

**COMMENTARIES
AND
SELECTED APPENDICES
FROM**

*The New Testament
In Its Original Order
A Faithful Version With Commentary*

2006 Edition—Third Printing
(No Longer Available as a Bound Volume)



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THE NEW TESTAMENT
In Its ORIGINAL ORDER
A Faithful Version With Commentary
From the Stephens Text of 1550

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Acknowledgments

First and foremost, all the honor and glory go to God the Father and Jesus Christ for making this endeavor possible, for we have nothing that we did not receive (I Cor. 4:7). In the same manner, Jesus told His apostles that they were entering into other men's labors: "For in this the saying is true, that one sows and another reaps. I sent you to reap that in which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor" (John 4:37-38). The apostles' ministry was built on the foundation of all those who had labored and served God before them.

Entering into the labor of others goes back to the beginning. After the creation of Adam and Eve, God raised up righteous men who walked with Him—Abel, Seth, Enoch and Noah. After the Flood, God dealt directly with Abraham, and it is written of Abraham that he kept and taught the "way of the LORD" (Gen. 18:19). Moreover, God said of Abraham that he "... obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws" (Gen. 26:5). Because of Abraham's faithfulness, the promises of God were passed on to Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Later, God raised up Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egyptian slavery and to give them His laws and commandments at Mount Sinai.

God instructed Moses to write all of His judgments, statutes, commandments and laws, and Moses recorded them all on scrolls which together were called the Book of the Law. After God spoke the Ten Commandments to Israel, He wrote them with His own finger on tablets of stone. Nearly a year later, when the tabernacle was completed, Moses put the tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments inside the Ark of the Covenant and placed the sacred scrolls of the Law in special sheaves on the side of the Ark—which was placed into the holy of holies.

The Aaronic priesthood and the Levites were custodians of these sacred laws for Israel. They made exact copies from the sacred scrolls so that the laws of God could be taught to the children of Israel. Just before Moses died, he finished writing the fifth and final book of the Law—Deuteronomy. At that time, God ordained Joshua to lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land (1448 BC). After Joshua and the elders died, God raised up judges to rule the people of Israel, while the priests and Levites continued to bear the responsibility of teaching the people the laws and commandments of God.

However, the children of Israel did not continue to walk in the way of the Lord. They sinned by not keeping His laws and commandments and by transgressing His covenant. They forsook the Lord and went after the gods of the land—Baal and Ashtaroth (Judg. 2:6-13). Therefore, God corrected them by delivering them into the hands of their enemies (vs. 14-15). When they repented, He raised up righteous judges to deliver them (vs. 16). As each judge died, the children of Israel would again go whoring after other gods. Each time they repented, God would raise up another judge to deliver them (vs. 17-23). This cycle continued for over 400 years during the period of the judges.

The last judge of Israel was Samuel. He was unique because he was judge and prophet. When Samuel became old, he made his three sons judges. But they did not walk in their father's ways—they took bribes and perverted judgment (I Sam. 8:1-3). As a result, the elders of Israel came to Samuel and demanded that they be given a king to judge them like all the nations (vs. 4-5). Not only did the children of Israel reject God's established system of judges, but they rejected God's reign over them.

In spite of the fact that the children of Israel had rejected God's rule, because of

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His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God instructed Samuel to fulfill the people's request for a king. At that time, God made a new covenant with the children of Israel and their kings (I Sam. 8:10-22; 10:17-24). After this covenant was ratified with the selection of Israel's first king, Saul, Samuel made it official by writing down the covenant and placing it in the holy of holies before the Lord (I Sam. 10:25). Samuel also wrote the books of Judges, and parts of I and II Samuel.

Afterwards, God rejected Saul as king because he did not follow God's commandments and rebelled against Him (I Sam. 15). Then the Lord selected David, the shepherd boy of the house of Jesse to succeed Saul as king (I Sam. 16). David was a man after God's heart and became the greatest of all the kings of Israel and Judah. As a king and prophet, David wrote hundreds of psalms and a number of proverbs in praise and worship of God. These were added to the sacred scrolls along with the Law and the histories of Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings.

David's son Solomon succeeded him and was granted permission by God to build a temple in Jerusalem, according to the plans that his father David had received from God. Solomon began his reign with great humility, desiring to serve God and the children of Israel and to judge them according to the Lord's covenant. Solomon built the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem and wrote many of the chapters in the book of Proverbs, as well as the Song of Solomon and the book of Ecclesiastes. God blessed Solomon and Israel with wealth and riches unparalleled in the history of the world. During his reign Israel was a world-ruling power and an enormous trading empire with all the nations of the world (I Kings 10:23-24; II Chron. 9:20-24).

Solomon's reign began in glory with the bountiful blessings of God. However, it ended in disaster because he sinned greatly against God and before all Israel. He married seven hundred wives and had three hundred concubines, many of them from foreign nations. They turned his heart away from the Lord and led him to worship other gods. So great was his apostasy that he built temples and incense altars for all the pagan gods of his wives in Jerusalem. He built them on the mount just west of the Temple Mount of God (I Kings 11:4-10). Later it was called the "mount of corruption" (II Kings 23:13).

As a result of Solomon's sins, God divided Israel into two kingdoms—the northern kingdom of the ten tribes of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah—the Jews, Levites and the tribe of Benjamin. During the reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel, God raised up prophets to warn the people when they and their kings sinned. Their writings were added to the Scriptures: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel and the twelve Minor Prophets.

The northern ten tribes of Israel continued until 721-718 BC, when they were carried into captivity by the Assyrians because of their sins and transgressions against God (II Kings 17:1-18). Later, because of the rebellion and transgressions of the southern kingdom of Judah, God sent Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon against them. Nebuchadnezzar and his armies destroyed Jerusalem and the temple that Solomon had built for the worship of God and carried the Jews into captivity to Babylon. After seventy years some of the Jews, together with some of the priests and Levites, returned to Jerusalem.

Under Ezra and Nehemiah, the remnant of the Jews along with the priests and Levites rebuilt the temple. During this time, God used the priest Ezra to write the books of Ezra, and I and II Chronicles, and to edit and canonize the Old Testament. He had one hundred twenty priests and Levites, called the Sopherim, who helped him complete this final canonization. Thus, the Old Testament took its final form with the three divisions of the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms (Writings). The Levitical Sopherim and scribes made official copies of the Old Testament which were sent to all Jewish synagogues throughout the Persian Empire to be used by the Jews in the Diaspora for teaching and worship.

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The Old Testament, with these divisions, was preserved by the scribes down to the time of Jesus Christ and the apostles (Luke 24:44-47). After the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the second temple in 70 AD, faithful Levitical scribes, later called Masoretes, continued to hand copy and preserve the Old Testament until the time of the printing press.

As Jesus said, the apostles entered into the labor of the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. Jesus Christ ordained His chosen apostles to preach the Gospel to the world, to raise up churches and to write and canonize the New Testament. Faithful scribes hand copied the original New Testament texts from the time of the apostles until the time of the Reformation. Beginning in the early 1500's AD, Erasmus brought together the Greek manuscripts, known as the Byzantine Text. His fifth and final edition of the Greek New Testament was published in 1535 AD. From this edition Robert Estienne published the Stephens Greek New Testament in 1550 AD. This became the standard for most Reformation translations and was later called the Textus Receptus. The Stephens 1550 text was used by this author for his translation of the New Testament.

In 1525, William Tyndale was the first man to translate and publish the New Testament from the Byzantine Greek into English, using Erasmus' 1516 and 1519 editions. Later, he translated the Old Testament from the Hebrew. Because he dared to translate and publish the Bible in English, William Tyndale was martyred by strangulation and burned at the stake in October 1536 AD at the behest of Roman Catholic Inquisitors. His complete Bible, finished by John Rogers after his death, is known as the Thomas Matthew Bible (1537 AD). In that same year, King Henry VIII authorized the Thomas Matthew Bible to be published and used in the churches in England.

Later, during the reign of Catholic Queen Mary, English exiles in Geneva produced an English Bible in 1557, known as the Geneva Bible. This Bible, which was 95-98% Tyndale's work, continued to be printed in many editions through 1699 and was widely used in England, Scotland and the American Colonies. In 1611, the first edition of the King James Version was published. Later, it became the standard English version and was used by English-speaking people throughout the world.

Today, Jesus' saying is still applicable: "I sent you to reap that in which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor" (John 4:38). Any contemporary translator enters into the labor of thousands of faithful men, who through the ages have labored in the Word of God—many giving their lives in martyrdom.

Acknowledgment goes to all those faithful, honest scholars and ministers of the Word, who down through the centuries have labored and published lexicons, dictionaries, commentaries, and the histories of the preservation of the Bible—without which this work would not be possible. Truly, we have entered into the labor of thousands of others.

I give my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to my lovely, dear wife, Dolores, for her patience and personal encouragement that helped to make this publication a reality. As translator of this Faithful Version of the New Testament, I give special tribute to the late Dr. Charles V. Dorothy, Ph.D., of Ambassador University, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Claremont Graduate School. It was under his private tutelage for two years that I studied New Testament Greek, 1974-75. Dr. Dorothy continued as my mentor and personal friend for many years. Through the years, I have constantly studied to increase my knowledge and understanding of New Testament Greek. Until his death in June 1996, Dr. Dorothy encouraged me to translate. In 1992, I began to translate the New Testament, beginning with the seven General Epistles. This complete translation, which was over ten years in the making, is the sole responsibility of Fred R. Coulter.

Special recognition and acknowledgement go to the late Dr. Ernest L. Martin, Ph.D., biblical scholar and historian, who died in January 2002. After serving as profes-

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sor of theology and history at Ambassador University, he founded the Association for Scriptural Knowledge in Portland, Oregon. Before his death, he was recognized as one of the world's foremost scholars in the history and preservation of the Bible. Dr. Martin's book, *Restoring the Original Bible*, is one of the premiere books in the field of the preservation and canonization of the Bible. Dr. Martin was a personal friend of mine. Only two weeks before his untimely death, Dr. Martin gave me permission to quote extensively in this work from his book, *Restoring the Original Bible*. In addition, he made me promise to arrange the books of the New Testament in their original order.

The New Testament In Its Original Order—A Faithful Version With Commentary is the result of over forty-three years of studying God's Word, and teaching God's people, including over thirty years of studying New Testament Greek—the last ten of which were devoted to translating. This book is the fruit of that labor. However, a work such as this has required the help of many. Everyone who has worked on this project gives special thanks and acknowledgement to the brethren of God because their love, prayers and financial support has made this project a reality.

Personal acknowledgment and gratitude go to Carl and Jean Franklin for their expert editing of this English translation so that it might accurately reflect the original Greek. Acknowledgment and deep appreciation go to William M. Tomory, Ph.D., for his professional expertise in evaluating both the expression and mechanics of this English translation, and for his scrupulous editing of the translation and commentaries to conform to the current standards for style and punctuation.

Gary Staszak is to be highly commended for his painstaking, exhaustive research and factual, compelling writing of the commentaries on the history and preservation of the Old and New Testaments—Chapters Nine through Fifteen and several appendices. He also acknowledges the assistance of Albert and Renate Miller, Louis Williams and Jenai Rasmussen in his efforts.

Special thanks go to Becky Ritke, Marcia Ritke-Momose and Phyllis Daniel for their diligent editing of the commentaries and appendices. John and Hiedi Vogeles are to be commended for their diligence and tireless labor in the final formatting and proof-reading of the entire text for publication of this book. Others who assisted in providing material for the appendices are Robert Martin, Mike Joseph and Ron Carey. Thanks also go to Kip Johnson for proof-reading the commentaries and appendices.

We all give thanks to God the Father and Jesus Christ for the blessing of being able to labor in this endeavor in the Word of God. We have labored to the end that the reader may find this translation faithful to the original Greek as preserved in the Stephens Text of 1550 and that it captures and reflects the meaning and divine authorship of the apostles' original writings. We pray that this translation and the accompanying commentaries and appendices may guide the reader to a better understanding of the original teachings of the apostles of Jesus Christ, who preached the Gospel to the world and originally wrote the New Testament—the enduring fruit of their labor.

*Fred R. Coulter
December 2003*

Author's Preface

Why This New Translation?

This new translation, The New Testament In Its Original Order—A Faithful Version With Commentary, has been produced because today, in these end times, we are confronted with the removal of God from the public conscience and the destruction of the Holy Bible—the Word of God—especially the New Testament! The foundation of Christianity is being subverted and corrupted with new translations that change the Word of God so dramatically, it is tantamount to destroying it.

In modern Western civilization today, most references to God and the Holy Bible have been removed from the public arena. Aside from profanity or cynical ridicule, God is rarely mentioned in the printed or electronic media, popular entertainment or music. Furthermore, within the past fifty years, a secular humanist worldview has gradually been eroding the knowledge of the true God. As a result, a form of Christianity without God has been developing. Who has ever heard of such a thing as an atheistic Christianity? Christianity without Christ? That is the supreme oxymoron—or to coin a new word to show the insanity of such a concept, a “moryoxon”!

