of Peter saying that these epistles were part of the growing New Testament canon.

Thus, the New Testament itself contains inferences that there was to be a New Testament canon although it does not indicate the extent of this new collection.

Next week: early testimonies on a canonical collection.



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1. George Milligan, *The New Testament Documents: Their Origin and Early History* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1913), 206–208; David G. Dunbar, “The Biblical Canon,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 318–319.
2. Milligan, *New Testament Documents*, 210–214.
3. Ibid., 214–15; Dunbar, “The Biblical Canon,” 321–323, 328–331.
4. Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Eerdmans, 1943).
5. Thiessen, Introduction, 9; Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 107.
6. Harry Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (1985; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 59–62; Dunbar, “The Biblical Canon,” 331–333.