Today's modern, pluralistic, secular, scientific world has no room for the true God—God the Father and Jesus Christ—or His Word, the Holy Bible. Lloyd Geering, a fellow of the Jesus Seminar, headquartered in Santa Rosa California, is an outspoken advocate of a secular, humanist religion—“Christianity” without God. In his book, *Christianity Without God*, Geering writes: “So appeal to human rights led, in turn, to the abolition of slavery, the rejection of racism, the emancipation of women, and the acceptance of homosexuals. All these emancipations evolved out of the Christian matrix and today are even sometimes referred to as Christian values. Yet each of these innovations has pitted the developing secular world against the entrenched dogmas of conventional Christianity....The emancipations already won, along with those still in the process of being achieved, have been made possible only because at the same time **we have also been steadily emancipating ourselves from obedience to a supposed supernatural heavenly Father, whose revealed will was not to be questioned.**

“We have now reached the stage within the evolving stream of Christian tradition when to achieve the most mature state of personhood **we must become emancipated from the last element of our cultural tradition which has the capacity to enslave us—namely, theism**” (Geering, *Christianity Without God*, p. 136, bold emphasis added).

In Psalm 2, David prophesied that before the return of Jesus Christ, the people and governments of the world would reject God's rule in their lives. They would not relent until they had “emancipated” themselves from God: “Why do the nations rage and the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD, and against His Christ, saying, **Let us break Their bands asunder, and cast away Their cords from us**” (Psa. 2:1-3).

Geering continues, “Secular futurists today, however, know that the world's future is, as never before in human history, dependent upon us humans. Because the modern global, secular humanist world stands in unbroken line of descent from the Christendom of the past, we can justifiably speak of this post-Christian dispensation as a further, but different, form of Christianity; it is now ‘**Christianity without God**’ ” (Geering, p. 142).

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The secularization of Christianity did not come suddenly. Rather, it has been a slow, but steady erosion of faith and trust in God and His Word, resulting in a destruction of the true knowledge of the Creator God. Geering elaborates: “During the twentieth century that ‘God’ was slowly vanishing from the area of public consciousness and was no longer being appealed to by public bodies in times of pestilence, war, and drought, as once was the case. Even in churches it is rare to hear prayers beseeching God, say, to break the current drought; asking him to provide a fine day for the Sunday School picnic could be done only in jest. **All public bodies, national and international, are now fully aware that humans themselves must solve the problems of our time and that there is no ‘God’ out there who can be appealed to when all else fails. The once public ‘face of God’ has been forced to retreat to the subjective consciousness of devout individuals and traditional church gatherings.** God has been privatized; what has remained public are the values inherited from the Christian past, values which continue to lead to fresh emancipations and new human ideals; **and it is these values which constitute ‘Christianity without God’**” (Ibid., p. 143, bold emphasis added).

In concert with the removal of God from the public conscience, there has been the move toward “political correctness.” The politically correct, public-speak language being espoused by government, liberal educators, and the printed and visual media promotes tolerance toward all political, religious and ethnic groups, is gender neutral and champions homosexuality. In most printed media, especially in books used at all levels of public education, politically correct “word police” scour publications to eliminate politically incorrect “offensive” or “potentially offensive” words and phrases. As a result, the emphasis of language has shifted to project the paradigm of a politically correct, atheistic humanism, which exalts man while debasing God the Father, Jesus Christ and His Word. Noting this, Geering writes: “The transition from Christendom to ‘Christianity without God’ is reflecting itself in common language. In three little books of a quite novel kind Don Cupitt has made a study of the religiously interesting idioms now coming into colloquial English. He observed, for example, that as the word ‘God’ has been disappearing from public use, a whole host of little phrases focusing on ‘life’ (many of them new) have been coming into common usage, such as ‘How’s life been treating you lately?’, ‘Get a life!’, ‘That is the story of my life!’ He suggests that the secularization of religion has had the effect of sacralizing life [worshiping human life itself instead of God].

“Cupitt also observed that the same change has been happening with our rituals. Funerals, for example, are ceasing to be events marking the departure of the deceased to their ‘reward in heaven’ and, instead are becoming ‘celebrations of a life’, a life which is now ended and complete” (Ibid., p. 143).

Rejection of Jesus Christ as the Savior of Mankind

Central to the concept of Christianity without God is the rejection of God the Father and Jesus Christ. Robert W. Funk, founder of the Jesus Seminar, in his article, “The Coming Radical Reformation” writes: “The God of the metaphysical age is dead. There is not a personal god out there external to human beings and the material world. We must reckon with a deep crisis in god talk and replace it with talk about whether the universe has meaning and whether human life has purpose” (The Coming Radical Reformation, *Thesis 1*).

Funk’s declaration is very similar to Aldous Huxley’s 1937 proclamation of his philosophy of meaninglessness, when he wrote his reasons and motives for the denial of a special creation of everything, and his rejection of God’s rule in his life: “I had motives

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for not wanting the world to have a meaning. Consequently, I assumed that it had none and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption ... For myself, as no doubt for most of my contemporaries, **the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation** ... from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom; we objected to the political and economic system because it was unjust....There was one admirably simple method of ... justifying ourselves in our politically erotic revolt: **We could deny that the world had any meaning whatsoever.** Similar tactics had been adopted during the 18th century and for the same reasons....The chief reason for being 'philosophical' was that one might be free from prejudices—above all, prejudices of a sexual nature. It was the manifestly poisonous nature of the fruits that forced me to reconsider the philosophical tree on which they had grown” (Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means*, pp. 312, 315, 316, 318).

The very God that the unbelieving reject has revealed His will and purpose for mankind, as well as for the universe, in His Word, the Holy Bible. Without God's inspired Word men cannot discern the purpose of life or the universe. Their rejection of God blinds their minds so that they cannot understand—all their talk about the purpose of human life and the universe is useless and meaningless! Thousands of years ago, King David wrote of such men: **“The fool hath said in his heart, ‘There is no God!’** They are corrupt; they have done abominable works, there is none that does good. The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any who understand, who seek *after* God. They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not *even* one. Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, those who devour My people as men eat bread and do not call not upon the LORD” (Psa. 14:1-4).

A Christianity without God must reject the commandments of God the Father and Jesus Christ, thus giving way to moral relativism. Funk proclaims: “The Bible does not contain fixed, objective standards of behavior that should govern human behavior for all time. This includes the ten commandments as well as the admonitions of Jesus” (Funk, *The Coming Radical Reformation, Thesis 20*).

When men cast aside the laws and commandments of God, they bring calamity upon themselves and those who follow them. The prophet Isaiah warned those who would do so: **“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: Who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him! Therefore as the fire devours the stubble, and the flame burns up the chaff; their root shall be like rottenness, and their blossoms shall go up like dust because they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel”** (Isa. 5:20-24).

In rejecting Jesus Christ as the Son of God, religious atheists retain the name of Jesus only to remake a Jesus in their own image, according to their theories—a false Jesus—a man merely of human origin, not divine. Therefore, they reject all references in the New Testament that Jesus was the Creator God, Who came to the earth to save mankind. Again Funk writes: “We should give Jesus a demotion. It is no longer credible to think of Jesus as divine. Jesus' divinity goes together with the old theistic way of thinking about God....The plot early Christians invented for a divine redeemer figure is as archaic as the mythology in which it is framed. A Jesus who drops down out of heaven, performs some magical act that frees human beings from the power of sin, rises from the dead, and returns to heaven is simply no longer credible. The notion that he will return at the end of time and sit in cosmic judgment is equally incredible. We must find a new

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plot for a more credible Jesus” (Ibid., *Theses 6 and 7*).

Funk and the fellows at the Jesus Seminar are busy making the “new plot” by dissecting the New Testament, throwing out as fiction all but 16-18% of the Gospels. They are rearticulating and redacting the Gospels to create a new false “Jesus,” a concoction of their imaginations: “In rearticulating the vision of Jesus, we should take care to express ourselves in the same register as he employed in his parables and aphorisms—paradox, hyperbole, exaggeration, and metaphor. Further, our reconstructions of his vision should be provisional, always subject to modification and correction” (Ibid., *Thesis 21*).

Further, in their perversion they are deciding for themselves which parts of the New Testament they will use while systematically discarding the rest. The few teachings they do accept from the Gospels are some of Jesus’ teachings that they have classified as wisdom teachings. Geering explains his views as follows: “**In ‘Christianity without God’ there is no place for the traditional figure of Christ as the divine Saviour.** Yet there is certainly a place for Jesus the teacher, the man of wisdom, the one who revitalised the path to freedom. Of relevance to us is not the Jesus who was elevated into a mythical heaven but Jesus the fully human person who shared the tensions, enigmas, and uncertainties that we experience. It is Jesus who told stories which shocked people out of their traditional ways of thinking and behaving, who can free us from the mind-sets in which we have become imprisoned. **The Jesus most relevant to us is he who provided no ready-made answers but by his tantalising stories prompted people to work out their own most appropriate answers to the problems of life.** That is why the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son will be remembered long after the historical confessions and creeds have been forgotten.

“**Christianity can exist without God.** Indeed, ‘Christianity without God’ has actually been in our midst for quite some time. It has been coming quietly, unheralded and unnoticed....It was ‘Christianity without God’ which made possible the series of emancipations mentioned above. Indeed, they may even be regarded as manifestations of the coming of the very Kingdom, of which Jesus spoke. Just as the early church saw evidence of the coming of the Kingdom in such events as ‘the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear’, so we may say that, though there is yet a long way to go, we can rejoice to see positive changes taking place:

there is increasing personal freedom to think and to speak,
the slaves are being freed,
patriarchy is crumbling,
homosexuals are free to ‘come out’,
weapons of mass destruction are being widely condemned,
racist attitudes are being overcome,
equality of the sexes is being achieved,
the disadvantaged are no longer being ignored,
human worth and values are being increasingly honoured”

(*Christianity Without God*, pp. 145-146).

The apostle Peter warned about false teachers, such as these, who would arise and deceive the majority of people: “But there were also false prophets among the people, as indeed **there will be false teachers among you, who will stealthily introduce destructive heresies, personally denying the Lord who bought them,** and bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many people will follow *as authoritative* their destructive ways; *and* because of them, **the way of the truth will be blasphemed**” (II Pet. 2:1-2).

In their brazen, blasphemous assaults against the truth of God, the fellows of the Jesus Seminar are attempting to mythologize the New Testament, so it becomes a collection of stories that can be changed at whim. According to Funk, “The New Testament is a highly uneven and biased record of orthodox attempts to invent Christianity. **The canon of scripture adopted by traditional Christianity should be contracted and ex-**

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panded simultaneously to reflect respect for the old tradition and openness to the new. Only the works of strong poets—those who startle us, amaze us with a glimpse of what lies beyond the rim of present sight—should be considered for inclusion. **The canon should be a collection of scriptures without a fixed text and without either inside or outside limits,** like the myth of King Arthur and the knights of the roundtable or the myth of the American West” (The Coming Radical Reformation, *Thesis 19*).

In order to accomplish this task they have rejected 82-86% of the Gospels and have sought to expand the New Testament by adding many other apocryphal and Gnostic writings from the Nag Hammadi library of Upper Egypt and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover and the Jesus Seminar have already published a book titled, *The Five Gospels*. As Funk said, they reduced and expanded Gospels at the same time. To reduce the four Gospels, they have rejected 99% of the Gospel of John and substantially reduced the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, retaining a mere 16-18% of these books. Then they added a “fifth” gospel, the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas (that was written by someone other than the apostle Thomas, in the 200’s AD or later). Among the other works they are seeking to incorporate into their new version of the New Testament—none of which were written by those whose names appear in the titles—include the following: *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene, The Gospel of Mary, The Gospel of Barnabas, The Apocryphal Gospel of Peter, The Gospel of Phillip, An Unknown Gospel, The Secret Book of James and The Didache*, as well as any other text they consider to be “Christian.” Homogenizing the New Testament with these spurious Gnostic and apocryphal writings would so corrupt it, it would be utterly unrecognizable as the Word of God.

In a Christianity without God, man becomes his own god. Hence, it is reasoned that man is his own savior and can solve all the world’s problems. Is it any wonder that Jesus said, “When the Son of man comes, shall He find the *true* faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

The apostle Paul prophesied about the fruits of a godless religion that would arise in the latter days: “Know this also, that in *the* last days perilous times shall come; for men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, braggarts, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, savage, despisers of those who are good, betrayers, reckless, egotistical, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; having an outward appearance of godliness [Christianity without God], but denying the power of *true* godliness. But *as for you*, turn away from *all* these....*They are* always learning but *are* never able to come to *the* knowledge of *the* truth [of God]” (II Tim. 3:1-7).

Today, we are witnessing a godless society that is suffering from the consequences of rejecting Jesus Christ and God the Father. The prophet Hosea laid bare the suffering that a society incurs when a majority of the people have rejected God: “Hear the word of the LORD, children of Israel [and the whole world as well], for the LORD *has* a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, There is **no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and the committing of adultery they break out; and blood touches blood.** Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one who dwells in it shall languish, with the beasts of the field and with the birds of the heavens. Yes, the fish of the sea also shall be taken away....**My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you from being a priest to Me. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget thy children.**

“As they were increased, so they sinned against Me. I will change their glory into shame. They eat up the sin of My people, and they set their heart on their iniquity. And it has become, like people, like priest; and **I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their doings.** For they shall eat, and not have enough. They shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase because they have stopped taking heed to the

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LORD. Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart. My people seek advice from their wooden *idols*, and their rod declares to them, **for the spirit of whoredoms has caused them to go astray, and they have gone awhoring away from under their God**" (Hosea 4:1-12).

Just as Hosea wrote of God's penalty for rejecting Him, the apostle Paul wrote that because men did not want to retain the knowledge of God, He abandoned them to their own devices: "Indeed, *the* wrath of God is revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest among them, for God has manifested *it* to them; **for the invisible things of Him are perceived from *the* creation of *the* world, being understood by the things that were made—both His eternal power and Godhead—so that they are without excuse; because when they knew God, they glorified *Him* not as God, neither were thankful; but they became vain in their own reasonings, and their foolish hearts were darkened.**

"While professing themselves to be *the* wise ones, they became fools and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into *the* likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed creatures, and creeping things. **For this cause, God also abandoned them to uncleanness through the lusts of their hearts, to disgrace their own bodies between themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie;** and they worshiped and served the created thing more than the one Who is Creator, Who is blessed into the ages. Amen.

"For this cause, God abandoned them to disgraceful passions; for even their women changed the natural use *of sex* into that which is contrary to nature; and in the same manner also the men, having left the natural use *of sex* with the woman, were inflamed in their lustful passions toward one another—men with men shamelessly committing lewd *acts*, and receiving back within themselves a fitting penalty for their error.

"And in exact proportion as they did not consent to have God in *their* knowledge, God abandoned them to a reprobate mind, to practice *those* things that are immoral; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, guile, evil dispositions; whisperers, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things *and practices*; disobedient to parents, void of understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable *and* unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who commit such things are worthy of death, not only practice these things themselves, but also approve of those who commit *them*" (Rom. 1:18-32).

These are the penalties that godless societies reap. Indeed, man's wisdom is foolishness to God. As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul was confronted with the foolish wisdom of this world—Greek philosophy and religion—that leads to spiritual death: "For to those who are perishing [the wise and mighty of the world], the preaching of the cross is foolishness; but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will nullify the understanding of those who understand.' **Where is *the* wise? Where is *the* scribe? Where is *the* disputer of this age? Did not God make foolish the wisdom of this world?** For since in the wisdom of God the world through *its own* wisdom did not know God, it pleased God to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching" (I Cor. 1:18-21).

Those who reject God the Father and Jesus Christ are not content with removing the knowledge of God from the public conscience and creating an evil society. They are also assaulting the Word of God with a vengeance. Their final coup de grace is the elimination of God the Father and Jesus Christ from the New Testament itself! By changing and corrupting the Scriptures with new versions that use common street language and politically correct, neuter gender language, the sacredness of the Holy Scriptures is debased. Thus, the Scriptures become secularized and profaned!

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How Did It Happen?

How did such designs against the Word of God ever develop in Western civilization, the bastion of Christianity that has published and distributed the majority of the billions of Bibles in the world today? Why do we see a world so deluded, deceived, degenerate and immoral that it is readily embracing “Christianity without God” and accepting debased, corrupted, blasphemous, politically-correct Bibles with hardly a whimper of resistance? Rather, than rehearsing a broad overview of history, we will examine a listing of the various English Bible versions and translations, which tell the story of a slow but steady, insidious corruption of the Word of God.

After the publication of the King James Version in 1611 virtually nothing was done to change the English Bible. However, beginning in 1871, Westcott and Hort, with a committee of revisers, began to change the printed Greek text of the Byzantine family, commonly known as the Textus Receptus, or the Received Text. They produced a revised New Testament Greek text to conform to the inferior Sinaiticus and Vaticanus Greek texts from which the English Revised New Testament in 1881 came, followed by the complete Bible in 1885, known as the English Revised Version.

After the ERV, many English versions were produced:

Fenton, NT 1895
The Emphasized Bible, Rotherham 1897
The Bible in Modern English, Fenton 1901
American Standard Version in 1901
Moffatt, NT 1913, 1917; OT 1926, 1935
Douay Bible 1941 (Catholic)
New World Translation 1950 (Jehovah's Witnesses)
Revised Standard Version 1952
New Testament in Modern English, J. B. Phillips 1957
The Amplified New Testament 1958
Berkley New Testament 1959
The Amplified Old Testament 1962
New American Standard Bible 1963
The Jerusalem Bible 1966 (Catholic)
New English Bible 1970
New American Bible 1970
The Living Bible (Paraphrased) 1971
Today's English Version (Good News for Modern Man) 1976
New International Version 1978
New King James Bible 1983
New Jerusalem Bible 1985
Revised English Bible 1989
New Revised Standard Version 1990
Contemporary English Version 1995
New Testament and Psalms (Inclusive Version) 1995
New Living Translation 1996
New American Standard Bible 1997
English Standard Version 2001
The Bible in Contemporary Language—The Message 2002
Today's New International (Inclusive) Version, proposed in 2002

The Bible in Contemporary Language

In some recent versions of the Bible, the emphasis on an accurate translation of the Hebrew or Greek texts has been abandoned in favor of a vernacular paraphrase. One

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of the newest versions, *THE MESSAGE: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, 2002, by Eugene H. Peterson, is a freewheeling paraphrased, personal interpretation of the Scriptures. To call it a translation is an insult to God the Father, Jesus Christ and the inspired Word of God. While some parts of this version may convey a fairly accurate meaning of various sections of the Hebrew or Greek texts, in general, this version destroys the true meaning of the Word of God with a common vernacular, street-language English that is far removed from any semblance of the true meaning of the original language. Below are four excerpts of Scripture from *The Message* compared with the *King James Version* in the Old Testament and *A Faithful Version* in the New Testament.

Psalm 22: David's prophesying of the sayings of Jesus Christ while He was on the cross in Psalm 22 is a prime example of Peterson's blasphemous rendition of the Scriptures: "God, God ... my God! Why did you dump me miles from nowhere? Doubled up with pain, I call to God all the day long. No answer. Nothing. I keep at it all night, tossing and turning. And you! Are you indifferent, above it all, leaning back on the cushions of Israel's praise? ... I'm a bucket kicked over and spilled, every joint in my body has been pulled apart. My heart is a blob of melted wax in my gut. I'm as dry as a bone, my tongue is black and swollen. They have laid me out for burial in the dirt" (verses 1-3, 14-15).

Peterson's interpretation is a radical departure from the inspired Hebrew text of the Old Testament. Rather than portraying the prophesied thoughts and sayings of Jesus on the cross, it sounds more like a person recovering from a drunken binge or a drug overdose.

In the KJV these verses read: "God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? *why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?* O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But thou *art* holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel ... I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death" (verses 1-3, 14-15).

John 1:1-5: The first five verses of the Gospel of John are central to the revelation of the divinity and pre-existence of Jesus Christ as God. Peterson's version entirely distorts the true inspired meaning of these verses, resembling Gnostic passages from an ancient Egyptian religious manuscript more than the inspired Word of God. Some phrases are not even intelligible and bear little resemblance to the original Greek: "The Word was first, the Word present to God. God present to the Word. The Word was God, in readiness for God from day one. Everything was created through him; nothing—not one thing!—came into being without him. What came into existence was Life, and the Life as Light to live by. The life-Light blazed out of the darkness; and the darkness couldn't put it out" (John 1:1-5, *The Message*).

An accurate translation reads: "In *the* beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in *the* beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and not even one *thing* that was created came into being without Him. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness does not comprehend it" (John 1:1-5). As is the inspired Greek, this faithful translation is straightforward, conveying the truth about Jesus Christ in an easy-to-read manner.

Romans 5:12-14: When Paul wrote to the Romans, he used very precise language in order to fully explain the teachings and doctrines of Jesus Christ. In Chapter Five, he wrote that Adam's sin brought death to all mankind. However, Peterson's paraphrased rendition greatly distorts this truth: "You know the story of how Adam landed us in the dilemma we're in—first sin, then death, and no one exempt from either sin or death. That sin disturbed relations with God in everything and everyone, but the extent

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of the disturbance was not clear until God spelled it out in detail to Moses. So death, this huge abyss separating us from God, dominated the landscape from Adam until Moses. Even those who didn't sin precisely as Adam did by disobeying a specific command of God still had to experience this termination of life, this separation from God" (Rom. 5:12-14, *The Message*). Such an impious, inaccurate rendition does away with the correct doctrinal teachings of Paul's writings—the inspired teachings of Jesus Christ. Moreover, in these verses, Peterson does not even mention the word "law," which is in the original Greek and is central to the doctrine of sin.

Here is a precise translation of these verses: "Therefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and by means of sin *came* death; and in this way, death passed into all mankind; *and it is* for this reason that all have sinned. For before *the* law, sin was in *the* world. However, sin is not imputed when law does not exist; nevertheless, death reigned from Adam until Moses, even upon those who had not sinned in the likeness of the transgression of Adam" (Rom. 5:12-14).

Ephesians 6:10-18: Finally, Peterson's paraphrase of Ephesians 6:10-18 again demonstrates his flippant, irreverent, sacrilegious style that degrades the true inspiration of God's Word: "And that about wraps it up. God is strong, and he wants you strong. So take everything the Master has set out for you, well-made weapons of the best materials. And put them to use so you will be able to stand up to everything the Devil throws your way. This is no afternoon athletic contest that you'll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels.

"Be prepared. You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it's all over but the shouting you'll still be on your feet. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation are more than words. Learn how to apply them. You'll need them throughout your life. God's Word is an *indispensable* weapon. In the same way prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. Pray hard and long. Pray for your brothers and sisters. Keep your eyes open. Keep each other's spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out" (*The Message*). Peterson's interpretative rendition denudes the Scripture of its dignity and sacredness.

Compare Peterson's version to a faithful translation from the original Greek: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in *the* Lord, and in the might of His strength. Put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil because we are not wrestling against flesh and blood, but against principalities *and* against powers, against the world rulers of the darkness of this age, against the wicked spiritual *forces* in high *places*. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having worked out all things, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girded about with truth, and wearing the breastplate of righteousness, and having your feet shod with *the* preparation of the gospel of peace. Besides all *these*, take up the shield of the faith, with which you will have the power to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one; and put on the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; praying at all times with all prayer and supplication in *the* Spirit, and in this very thing being watchful with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (Eph. 6:10-18).

God's inspired Word is meant to uplift and inspire, as well as to teach the true revelation of God the Father and Jesus Christ. It is meant to show the way of salvation and eternal life, which only God can provide through Jesus Christ. The Word of God should never be recast in vulgar street-language reminiscent of "Mad Magazine," or MTV, or "Saturday Night Live" as Peterson has done in the majority of his personal, paraphrased interpretations of Scripture. However, it is not surprising that millions of people have purchased *The Message* because the majority of people are ignorant concerning Bible translation.

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A Radical Translation of the New Testament

In the world of Bible translations, it seems as if some translators are in a race to see who can produce the worst, most corrupt, debased English translation possible. In an apparent attempt to outdo Peterson in desecrating, secularizing, demonizing and profaning the New Testament, John Henson has published *Good As New: A Radical Retelling of the Scriptures* funded by “The ONE Community for Christian Exploration.” This organization is described on the back flyleaf of the dust jacket: “ONE is a network of radical Christians and over twenty organizations in the UK, working to renew the Church from within. Contributions have come from all across the spectrum, from fundamentalists to liberals, and from all denominations.”

Henson’s presentation so cynically mocks the Word of God, and even God Himself, that to dignify his work as a translation of the New Testament is blasphemous indeed. Yet, Rowen Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, head of the Anglican Church of England, praised it as a “presentation ... of extraordinary power ...” (Ibid., p. 7).

So arrogant and presumptuous is Henson’s work that he radically deviates from the canon of the Greek New Testament by excluding the epistles of Titus, II Peter, II and III John and Jude, as well as the book of Revelation. To add further confusion, he includes the Gospel of Thomas in his New Testament version as did Robert W. Funk and the fellows of the Jesus Seminar in their publication, *The Five Gospels*.

In Henson’s chapter, “Firing the Canon,” he justifies his reasons for making void the true “God-breathed” canon of the New Testament. Henson writes: “It’s time we ditched our obsession with the hefty tome we have inherited, and recognized what a turn-off it is for those seeking enlightenment. Those who believe the Bible from ‘cover to cover’ (especially the covers) make sure their novices are carefully guided so that they miss most of it. We need to revoke the redundancy notice given by the Church to the Holy Spirit the moment the last full stop was put to the Book of Revelation. **We need the courage to say that some things in the Bible are no longer scripture for us,** whereas the letters of Bonhoeffer and the sermons of Martin Luther King are, and the hymn/poems of Brian Wren and John Bell may one day be. We must say, if we find it to be true, that The Gospel of Thomas is closer to the Jesus we understand and appreciate than Revelation.

“As a community we offer new and fresh versions of some of the earliest Christian writings. They include five ‘Gospels’ (counting Thomas), Acts, the letters of Paul—to Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica and Philemon; the letters of James, Peter, John the Elder and ‘To the Hebrews.’ These writings preserve truths and insights from the first Christians that continue to have value for us today. My own view is that the remaining books of the traditional canon do not have much to add and that Revelation in particular is contrary to the mind of Jesus” (Ibid., p. 18). How can Henson even pretend to know the mind of Jesus Christ? Such an audacious assertion that the book of Revelation is contrary to the mind of Jesus is utterly blasphemous.

Henson continues with this comment: “(There has not been a vote on this, but feedback suggests that the ONE community for the most part goes along with this. But it must always be stressed that the ONE community is a collection of individuals—very much so, and that none of our publications, including this one, is likely to reflect the standpoint of all our members.)

“Our intention is not to create a new canon to replace the old [but that is exactly what they are doing], but to do away with the concept of a closed canon of scripture. The canon perpetuates some of what should not be there, and inhibits an enthusiastic appreciation of the treasure-store of Christian writing since biblical times to the present day (post-biblical scripture). **The canon is an idol. We have fired the canon!!**” (*Good As*

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New, pp. 18-19, bracketed comment and bold emphasis added.)

Changing the Names of God and Persons: In order to make the Scriptures gender neutral, Henson has changed the names of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and Satan the Devil, as well as the names of persons and places. Henson gives this rationale for doing so: “We seek to include the experience of the feminine in our understanding of God. That aspect of God theologically understood as the ‘First Person’ receives no sexual bias at all. ‘Father’ is translated as ‘the Loving God.’ The ‘Second Person,’ Jesus, is male, and although maleness is part of his humanity, it is secondary to it. So titles of Jesus lose their exclusive masculine sense. The cryptic term ‘Son of Man’ becomes ‘the Complete Person.’ ‘Son of God’ is translated ‘God’s likeness.’ ‘The Third Person’ is regarded as feminine” (Ibid., p. 12). Contrary to what Henson asserts, in the Greek New Testament, “Spirit” is neither a masculine nor a feminine gender noun, but it is neuter gender [See Appendix H, page 762, for a full exegetical explanation of the Holy Spirit]. However, Henson carries out his misguided assumption that the Holy Spirit is feminine by using the word “she” for its pronoun.

In his *Introduction*, Henson further explains: “However, when a word like ‘spirit,’ carrying with it the idea of personality and creativity is classified alongside other words, which are also words for persons, such as women and mother, it is reasonable to suppose that the choice of classification is significant in terms of sexual understanding” (Ibid., pp. 12-13). Indeed Henson’s last statement is true. However, “Spirit” in the original Greek is always and only neuter. His statements reveal that he has little or no knowledge of the Greek or has deliberately ignored the inspired Greek text in order to promulgate his baseless assertion that the Holy Spirit is feminine.

Henson continues his explanation for changing key words in his presentation: “Other radical departures reflect the need to demythologize in order to translate adequately into our own culture. ‘Kingdom of God’ thus becomes ‘God’s New World,’ ‘Eternal Life’—‘Life to the full,’ ‘Salvation’—‘Healing’ or ‘Completeness,’ ‘Heaven’—‘The world beyond time and space’ and so on.

“ONE was largely responsible for introducing the concept of inclusive language to these islands [the British Isles] in its pamphlet *Bad Language in Church* (1981) amidst some scorn. Our position is now accepted by all but the most change-resistant” (Ibid., p. 13).

John 16:13-16, The Holy Spirit: As shown in the following, when the words are changed, the meaning is likewise changed.

“But when the Spirit comes, she’ll make you aware of many different types of truth. She won’t push her own ideas. She’ll open your minds and teach you how to listen. She’ll make you aware of possibilities in the future. The Spirit will ensure my reputation by explaining my teaching to you. She’ll continue to pass on to you the truths my Parent and I share. Soon you’ll miss me; then it won’t be long before you see me again” (*Good as New*, p. 114). This translation does not reflect the Greek at all. It is hopelessly misconstrued.

From this *Faithful Version* these verses read: “However, when that one has come, *even* the Spirit of the truth, it will lead you into all truth because it shall not speak from itself, but whatever it shall hear, it shall speak. And it shall disclose to you the things to come. That one shall glorify Me because it shall disclose to you *the things that* it receives from Me. Everything that the Father has is Mine; for this reason, I said that it shall receive from Me and shall disclose *these things* to you. A little *while*, and you shall not see Me; and again a little *while*, and you shall see Me, because I am going to the Father”

John 1:1-4: Henson’s rendition is not even a translation; rather it is only a crude interpretation that completely ignores many of the Greek words as in the following from John 1:1-4:

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"In the beginning God spoke. This is just like God—part of the way God is. Everything there is comes from God speaking; otherwise there would be nothing at all. God speaking brought into being the life and intelligence we all share."

A correct translation reads: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and not even one *thing* that was created came into being without Him. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."

Romans 1:26-27: Henson's outlandish interpretation of scriptures ignores the actual meaning of the Greek and openly twists the scriptures to endorse homosexuality and unmarried sexual relationships. His translation utterly destroys the meaning of the Word of God. Modern-day promiscuous sexual behavior is endorsed in his ignominious rendition.

"God let them go on to pursue their selfish desires. Women use their charms to further their own ends. Men, instead of being friends, ruthlessly exploit one another. Their stressful lifestyle makes them ill." Henson justifies his blatantly perverse interpretation of these verses in a footnote that reads: "These verses have been shamefully used as a basis for the discomfiting of those with a same-sex orientation. Undoubtedly Paul had uppermost in his mind [now he knows Paul's mind as well] the callous exploitation associated with the sex-trade, centered in his day in the pagan temples. He was not addressing the issue of loving same-sex relationships. Our translation strives to refocus on Paul's concern with the ill treatment of one human being by another, of which sexual abuse is one example, the persecution of minorities another" (*Good as New*, p. 303).

A correct and faithful translation reads: "For this cause, God abandoned them to disgraceful passions; for even their women changed the natural use of *sex* into that which is contrary to nature; and in the same manner also the men, having left the natural use of *sex* with the woman, were inflamed in their lustful passions toward one another—men with men shamelessly committing lewd *acts*, and receiving back within themselves a fitting penalty for their error."

I Corinthians 7:1-2, 27-28: Henson's twisted interpretation turns God's truth into a lie and makes a mockery of godly marriage:

"I now turn to the questions you raised in your letters to me. Some of you think the best way to cope with sex is for men and women to keep away from one another. I think that is more likely to lead to sexual offenses. My advice is for everyone to have a regular partner.... If you have a partner, keep the relationship going. If you are on your own, try not to get involved. But if you do find a partner, there's nothing wrong with that, not even if previously you didn't think yourself the type. Those in relationships have extra problems, and I feel for you."

The true meaning of these verses reads: "Now concerning the things that you wrote to me, *saying*, 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman,' I say *this*: Rather, to avoid sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband Have you been bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Have you been loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. However, if you have married, you have not sinned; and if a virgin has married, she has not sinned. Yet those *who marry* shall have distress in the flesh, but I *wish* to spare you" (verses 27-28).

I Corinthians 6:9-10: Henson's gross mistranslation reads: "It's time you realized that people who choose not to control their conduct aren't ready for God's New World! I'm talking about people who mess around in frivolous relationships, people who worship things instead of God, those who set out to steal another's partner, those who make money out of sex or abuse the young, thieves, loan-sharks, those who eat and drink too -much, those who make fun of others."

A true rendition of the Greek reads: "Don't you know that the unrighteous shall not inherit *the* kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters,

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nor adulterers, nor abusers of themselves as women, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit *the* kingdom of God.

Nicknames: Henson has taken the liberty to rename nearly every person, and many places and terms in his translation. A few examples follow:

People: Aaron—Ron; Apollos—Ray; Clement—Clem; the Devil—Evil the power of evil; James and John—Thunder and Lightning; John the Baptist—John the Dipper; Nicodemus—Nick; Peter—Rocky; Thomas—Twin.

Places: Arimathea—Ram; Bethsaida—Fishtown; Bethany—Dategrove; Laodicea—Banktown; Paradise—God's Garden.

Terms: Angels—God's agents, messengers, companions; Apostles—Special helpers, close friends of Jesus, Jesus' team; Christ/Messiah—God's Chosen, the Chosen One; Disciples—Friends, followers, team, gang; King—Ruler, Leader, head of state, "the greatest"; Kingdom of God—God's New World; Kingdom of heaven—Bright New World; Lord (of Jesus)—Leader; The Law—The Rule Book, rules and regulations; The Scripture—the old books; Sin—wrongdoing, faults; Son of God—God's true likeness; Son of Man—The Complete Person; I—for Jesus; We—for Jesus and his community or humanity (See *Good as New*, pp. 22-25).

Upon close examination, it is evident that nearly every verse in Henson's *Good as New—A Radical Retelling of the Scriptures* is a radical perverse interpretation of the New Testament. It is a literal destruction of the sacredness, the holiness, the beauty and grace of the God-breathed Word of God.

Another Perverse Corruption of the Word of God—the Inclusive Version

Ungodly men have made deep inroads into the Holy Bible in their attempt to demote the true Creator God and Jesus Christ His Son and rank them equally with the demon gods of the religions of this world. Unbeknown to the general public, since 1983, the translating committees for the New International Version of the Bible have been planning and working on a new version of the Scriptures that is gender neutral and politically correct. In 2002, they published an inclusive version of the New Testament and announced that the complete Bible will be finished in 2005 and will be titled, Today's New International Version. However, in 1995, as a trial run, Oxford University Press published *The New Testament and Psalms (An Inclusive Version)*. This perverse version pales into insignificance Peterson's irreverent, flippant, sacrilegious style. This new gender neutral, politically-correct version is so radical that it is tantamount to having a "Bible without God"—the supreme oxymoron fulfilled—a moryoxon indeed! It is no less than the destruction of the Word of God through subversion. It seems that all the powerful and subtle forces of evil have come together to produce this ungodly corrupted version.

The Inclusive Version: The following excerpts are quoted from the *General Introduction of An Inclusive Version*. These are given to show the rationale behind the thinking of the translation committee. It is truly mind-boggling! The editors write, "This new, inclusive version of the Bible not only reflects the newest scholarly work of the most reliable manuscripts available, it also reflects and *attempts to anticipate* developments in the English language with regard to specificity about a number of issues such as gender, race, and physical disability....This introduction [to the Inclusive Version] is intended to inform the reader about the interpretive character of the text. Attention should be paid to the kinds of adaptations in the language that have been made in order to express the intent of the text in **the most inclusive way possible**" (*An Inclusive Version*, p. viii).

The reference to "the most reliable texts available" is not a correct statement, be-

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cause an inferior Greek text has been used, which is very similar to the corrupted Greek text produced by Westcott and Hort. The statement “the interpretive character of the text” means that it is not an accurate translation from the Greek; rather, it is an interpretation suited to their politically-correct, gender neutral agenda.

In order to produce an inclusive version, wholesale changes have been made. While their rationale seems altruistic—not to offend anyone—the result is the utter debasing of the Word of God: “This [inclusive] version has undertaken the effort to replace or rephrase all gender-specific language not referring to particular historical individuals, all pejorative references to race, color, or religion, and all identification of persons by their physical disability alone, by means of paraphrase, alternative renderings, and other acceptable means of conforming the language of the work to an inclusive idea...The editors were committed to accelerating changes in English usage toward inclusiveness in a holistic sense. The result is another step in the continuing process of rendering Scripture in language that reflects our best understanding of the nature of God, of the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ, and of the wholeness of human beings” (Ibid., pp. viii-ix).

As cited above, these editors have rewritten and reinterpreted the Scriptures to fit a modern, post-Christian paradigm. Rather than teaching that people should be subject to the Word of God, they teach that the Word of God should be subject to the people. Thus the “church” becomes a “community” that shapes the Scriptures according to its own carnal, sinful desires: “This inclusive community looks to its Scriptures [the new inclusive version] for guidance and authority in how to form community; the way community is formed ultimately influences how the Scriptures themselves are read. Thus, the language of Scripture reflects the community, and the community is shaped by language. When we make our churches accessible to persons with disabilities, when we struggle against the pervasive racism and violence in our societies, when all persons, women, men [including homosexuals], children, the elderly, are treated equally and non-violently, we are forming the Body of Christ” (Ibid., p. ix, bracketed comments added).

It is through the calling of God the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus forms His Church—the Body of Christ—not through an inclusive, corrupted version of the Scriptures and the vain efforts of godless humanists. The apostle Paul wrote: “You [individual believers] are being built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being *the* Cornerstone; in Whom all the building, being conjointly fitted together, is increasing into a holy temple in *the* Lord” (Eph. 2:20-21). Jesus Himself said He would build His Church, and the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18).

Believers do not frame the Scriptures; rather the Scriptures frame the believers. They are to live by every word of God. Furthermore, the Word of God, which is the truth of God, must be clear and easy to understand and faithfully translated to reflect the inspiration of God the Father and Jesus Christ. The Word of God, which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is a clarion call to repentance, faith, love and obedience. Yet, *An Inclusive Version* does just the opposite.

God the Father Becomes—Father-Mother: The authors of *An Inclusive Version* have replaced all references to God the Father with “Father-Mother.” In order to justify changing the nature of God the Father, they have redefined the word “Father” to mean a “metaphor.”

“Another metaphor to which we have become accustomed is God as Father...But if we try to cast any biblical metaphor in stone and say that, for example, God is literally a father, we lose the power of communication which makes us *think*, How is God like a father? How is God much more than a father?”

“We have based much of this inclusive version on this insight into the nature of metaphor. When **we have crafted new metaphors, such as Father-Mother**, we have done so to make the reader think about what is being read and to experience the power of

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metaphor to make us ask, How is this the same? and, How is this different?" (Ibid., p. x, bold emphasis added).

"The metaphor 'Father,' used for God, occurs in every book of the New Testament except its shortest work, 3 John. It is used for God over one hundred times in the Gospel of John alone. It is, of course, a male metaphor, and leads those who read it repeatedly to think of God as a male being. It is also a highly personal metaphor, connoting family intimacy, authority, care, and protection. By repetition, however, all metaphors tend to lose their metaphorical meaning, and begin to be understood as propositions, as literal statements. This has happened in the church [which church?] with the New Testament metaphor, 'Father.' By speaking to God, and by referring to God again and again, as 'Father,' one may begin to think of God, literally, as a 'Father,' hence also as a male being; and those for whom the word 'father' has negative, rather than positive connotations, have great difficulty with that metaphor for God—do not want either to use it, or to hear it used.

"Occasionally in the Bible, however, God is thought of on the analogy of a mother, and as the church [which church?] does not believe that God is literally a father, and understands 'Father' to be a metaphor, the metaphor 'Father' is rendered in this version by a new metaphor, 'Father-Mother.' This new metaphor is not even understandable as a literal statement and can be understood only in a metaphorical way. One cannot be literally a 'Father-Mother,' so the metaphor allows the mind to oscillate between the picture of God as 'Father' and the picture of God as 'Mother,' the mind attributing both fatherly and motherly attributes to God" (Ibid., pp. xi-xii, bracketed comments added).

Such reasoning is utter nonsense! The word "Father" is not a metaphor and literally means "Father." To replace "Father" with "Father-Mother" only causes confusion! What is God? Is He a father, or a mother? How can He be a Father-Mother or Mother-Father at the same time? How would one know to whom to pray? Notice what this does to the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father-Mother in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Matt. 6:9, *An Inclusive Version*).

Paul wrote, "God is not the author of confusion" (I Cor. 14:33). However, even the editors admit that this inclusive version causes confusion: "This can confuse the reader of an English translation of Scripture who may think that when God is referred to as 'he,' it is also said that God is a male being. Because the church [which church?] does not assume that God is a male being, or, indeed, that God has a sex, in this version God is never referred to by a masculine pronoun, or by any pronoun at all. This has been accomplished by either saying 'God,' or by using another expression for 'God,' rather than by using a pronoun, or by changing the syntax of a sentence so as to avoid using a pronoun—for example, replacing 'he said' by a participle, 'saying' " (Ibid., p. xi, bracketed comments added). Apparently, this is done to conform to the demands of the radical feminists.

The New Testament teaches that Jesus Christ came to reveal God the Father to those whom He chooses: "At that time Jesus answered and said, 'I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent, and have revealed them to babes. Yes, Father, for it was well pleasing in Your sight to do this. All things were delivered to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; neither does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son personally chooses to reveal *Him*'" (Matt. 11:25-27). Jesus Christ never once called God His mother, or "Father-Mother."

In addition to "Father," other words have been substituted for the title "Lord." As the editors explain: "... 'Lord' is retained in every instance in which the antecedent is ambiguous, being either God or Christ; it is also retained in phrases such as 'the Lord Jesus' or 'the Lord Jesus Christ.' Where the antecedent of 'Lord' is clearly God, 'God' is often substituted for 'Lord'; where the antecedent is the historical Jesus, 'Jesus' is of-

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ten substituted; and where the antecedent is clearly the risen Christ, 'Christ' is often substituted. The result is that references to 'Lord' ... are considerably diminished. On occasion, also, when Jesus is being addressed, it is difficult to know whether the meaning is 'Lord' or simply 'Sir' " (*Inclusive Version*, p. xiii). In Paul's Epistles, "Christ" is exchanged for "Lord," thus further diminishing the lordship of Jesus Christ (*Ibid.*, p. xix), leaving open the idea that just any false Christ could be accepted.

Not content with reducing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the translators of the *Inclusive Version* continue desecrating Jesus Christ as Son of God, Son of Man, Son of the Blessed One and Son of the Most High. They claim: "The maleness of the historical person Jesus is not relevant ... the formal equivalent 'Child' is used for 'Son,' and gender-specific pronouns referring to the 'Child' are avoided. Thus readers are enabled to identify themselves with Jesus' *humanity*....If the fact that Jesus was a man, and not a woman, has no christological significance in the New Testament, then neither does the fact that Jesus was a *son* and not a *daughter*" (*Ibid.*, p. xiii). This statement is a preposterous lie! The New Testament makes it quite clear that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, a male and circumcised the eighth day (Luke 2:21). Moreover, that Jesus was a male is crucial to His being the Savior of mankind—men and women. Such reasoning by the translators of the *Inclusive Version* is absurd.

They further try to destroy the revelation of Jesus Christ by substituting "the Human One" for "the Son of Man"; "Kingdom" is exchanged for "dominion"; "King" is renamed "ruler." When referring either to the Devil, Satan or an angel, they replace the masculine pronoun "he" with "the Devil," "Satan" or "angel," thus avoiding any reference to "he" in order to please the radical feminists (*Ibid.*, p. xiv).

In their eagerness to be ever so politically correct and to avoid offending various racial groups, they exchange the word "darkness" with "night." Finally, they avoid characterizing people by their disabilities and handicaps.

An Inclusive Version's rendition of the New Testament is diametrically opposed to the God-breathed original Greek. While claiming to improve the Word of God, in reality the authors display their utter contempt for God and His Word, thus conforming the New Testament to the tenets of Christianity without God. Their doctrine of inclusion is actually a doctrine of exclusion because it excludes true godliness and righteousness and the freedom to publicly worship God the Father and Jesus Christ.

A Practicing Homosexual Consecrated a Bishop: In recent years, the godless anti-family, pro-abortion agendas of the radical feminists and homosexual organizations—political and religious—have been embraced by many so-called "Christian" denominations. At the same time, many Roman Catholic priests have been exposed as pedophiles and homosexuals. Predator priests stalking innocent children have seduced, defiled and destroyed the lives of untold thousands of boys and girls around the world—all in the name of God. The dirty secret is that these abominable practices have been going on for centuries but only now are partially being exposed. It is impossible to make a corrupt tree produce good fruit!

The homosexual movement has not only come out of the closet, but it has declared war on Christianity—targeting it for destruction through new laws and court decisions.

On August 5, 2003, the Episcopal Church in America fully baptized itself into Christianity without God by elevating a practicing homosexual to be a full bishop. Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold said bishops at the General Convention in Minneapolis voted 62-45 to confirm the Rev. V. Gene Robinson. Robinson was consecrated to the Diocese of New Hampshire on November 2, 2003.

In an article for the *Wall Street Journal*, Katherine Kersten wrote in *Gospel of Inclusion?—Its Episcopal Church Disciples Have Little Room for Scripture* about the consequences of the Episcopal Church's sanction of homosexual priests and bishops and

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its endorsement of same sex marriages: “Yet this church has just tossed aside 2,000 years of bedrock Christian teaching about marriage, the family and sexuality ... Episcopalians’ inability to defend core doctrine suggests that mainline American churches are losing their theological moorings, and increasingly falling prey to the prevailing winds of secular culture ... “The Episcopal Church has always regarded marriage as the sacrament that sanctifies the ‘one flesh’ union of man and woman. But the new gospel expands the notion of sacrament to include anything that ‘mediates’ the grace or blessing of God and causes us to give thanks ...

“The new gospel subordinates thinking to ‘feelings’ ... The gospel of inclusion preaches a reconstructed, therapeutic Jesus, who accepts us exactly as we are. Traditional Christianity, however, holds that Jesus calls us to repentance of sins, and to transformation through a new life lived in accordance with God’s will.

“The gospel of inclusion has little place for repentance or transformation. Thus, it has little place for the central feature of Christianity: Christ’s Cross, which brings redemption through suffering. This new gospel may be appealing, for it permits its adherents to ‘divinize’ their own, largely secular agenda. But in a Christian church, it cannot easily coexist with the Gospel of Christ” (*Wall Street Journal*, August 8, 2003).

One thing is clear: God warns us that there will either be repentance or destruction. In order to stave off destruction by the hand of the Lord of hosts, this evil generation must repent and change its ways! God will accept nothing less as Isaiah prophesied: **“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do good; seek judgment, reprove the oppressor. Judge the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD. Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it”** (verses Isa. 1:16-20). These words of God, though directed to ancient Israel, apply to any nation at any time down through history (Jer. 18:7-10). Unfortunately, only the remnant—the few who are truly seeking God and His way—will heed and repent. God will be merciful to the remnant, but the sword of the Lord will devour unrepentant sinners.

The Battle over the Ten Commandments: During the writing of this Preface, an intense legal battle over the public display of a monument of the Ten Commandments in the Alabama Supreme Court was being waged. On August 27, 2003, Chief Justice Roy Moore lost the battle to retain the monument on public display, and the Ten Commandment monument was moved to a private room in the Alabama court house. After its removal, Judge Moore issued this statement saying, “It is a sad day for our country when the moral foundation of our law and the acknowledgment of God has to be hidden from public view to appease a federal judge” (*San Jose Mercury News*, August 28, 2003, p. 3A).

On November 13, 2003, in Montgomery, Alabama, a Court of Judiciary conducted the United States’ first official religious inquisition. Judge Moore was questioned about his refusal to heed a federal judge’s ungodly, illegal and unconstitutional order to remove the Ten Commandments monument from the rotunda of the state courthouse and his public acknowledgment of God. It was reported that during the course of the inquiry, a panel of nine judges gave him three opportunities to deny his public acknowledgement of God so that he could retain his position, which he refused to do. Excerpts from an article Judge Moore wrote for the *Wall Street Journal* dated August 26, 2003 and entitled “In God I Trust” follow:

“The battle over the Ten Commandments monument I brought into Alabama’s Supreme Court is not about a monument and not about politics ... Federal Judge Myron Thompson, who ordered the monument’s removal, and I are in perfect agreement on the

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fact that the issue in this case is: 'Can the state acknowledge God?' Those were the precise words used by Judge Thompson in his closing remarks in open court ...

"We must acknowledge God in the public sector because the state constitution explicitly requires us to do so. The Alabama Constitution specifically invokes 'the favor and guidance of Almighty God' as the basis for our laws and justice system. As the chief justice of the state's supreme court I am entrusted with the sacred duty to uphold the state's constitution. I have taken an oath before God and man to do such, and I will not waver from that commitment.

"By telling the state of Alabama that it may not acknowledge God, Judge Thompson effectively dismantled the justice system of the state ...

"No judge has the authority to impose his will on the people of a state, and no judge has the constitutional authority to forbid public officials from acknowledging the same God specifically mentioned in the charter documents of our nation, the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution.

"My decision to disregard the unlawful order of the federal judge was not civil disobedience, but the lawful response of the highest judicial officer of the state to his oath of office ...

"For half a century the fanciful tailors of revisionist jurisprudence have been working to strip the public sector naked of every vestige of God and morality. They have done so based on fake readings and inconsistent applications of the First Amendment. They have said it is all right for the U.S. Supreme Court to publicly place the Ten Commandments on its walls, for Congress to open in prayer and for state capitols to have chaplains—as long as the words and ideas communicated by such do not really mean what they purport to communicate. They have trotted out before the public using words never mentioned in the U.S. Constitution, like 'separation of church and state,' to advocate, not the legitimate jurisdictional separation between the church and state, but the illegitimate separation of God and state.

"The First Amendment says that 'Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof ... (Moore, WSJ, *In God I Trust*, emphasis added).

Because of his stand for God, the Word of God and the Constitution of the United States, Judge Roy Moore was removed as Chief Justice of Alabama's Supreme Court by the nine member Court of Judiciary.

Over twenty years ago, Edward F. Hills, author of *The King James Version Defended*, wrote a prophetic warning about the coming laxity of professing Christians. In his 1979 edition, Hills sounded the alarm that unless America returned to its heritage of faith in God the Father and Jesus Christ and the Word of God, diligently using the Bible as the standard for her behavior, America's fall and destruction would surely come.

Hills wrote: "For almost two decades this policy of unilateral disarmament and surrender has been relentlessly pursued by the forces of the Liberal-left, until now the end of the road is clearly in sight. Humanly speaking, the United States has only a few more years to exist as an independent nation. Soon riots and insurrections will take place. Then the Russians [and other nations] will move in with overwhelming force in the name of the United Nations, and the United States Government will surrender as planned. Then world government, the goal of the Liberal-left, will have been achieved. Christians, however, will be bitterly persecuted even unto death.

"Most American citizens are completely carnal, absorbed in their fleshly pursuits and oblivious to their country's impending doom. And, tragically, this carnal carelessness is shared by many [at this time most] professing Christians. They take a balcony view of these threatening dangers and will not lift a finger to avert them, insisting that the rapture will take place before these disasters overtake America. But this is a misuse of biblical prophecy. Christ's word to us is, *Occupy till I come* (Luke 19:13). We must

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not use the doctrine of the second coming of our Lord as an excuse for failure to do our present duty now. As spiritually minded Christians we must work for the re-arming of our country and do everything we can to roll back the tide of atheism and communism which is now engulfing the world. But in order to accomplish this we must first arm ourselves with the *sword of the Spirit* (Eph. 6:17), namely, the true Word of God, which is found in the printed Masoretic text, the Textus Receptus, and the King James Version and **other faithful translations**" (Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 2000, p. 242, bracketed comments and bold added).

Hills' protégé, Theodore P. Letis, wrote of the demise of the Bible because political and sexist agendas are now controlling the philosophy of Bible translation committees and publishing companies: "The Bible in English has fallen on hard times. Not only do some feminists see it as a format from which to transform Ancient Near Eastern, patriarchal religions [through the use of inclusive versions] into modern, 20th century paradigms of egalitarianism [i.e. Communism, under the guise of liberalism, and world government], but the American Bible publishing industry has reduced it to a commodity, hoping to maximize gains by imposing a marketing-manufactured consensus on conservative evangelicals, calling it the beginning of a 'new tradition [Christianity without God]' " (Ibid., back cover, bracketed comments added).

The Reasons for This New Translation

The onslaught of vicious attacks from every side against Christianity, God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Word of God have been so overwhelming that the true Word of God and true Christianity are in a desperate battle of epic proportions. Satan, the devil, and the political, secular, sexist and religious establishments of this world have united in their efforts to destroy true Christianity and the truth of the Word of God. This war is a spiritual Armageddon! It is time for everyone who loves God the Father and Jesus Christ to realistically confront these assaults and have the courage to make a stand for God, for His Word and for the Truth, because "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psa. 11:3). Furthermore, God the Father and Jesus Christ hold each one accountable, not only to live by every word of God but also to stand for the Word of God and defend it.

Christendom has grown rich and increased with goods and has need of nothing. Its faith is so weak and insipid that it is on the verge of destruction. It is ready to implode upon itself because it has grossly compromised with and accepted the world's standards—instead of living by God's laws and commandments. The truth of God's Word has been replaced with an ungodly, emotional, feel-good religion—an insipid counterfeit. As a result, the main bulk of Christendom is blind and ignorant. It has fallen asleep, while the forces of evil have marshaled their armies to try to destroy the Word of God by corrupting it and replacing it with a lie!

However, in spite of the efforts of ungodly men to destroy and corrupt the Word of God with a flood of translations that range from inadequate to blasphemous, Jesus Christ promised, "**The heaven and the earth shall pass away, but My words shall never pass away**" (Matt. 24:35). God has faithfully overseen the preservation of His Word written by the apostles in the *Koiné* Greek language and preserved in manuscripts known as the Byzantine Text.

This new translation, *The New Testament In Its Original Order—A Faithful Version With Commentary*, is firstly a call to repentance and a return to the true faith of Jesus Christ as taught by the original apostles and written in the original God-breathed New Testament. In his short epistle to the brethren of Jesus Christ, the apostle Jude wrote a most impassioned plea for the true believers to return to the faith once delivered to the saints. When he wrote his urgent message, the apostolic age was coming to a

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close, the great apostasy was gaining momentum, and false apostles and ministers were leading brethren astray. Likewise, in our day, the age of man's rule under the sway of Satan, the devil, is coming to a close, and the return of Jesus Christ is near. Once again false teachers and pseudo-scholars are busily seeking to subvert and undermine the Word of God and destroy the faith of true Christians. Jude wrote: "Beloved, when personally exerting all *my* diligence to write to you concerning the common salvation, **I was compelled to write to you, exhorting you to fervently fight for the faith, which once for all time has been delivered to the saints.** For certain men have stealthily crept in, those who long ago have been written about, condemning *them* to this judgment. **They are ungodly men, who are perverting the grace of our God, turning it into licentiousness, and are denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ**" (Jude 3-4).

Secondly, we have striven to make the Word of God available to students of the New Testament and the true brethren of Jesus Christ in a modern English that has been faithfully translated from the *Textus Receptus*—the Stephens Text of 1550. The Stephens Text agrees with 98-99% of the Byzantine Greek Text.

Thirdly, we have endeavored to provide accurate commentaries that explain the history of the preservation of the Word of God and to answer such questions as: What is the New Testament? Who wrote it? When was it written, and by whom was it canonized? Other commentaries and footnotes explain many hard-to-understand scriptures.

Fourthly, we have provided an accurate chronological setting of the days of Jesus and the apostles that is centered around the true Sabbath and holy days of God. This helps to answer questions about when Jesus was most likely born; how Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets; what it means to be born again and born of God; what the true meaning of justification by faith and the works of the law is, and much more.

Finally, we have sought to provide the ministers of Jesus Christ with an accurate translation and commentaries, so they can have confidence that the Word of God is true in order to feed the Flock of God that is among them with the true teachings of Jesus Christ and His apostles. May they rightly divide the Word of God.

May God the Father and Jesus Christ bless you with a humble heart, a contrite spirit, and a hunger and thirst after righteousness and eternal salvation. My prayer for you is what the apostle Paul was inspired to write to the brethren in Ephesus: "For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of Whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He may grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; *and* that being rooted and grounded in love, you may be fully able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses *human* knowledge; so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that is working in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all generations, *even* into the ages of eternity. Amen" (Eph. 3:14-21).

*Fred R. Coulter
December 2003*

A Faithful Translation

The word “faithful” is found in numerous passages of Scripture, many of which contain the words of Jesus Christ. One of the most well-known passages is the parable of the talents, spoken to the disciples near the end of Jesus’ ministry: “Well *done*, good and faithful servant! *Because* you were faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matt. 25:21). Jesus was exhorting his followers to use their talents in His service after He returned to the Father. Mr. Coulter has heeded his Lord’s exhortation and has diligently studied and labored to render a faithful translation of the New Testament.

What greater responsibility could there be than to translate the Word of God in a trustworthy, accurate and meaningful manner—neither adding to nor taking away from the words of God! (Rev. 22:18-19.) Faithfulness in translating requires fidelity and accuracy in communicating the meaning of the words and phrases of the language that is being translated. Such accuracy depends upon knowledge of the lexical and grammatical patterns of both the language one is translating from and the language one is translating to.

In his translation of the Greek text into English, Mr. Coulter has taken great care to communicate the intended meaning of the words chosen by the original writers. Mr. Coulter’s translation of Hebrews 4:9 is a good example of his faithfulness in accurately conveying the meaning of the words in the Greek text. The subject of this chapter is the observance of the weekly Sabbath day by the New Testament church. In Verse 9, the Greek text uses the word “sabbatismos,” which specifically refers to the observance of Sabbath days. This meaning is clearly conveyed in Mr. Coulter’s translation of the verse: “There remains, therefore, Sabbath-keeping for the people of God.”

Matthew 28:1 also demonstrates the faithfulness and accuracy of Mr. Coulter’s translation of the phrasing in the Greek text. This verse relates the arrival of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary at the sepulcher in which Christ had been laid. In describing the time of this event, the Greek text uses the phrase “the first of the weeks,” an expression which specifically refers to the day that the annual wave sheaf was offered to God. This meaning is reflected in Mr. Coulter’s translation of the verse: “Now late on the Sabbath, as *the first day* of *the* weeks was drawing near, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to observe the sepulcher.” This translation of the Greek text accurately conveys that the women came to observe the sepulcher toward the end of the weekly Sabbath, which would occur at sunset. The “first day of the weeks,” which would begin the seven-week count to the Feast of Pentecost, had not yet arrived.

Faithfulness in translating also requires an accurate representation of the Greek text by the punctuation that is used for the rendering. A good example of the importance of proper punctuation is found in Mark 16:9. In the King James Version this verse is translated, “Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene....” The placement of the comma in the KJV translation conflicts with other passages in the Greek text, which reveal that Jesus rose as the Sabbath day was ending at sunset, not at sunrise Sunday morning. Knowing that Scripture does not contradict itself, Mr. Coulter has properly placed the comma to reflect the actual meaning of the Greek text: “Now after *Jesus* had risen, early *the first day* of the weeks He appeared first to Mary Magdalene....” This rendering of Mark 16:9 acknowledges the divine inspiration of all the Scriptures and does not translate the passage in a manner that conflicts with other passages.

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Included in the requirements for a faithful translation is an understanding of Greek idioms that were commonly used at the time of Christ. Such idioms cannot be translated literally but must be translated according to their cultural and historical usage, as documented in other Greek writings of that period. A good example is found in Luke 24:21. This verse is part of the narrative describing the appearance of the risen Christ to two disciples who were on their way to the village of Emmaus. In speaking of the death of Jesus, one of the disciples used a Greek expression that is translated “the third day.” This Greek expression is an idiom that was commonly used at that time to describe a complete unit of three days. It was never used to describe a three-day period that was in progress, but only a three-day period that had already been completed. The King James Version overlooks the true meaning of this idiom and translates the expression in Luke 24:21 as “... today is the third day since these things were done.” (This wording in the KJV translation misrepresents the meaning of the Greek text.) Mr. Coulter accurately conveys the meaning of Luke 24:21 by translating the expression according to the idiomatic usage of that period: “... as of today, the third day has already passed since these things took place.”

In addition to fulfilling the requirements of the language that is being translated, a faithful translation must use phrasing that befits the language that is used for the translation. The phrasing in the translation must not only represent the words in the Greek text but also appropriately express the thoughts of the writer. The use of inappropriate phrasing in a translation detracts from the writer’s purpose and allows room for misunderstanding. Take, for example, the translation of I John 3:18 in the New International Standard Version: “Little children, we must stop loving in word and in tongue, but instead love in work and in truth.” This translation implies that we should cease to express love with our mouths. This was not John’s intention when he wrote the words in the Greek text. John’s intent was to point out that to profess one’s love with one’s mouth is not sufficient. John was communicating the fact that Christianity is a way of life lived in the truth taught by Christ and His apostles. The Christian walk is not a life of lip service, but is manifested by one’s conduct and actions. Mr. Coulter’s translation of I John 3:18 conveys this meaning: “My little children, we should not love in word, nor with our tongues; rather, *we should love* in deed and in truth.”

Some passages in the Greek text require clarification in order to accurately convey the thoughts of the writer. Paul’s statements in I Corinthians 15:29, the famous resurrection chapter, illustrate this point very graphically. The King James Version translates this verse literally: “Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?” The KJV translation makes it appear that Christians should be baptized in behalf of dead relatives so that these unconverted family members may be resurrected to immortality. This is not Paul’s intention at all. In his epistle to the Hebrews Paul shows that baptism must be accompanied by repentance from sin and accompanied by faith in Jesus Christ (Heb. 6:1-2). No individual can repent and believe in behalf of another. It is therefore impossible for a Christian to obtain eternal life for a relative by being baptized for that person. The true meaning of Paul’s words in I Corinthians 15:29 is made clear by examining his statements in the preceding verses. The entire chapter is discussing the resurrection of the dead, which is the basis of the Christian faith (I Cor. 15:1-4, 12-14). The resurrection to immortality is the hope of every Christian who is baptized (I Cor. 15:19-20, Rom. 6:4-5). Paul is arguing a point of logic: if there is no resurrection of the dead, why be baptized for the hope of being resurrected? Mr. Coulter’s translation enables the reader to grasp the meaning of Paul’s words: “Otherwise, what shall they do who have been baptized for the *resurrection* of the dead, if *the* dead are not raised at all? Why then are they baptized for the *resurrection of the dead*?”

A Faithful Translation

The words in italics have been inserted to clarify the meaning of the Greek text. Without such clarification, the true meaning of the verse cannot be transmitted to the reader.

Every verse and passage in this faithful translation of the New Testament has been phrased with one goal in mind: to reveal the true meaning of the Greek text. Many passages in the Greek text allow a literal translation and need no clarification because they are understandable to the reader. Where a literal translation would not convey the meaning of the text, a passage has been clarified by the addition of one or more words, printed in italics to distinguish them from the literal wording of the Greek text. This method enables the wording of the original text to be preserved while communicating to the reader the meaning and intent of the writer.

In every respect, this translation has been an endeavor to uphold the true teachings of Jesus Christ and His apostles as recorded in the Greek text of the New Testament. While no translation can attain a state of flawlessness, this translation far surpasses the standards of many other recent translations into English and has indeed fulfilled the requirements for a faithful translation—*The New Testament In Its Original Order—A Faithful Version With Commentary*.

Carl D. Franklin
December 2003

About This New Translation

The basis for this new translation of *The New Testament In Its Original Order—A Faithful Version With Commentary*, is the inspired Word of God, originally written and canonized by His chosen apostles in the *Koiné* (common) Greek language (31-95 AD). Later the manuscripts of these New Testament books became known as the Byzantine Text. The Greek text used for this translation is the Stephens 1550 Greek New Testament. It is in 98-99% agreement with the Byzantine Text, the dominant text form used during the period of manual copying. (See Chapters 9-15 on the preservation and transmission of the New Testament Greek text.)

God the Father and Jesus Christ have faithfully watched over the Word of God so that it would never be lost or destroyed. Jesus Christ promised that He would uphold His words: “The heaven and the earth shall pass away, but My words shall never pass away” (Mark 13:31, Matt. 24:35, Luke 21:33).

In spite of all the attacks against the New Testament down through the centuries, Jesus Christ has kept His promise. These attacks first began during the days of the apostles. False teachers and prophets were attempting to counterfeit the epistles of the apostle Paul (II Thes. 2:1-2) and were preaching a different gospel by perverting the true Gospel of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:6-10). Therefore, God moved Paul, Peter and John to canonize the New Testament in order to preserve the Word of God for future generations. (See Chapters Five, Six and Seven on the apostles’ canonization of the New Testament.)

Fifty years after the death of the apostle John in 98-100 AD, beginning in the middle of the second century, revisers of the Greek New Testament texts—mainly in Alexandria, Egypt and possibly Rome—began to modify some portions of the New Testament. They produced texts that were, in many respects, different from the Byzantine Text. However, the Byzantine manuscripts in Asia Minor, the Aegean region and elsewhere were only slightly influenced by the readings of these altered Greek texts.

The total number of existing New Testament manuscripts and lectionaries is over 5,400. The dominance of the Byzantine Text is reflected in 90% of these manuscripts. Therefore, when the altered texts are set aside, it is apparent that the Byzantine Text most closely reflects the original New Testament written and canonized by the apostles of Jesus Christ.

In spite of the attempts of men to modify the Word of God—by adding to and deleting from or corrupting it—the promise of God stands sure! Down through the centuries, Jesus Christ has guided faithful men to copy and preserve authentic copies of the original New Testament books written by His apostles. (See Chapter Four “When Was the New Testament Written?”) From the days of the apostles until the mid-fifteenth century, faithful scribes accurately copied the Greek New Testament, known as the Byzantine Text. After the fall of the Byzantine Empire to the Turks in 1453 AD, Greek scholars and theologians brought the Byzantine Greek New Testament with them to Europe. During the next seventy-five years, New Testament Greek was taught in various universities throughout Europe, setting the stage for the Protestant Reformation.

In 1456, with the invention of the movable type printing press, Johann Gutenberg printed the first Latin Bible, making scribal hand copying obsolete. Then, in 1516, one man, Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536), with the help of Froben, a printer in Basel, Switzerland, published Erasmus’ Greek-Latin New Testament. His Greek-Latin New Testament ignited the fires of the Protestant Reformation and led Martin Luther to nail his ninety-five theses to the Wittenberg Cathedral door on Halloween Eve, October 31, 1517.

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Later, William Tyndale used Erasmus' 1516 edition for his New Testament translation into English, which was published in 1526, and Erasmus' 1519 edition for his 1534 revised New Testament. Subsequently, Erasmus refined his Greek-Latin New Testament, combining the best Byzantine texts, and printed his fifth and final edition one year before his death, in 1535. It was from this version that Robert Estienne (1503-1559), also known as Stephens, published the famous Stephens Greek New Testament of 1550 in Paris, reprinted in Geneva, Switzerland in 1553. (The Stephens version is practically identical to Erasmus' Fifth Edition.) Later, Erasmus' 1535 text, the Stephens Text, along with Beza's 1598 and Elzevir's nearly identical 1633 text, was called the "Textus Receptus." The Stephens Greek Text of 1550 was used to translate the New Testament of the Geneva English Bible of 1557. The 1599 Geneva New Testament Bible was translated from Beza's text. (Metzger, *The New Testament, Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd ed., pp. 103-104.)

The translators of the 1611 King James Version of the Bible used the Textus Receptus as the basis for their New Testament. However, beginning with *The Revised English New Testament* in 1881, translators incorporated the faulty and deficient readings of Alexandrian manuscripts. The twentieth century saw a proliferation of new English translations of the Bible, and nearly all the New Testaments were translated from the inferior Alexandrian Greek text type. Only a few translations were made from the Textus Receptus. The two main ones are *The New King James Version* and *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* by J. P. Green Sr.

A faithful translation requires that the translator render the New Testament accurately from the Textus Receptus, and have an understanding of what Jesus Christ Himself taught about the Word of God.

Jesus' Teachings About the Word of God

Jesus' teachings about the Word of God are the fundamental basis for translating the New Testament from the original Greek. Jesus Christ, who was God manifested in the flesh, said in His prayer to God the Father the night before His crucifixion, "Your Word is the truth" (John 17:17). Jesus' statement applies to the entire New Testament as written and canonized by His specially chosen apostles. The Word of God is the Truth of God, and no lie comes from the truth (I John 2:21). This is the cornerstone of a faithful translation.

God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of the Lord. He fully testified that Jesus spoke the words of God: "He Who comes from above is above all. The one who is of the earth is earthy, and speaks of the earth. He Who comes from heaven is above all; and **what He has seen and heard, this is what He testifies**; but no one receives His testimony. The one who has received His testimony has set his seal that God is true; **for He Whom God has sent speaks the words of God**; and God gives not the Spirit by measure *unto Him*" (John 3:31-34). And again Jesus told His disciples, "The words that I speak to you, *they* are spirit and *they* are life" (John 6:63).

All the words that Jesus Christ spoke were the commands of God the Father. He did not speak His own words but the words of the Father. Jesus said, "**For I have not spoken from Myself; but the Father, Who sent Me, gave Me commandment Himself, what I should say and what I should speak**" (John 12:49). Again Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. The one who does not love Me does not keep My words; and **the word** [the entire message—the Gospel of Jesus Christ] **that you hear is not Mine, but the Father's, Who sent Me**" (John 14:23-24).

Because Jesus' chosen apostles needed direct, divine spiritual guidance in order

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to write and canonize the New Testament, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance what He had taught them and, therefore, what they should write: “But *when the Comforter comes, even the Holy Spirit, which the Father will send in My name, that one shall teach you all things, and shall bring to your remembrance everything that I have told you*” (John 14:26). Again, Jesus told the apostles, “I have yet many things to tell you, but you are not able to bear them now. However, when that one has come, *even the Spirit of the truth, it will lead you into all truth* because it shall not speak from itself, but whatever it shall hear it shall speak. And it shall disclose to you the things to come” (John 16:12-13).

When Jesus called Saul, who later became an apostle and was renamed Paul, He said that He would personally reveal to him the things he should teach the Gentiles: “... For I have appeared to you for this purpose: **to appoint you as a minister and a witness both of what you have seen and what I shall reveal to you.** I am personally selecting you from among the people and the Gentiles, to whom I now send you” (Acts 26:16-17). Paul was taught directly by Jesus Christ in dreams and visions for three years in Arabia (II Cor. 12:1-5; Gal. 1:17-18).

Apostles Were Instruments of God-breathed Writings

The God-breathed writings of His chosen apostles are the commandments of the Lord, as the apostle Paul taught the Corinthians. When the believers at Corinth became self-exalted in their own false spirituality due to the teachings of false apostles, the apostle Paul warned them most emphatically that the things he was writing to them were no less than the commandments of God: “WHAT? Did the Word of God originate with you? Or did it come only to you *and no one else?* If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that **the things I write to you are commandments of the Lord.** But if anyone *chooses to be ignorant, let him be ignorant*” (I Cor. 14:36-38).

The apostles who wrote and canonized the New Testament were direct divine instruments of God the Father and Jesus Christ. They received special guidance through the power of the Holy Spirit in order to write the very words of God. The apostle Peter left no doubt about this fact, when he wrote: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture originated as anyone’s own *private* interpretation; because prophecy was not brought at any time by human will, but the **holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit**” (II Pet. 1:20-21).

The apostle Paul confirmed this when he wrote that the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, were literally God-breathed: “And that from a child you have known the holy writings [the Old Testament], which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith, which *is* in Christ Jesus. **All Scripture** [Old and New Testament] **is God-breathed** and *is* profitable for doctrine, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work” (II Tim. 3:15-17).

Therefore, the entire message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as originally written and recorded by His apostles in the *Koiné* Greek language is the God-breathed word of God the Father and Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the New Testament is the apostles’ continuous witness to the world until man’s rule under the sway of Satan the devil ends, when Jesus Christ returns.

Today, we have a faithful copy of the Byzantine Text contained in the Stephens Greek New Testament of 1550. Since its publication in 1550, the Stephens Text has widely been used as the standard Greek text for translation and scholarly research. For over 450 years, it has withstood the attacks of critics and detractors, proving itself to con-

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tain the true words of God the Father and Jesus Christ as written by His holy apostles. Therefore, when the Stephens Text of 1550 is faithfully translated, it conveys the original divine authorship of God’s Holy Word—the truth of God the Father and Jesus Christ to show the way of redemption and eternal salvation.

Translation Philosophy

This translation is not the work of a committee. In recent years, as evidenced by their translations, translation committees have demonstrated that they are more committed to carnal-minded, special interest groups, who desire to make the Word of God convey a particular political, sexist or ecumenical religious agenda, than to accurately translating the Word of God in truth. Moreover, they have used inferior Alexandrian type Greek texts for their translations of the New Testament. They have further corrupted the Word of God by using common street language and superimposing a gender-neutral language on the Word of God in their efforts to please radical feminists and homosexuals. In summary, they have allowed societal mores to determine how they should present their translations; they have allowed the community to frame the Word of God.

The obligation of any New Testament translator is to present to the reader a faithful translation of the God-breathed words, as God moved the original apostles to write and canonize them.

The philosophy underlying this translation, *The New Testament In Its Original Order—A Faithful Version With Commentary*, by Fred R. Coulter, is a return to translating the Word of God faithfully from Greek into English. The goal of this version is: 1) To seek the truth and best represent its meaning from the original Greek into English, 2) To convey the Word of God as accurately as possible with the same divine character that is conveyed in the Greek text, 3) To recapture the original doctrines of Jesus Christ that the apostles taught the authentic primitive Church of God as recorded in the New Testament and, 4) To cherish and uphold every “jot and tittle” of the writings of the apostles of Jesus Christ so that true believers may know how to live by every Word of God in a personal, intimate relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Notes on the Greek Text

The Original Order of the New Testament Books: In nearly every version or translation of the New Testament, the seven *General Epistles* are found after the book of Hebrews and before the book of Revelation. But that was not the original placement of the seven *General Epistles*.

Few people who read the New Testament realize that in its original canonization by the apostles of Jesus Christ—Paul, Peter and John—the *General Epistles*—*James, I and II Peter, I, II, III John and Jude*—were placed immediately after the book of Acts and before the Epistle to the Romans. That is the proper order of the books in the New Testament, as inspired by God the Father and Jesus Christ. To this day, the Byzantine text of the New Testament retains the correct order of the books.

The original arrangement of the books of the New Testament is well known by scholars and textual critics. As one scholarly work states, “Whether copies contain the whole or a part of the sacred volume, the general order of the books is the following: Gospels, Acts, Catholic Epistles [the title that scholars have given to the *General Epistles*—not epistles written by the fathers of the Catholic Church], Pauline Epistles, Apocalypse [the book of Revelation]” (*A Plain Introduction to the New Testament, Textual Criticism*, Scrivener, 4th ed., vol. 1, p. 72).

Scholars attribute the original placement of the *General Epistles* to the high re-

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pute in which their authors were held by the early New Testament church. Concerning the placement of the *General Epistles*, we read, “In our English New Testament, the General Epistles are placed near the end of the volume, just before the Book of Revelation. The Greek manuscripts put them, as a rule, immediately after the Gospels and Acts, and before the writings of Paul. This was no doubt in recognition of the fact that they bore the names of the Apostles who were directly associated with Jesus, and whose authority, therefore, might be considered superior to that of Paul. In keeping with this principle, the first place of all was accorded to the Epistle of James. Its author was assumed to be no[ne] other than James, the Lord’s own brother” (*The Literature of the New Testament*, pp. 209-210).

While acknowledging the role that the apostles’ high standing played in the placement of the *General Epistles*, we must be careful not to view their original placement as a matter of human opinion. It is not human judgment but divine inspiration that guided the original placement of these epistles among the books of the New Testament.

There was a divine purpose in the original placement of the books of the New Testament. The *General Epistles*, which were originally located after the book of Acts and before the Epistle to the Romans, clearly teach that obedience to the laws and commandments of God is required of all Christians and is essential for salvation. The *General Epistles* lay a firm scriptural foundation for understanding Paul’s words concerning law and grace, not only in the Epistle to the Romans but in his other epistles as well. If the original order of the apostolic epistles had been retained by the translators of the New Testament, perhaps the scriptural teachings concerning grace and law-keeping would not have been so universally misconstrued as they have been.

This translation has retained the original placement of the books of the New Testament that is reflected in the Byzantine Text. The complete order is as follows: The four Gospels, Acts, The Seven General Epistles, Paul’s Epistles to the Churches, Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews, Paul’s Pastoral Epistles and Revelation.

Notes on the Stephens Text

The original Stephens Text used an ornate style of letters with abbreviations for various words. It does not use the final moveable **ν** for the third person singular and plural, the third singular **ε**, the dative plural in **σιν**, etc. Also, there are occasions when the **ς** is not used. (See page *xli* for a replica of the first page of the Gospel of John.) In most modern printings of the Stephens Greek Text, ornate type has been replaced with a more readable font, variables have been added and abbreviated words have been fully spelled out. However, aside from updating these features, modern printings are exactly the same as the original Stephens 1550 version. In 1897, George Ricker Berry used the Stephens Text for his Greek-English Interlinear New Testament. His translation has widely been used and is still being published by Zondervan Publishing.

Notes on Points of Grammar

Present Tense Verbs: Present tense personal verbs can correctly be translated two ways. The first is the immediate personal present tense, for example: **γραφω** *grapho*, “I write” or “I am writing” (I John 2:8, 12, 13). “I am writing” is more personal and direct. In this translation, when the context calls for it, the present tense verbs have been translated in the present progressive tense with an “-ing” ending. The second is the simple present tense or present tense verbs with a perpetual application. For example: “He [God the Father] **takes away** every branch in Me *that* does not bear fruit; but He **cleanses** each one that bears fruit, in order that it may bear more fruit” (John 15:2).

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Participles: Greek is sometimes referred to as a participial language because of the extensive use of participles and participial phrases. The participle can be used as a noun, adjective, adverb or verb and in any mood. Moreover, participles are also declinable and have gender, number and case, and are found in all tenses—past, present and future. Because of this, the use of the participle is most difficult to grasp. Therefore, only the two most frequently used types of participles will be examined, these being the present tense and aorist tense participles. Several examples follow:

Present Tense Participles:

John 14:21: “**The one who has** My commandments and **is keeping them**, that is **the one who loves** Me; and **the one who loves** Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him.”

Philippians 2:13: “For it is God **Who works** in you both to will and to do according to *His* good pleasure.

James 4:11: “Brethren, do not talk against one another. **The one who talks** against a brother, and **judges** his brother, **is speaking against** *the* law, and is judging the law. But if you judge *the* law, you are not a doer of *the* law; rather, *you are* a judge.

I John 2:4: “**The one who says**, ‘I know Him,’ and **does not keep** His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

Aorist Tense Participles:

Matthew 2:4: “And **after gathering together** all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ should be born.”

Luke 6:49: “But **the one who has heard** *My words* and **has not practiced them** is like a man who built a house on *top of* the ground, without a foundation; and *when* the torrent beat against it, it fell at once, and the ruin of that house was great.”

Romans 1:21: “Because **when they knew God**, they glorified *Him* not as God, neither were thankful; but they became vain in their own reasonings, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

I Corinthians 15:17-18: “But if Christ has not been raised, your faith *is* vain; you are still in your sins, and **those who have fallen asleep** in Christ have then perished.”

Aorist Tense Verbs: In Greek, the aorist tense verb indicates a completed action in the indefinite past. However, in English it is most difficult to strictly maintain that application. Therefore, the aorist tense, depending on the context, has been translated sometimes in the present tense, sometimes in the future tense and sometimes in the perfect tense. For example, the aorist tense verb **εγραψα** *egrapsa* “**I wrote** ...” in I Cor. 5:9 refers to a past epistle that Paul had written to the Corinthians. However, in verse 11, in order to make sense in English, the same verb **εγραψα** *egrapsa* was translated, “But now **I have written** ...”

Again, the aorist tense verb **επιστευσαμον** *episteusamon* “we believed” was translated “**we ... have believed**” (Gal 2:16), which conveys the most accurate meaning in English.

Perfect Tense Verbs: The perfect tense verb describes an event that has taken place in the past but has results existing in the present time. For example: **εωπακα** *eo-raka*, “**I have seen** ...” and **μεμαρτυρηκα** *memartureka*, “**I have borne witness** ...” (John 1:34) are perfect tense verbs in the Greek and have been translated as perfect tense verbs in English. In the KJV, these perfect tense Greek verbs have been translated “I saw ...” and “I bare record ...” which incorrectly reflect an aorist past tense.

In Romans 5:5, the perfect tense verb **εκκεχυται** *ekkechutai*, “The love of God **has been poured out** into our hearts through the Holy Spirit ...” again shows a past

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completed action that has results continuing in the present and into the future.

Middle Voice Verbs: Some middle voice verbs are unique in that the subject that is performing the action either experiences the result of the action or participates in the action. For example, middle voice verbs that reflect the action in reference to the subject should be translated “I myself,” “he himself,” “you yourself,” “you yourselves,” “we ourselves,” etc., and when expressing personal involvement, “I personally.” Unfortunately, most translators have not translated middle voice verbs accurately to reflect the true meaning expressed in the Greek. In this translation, where the added expression “self” is awkward in English, the subject’s personal involvement is expressed by using the word “personally.”

John 15:16: “**You yourselves** did not choose Me, but **I have personally chosen** you ...” This verse shows both types of the middle voice verb.

Eph. 1:4: “According as **He has personally chosen** us for Himself ...” In this case it would be awkward to translate the middle voice as “He Himself has chosen us for Himself”; therefore, God’s personal involvement in choosing us is expressed by the word “personally.”

Col. 1:13: “Who **has personally rescued** us from the power of darkness and has transferred *us* unto the kingdom of the Son of His love.”

Col. 1:18: “And He is the Head of the body, the church; Who is *the* beginning, *the* firstborn from among the dead, so that in all things **He Himself** might hold the pre-eminence.”

Acts 26:17: “**I am personally selecting you ...**” Acts 22:14: “The **God** of our fathers **has personally chosen** you ...” The middle voice verb in these examples show that Jesus Christ Himself personally selected and called the apostle Paul.

I John 1:6: “If we proclaim that we have fellowship with Him, but we are walking in the darkness, **we are lying to ourselves ...**” This middle voice verb clearly shows that the subject “we” is initiating the action as well as receiving the consequences of the action (self-deception). A single middle voice verb *ψευδομεθα psuedometha* is used to convey the meaning that must be translated into the English phrase “we are lying to ourselves.”

Middle voice verbs are different from verbs used with a reflexive pronoun. Verbs used with a reflexive pronoun to express the involvement of self are also used in the New Testament. In I John 1:8, John expressed nearly the same thought as he did in verse 6 by using a verb with a reflexive pronoun, “If we say that we do not have sin, **we are deceiving** [verb] **ourselves** [reflexive pronoun], and the truth is not in us.”

Gal. 4:9-10: “But on the other hand, after having known God—rather, after having been known by God—how *is it that* you are turning again to the weak and impotent elements, to which you again desire to be in bondage? **You are of your own selves** observing days, and months, and times and years.” By using a middle voice verb in this passage, the apostle Paul is showing that what the Galatians were doing was contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ—they were returning to their former pagan beliefs. They themselves of their own accord were observing pagan religious days, months, times and years. In effect, by such practices, they were rejecting God’s commands to observe the Sabbath and holy days.

Heb. 9:11-12: “But Christ Himself has become High Priest of the coming good things, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made by *human* hands (that is, not of this *present physical* creation). Not by *the* blood of goats and calves, but by the means of His own blood, He entered once for all into the holiest, **having by Himself** secured everlasting redemption *for us*.”

Other Types of Middle Voice Verbs: Not all middle voice verbs can be translated to express an action to or for the self, or to express active personal participation. These other types are intransitive verbs, called deponent verbs, which have no active form but

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only middle voice or passive form with an active meaning. Some examples follow:

Active Voice

αιρεω—I take
αποδιδωμι—I give away
κρινω—I judge
φυλασσω—I guard

Middle Voice

αιρομαι—I choose, prefer
αποδιδομαι—I sell
κρινομαι—I bring a lawsuit
φυλασσομαι—I am on my guard

Indeed, the grammar of New Testament Greek is very complex. Furthermore, it is impossible to literally translate the Greek into English because of the differences in the syntax and word order between the two languages. These few examples have been presented to give the reader a flavor of the Greek that underlies this English translation. It is hoped that this brief summary on these few points of Greek grammar will assist readers who are interested in the mechanics of translating the text into English. For the average Bible student, George Ricker Berry's work, *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, would be a most helpful tool. As an encouragement to anyone desiring to acquire some knowledge of Old Testament Hebrew or New Testament Greek, the following is Berry's admonition to ministers and teachers (clergymen):

“1. Without *some* knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, you cannot understand the critical commentaries on the Scriptures, and a commentary that is *not* critical is of doubtful value.

2. Without *some* knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, you cannot satisfy yourself or those who look to you for help as to the changes which you will find in the Revised Old and New Testaments [or any other translation].

3. Without *some* knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, you cannot appreciate the critical discussions, now so frequent, relating to the books of the Old and New Testaments.

4. Without *some* knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, you cannot be certain, in a single instance, that in your sermon based on a Scripture text, you are presenting the correct teaching of that text.

5. Without *some* knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, you cannot be an independent student, or a reliable interpreter of the word of God.

6. As much knowledge of Hebrew can be secured, with the same method, under the same circumstances, by the same pupil, in *one* year, with the aid of the Interlinear Old Testament, as can be gained of Latin in three years. Greek, though somewhat more difficult, may be readily acquired within a brief period with the aid of the Interlinear New Testament (which contains a lexicon) and an elementary Greek grammar.

7. The Hebrew language has, in all, about 7,000 words, and of these 1,000 occur in the Old Testament over 25 times each.

8. The Hebrew grammar has but *one* form for the Relative pronoun in all cases, numbers and genders; but *three* forms for the Demonstrative pronoun. The possible verbal forms are about 300 as compared with the 1,200 found in Greek. It has practically no declension.

9. Within ten years the average man wastes more time in fruitless reading and indifferent talk than would be used in acquiring a good working knowledge of Hebrew and Greek that in turn would impart to his teaching that quality of independence and of reliability which so greatly enhances one's power as a teacher.

10. There is not *one* minister in *ten* who might not if he but *would*, find time and opportunity for such study of Hebrew and Greek as would enable him to make a thoroughly practical use of it in his work as a Bible-preacher and Bible-teacher.”

George Ricker Berry
1897

May George Ricker Berry's words be an incentive to you, the reader, to go beyond the basics so that you may grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

ΤΗΣ ΚΑΙΝΗΣ ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗΣ ἌΠΑΝΤΑ.

ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ

Κατὰ Ματθαῖον.

Κατὰ Μάρκον.

Κατὰ Λουκᾶν.

Κατὰ Ἰωάννην.

ΠΡΑΞΕΙΣ ΤῶΝ Ἀποστόλων.

Nouum IESV Christi D.N.
Testamentum.

EX BIBLIOTHECA REGIA.



Ex Libris
Georgii à Schöbel
F Rosenfeld.

An. M. DC. LXX

Symb.

Terrenis præstant Celestia Rebus.

Joh. Jones.

Βασιλεὺς τ' ἀγαθὸν καὶ περὶ τ' ἀρχιεπιστῆν.

LVTETIAE,

Ex officina Roberti Stephani typographi Regii, Regiis typis.

M. D. L.



ΤΟ ΚΑΤΑ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΝ ἍΓΙΟΝ
ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100.

ἘΝ ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν
 πρὸς τὸ Θεόν, ὃ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. ὅτι
 ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸ Θεόν. Πάντα δι
 αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐ
 δὲ ἓν, ὃ γέγονεν. ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ
 ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τοῦ ἀνθρώπων, ὃ τὸ
 φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, ὃ ἡ σκοτία αὐ
 τὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν. Ἐγένετο ἀνθρώπος ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ
 Θεοῦ, ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννης· ὅτι ἦλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν, ἵνα μαρ
 τυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός, ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσι διὰ αὐτοῦ. ἐκ ἡ
 κείνου τὸ φῶς, ἀλλ' ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός. Ἦν τὸ
 φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸ
 κόσμον. ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν, καὶ ὁ κόσμος διὰ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ ὁ κό
 σμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω. εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθε, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέ
 λαβον. ὅσοι ὅμως ἔλαβον αὐτὸν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἴσους τὰ τέκνα
 Θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, οἱ ἐκ ὕδατος
 καὶ αἵματος, οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς, οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρός,
 ἀλλ' ἐκ Θεοῦ ἐγενήθησαν. καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, καὶ ἐσκή
 νωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, (καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς
 μονογενοῦς πατρὸς,) πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας. Ἰω
 ἄννης μαρτυρεῖ περὶ αὐτοῦ, καὶ κέκραγε, λέγων, (ὁ υἱὸς ἦν ὃν εἶπον,
 ὃ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος, ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν ὅτι πρὸ τῶν
 μου ἦν. ὃ ἐκ τῶν πληθόντων αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἐλάβομεν,
 καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος ὅτι ὁ νόμος διὰ Μωσέως ἐδόθη, ἡ χά
 ρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο. Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρα
 κε πώποτε ὁ μονογενὴς υἱὸς, ὃς ὢν ἐκ τῶν κόλπων τοῦ πατρὸς, ἐκεῖ
 ν ὄξηγήσατο. Καὶ αὕτη ὄστιν ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ Ἰωάννου, ὅτι

Κολοσ. α. Γ

Ματθ. γ. Α
 ριζ. α. Α
 Λουκ. γ. Α

Κεφ. θ. Α.
 ἔ β. Ε. ΙΙ

Β 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100.

Ματθ. α. Γ
 Λουκ. β. Δ
 Ματθ. ιζ. Α
 β. ανβ. α. Δ

Κολοσ. α. Γ.
 ἔ β. ΙΙ

Κεφ. ε. Ε
 α. ιω. ι. Γ
 α. β. μ. ε. Δ

Ματθ. γ. Α
 ριζ. α. Α
 Λουκ. γ. Δ

l. i.

Love of God

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish, but may have everlasting life.”
John 3:16

“In this *way* the love of God was manifested toward us: that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this *act* is the love—not that we loved God; rather, that He loved us and sent His Son *to be the* propitiation for our sins.”
I John 4:9-10

“And we have known and have believed the love that God has toward us. God is love, and the one who dwells in love is dwelling in God, and God in him. By this *spiritual indwelling*, the love *of God* is perfected within us ... There is no fear in the love *of God*; rather, perfect love casts out fear because fear has torment. And the one who fears has not been made perfect in the love *of God*. We love Him because He loved us first.”
I John 4:16-19

“By this *standard* we know that we love the children of God: when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God: that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome ... And this is the love *of God*: that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, exactly as you heard from *the beginning*, that you might walk in it.”
I John 5:2-3; II John 6

“If you love Me, keep the commandments—namely, My commandments.” John 14:15

“The one who has My commandments and is keeping them, that is the one who loves Me; and the one who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him ... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. The one who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word that you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s, Who sent Me.” John 14:21, 23-24

“As the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you; live in My love. If you keep My commandments, you shall live in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and live in His love ... the Father Himself loves you.” John 15:9-10; 16:27

“ ‘You shall love *the* Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is *the* first and greatest commandment; and *the* second *one is* like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Matt. 22:37-40

“A new commandment I give to you: that you love one another in the same way that I have loved you, that *is how* you are to love one another.”
John 13:34

Part One

Commentaries

About the New Testament

CHAPTER ONE

ABOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT

Billions of people have the New Testament, but most do not understand what it really is. Although many have read it, very few realize why, when and by whom it was written. Chapters One through Seven answer these vital questions.

What Is the New Testament?

The New Testament is not a collection of cleverly concocted myths to establish a religious movement or to create vast ecclesiastical empires to rule men and women. It is the divinely inspired account of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, whose life and teachings fulfilled hundreds of prophecies in the Old Testament. It is a message from God the Father and Jesus Christ to all mankind—not only to the rich and educated, but also, even more importantly, to the common man and woman. Its God-breathed words and teachings set forth the Father’s entire plan for our salvation, called the “gospel of grace” and “the gospel of the kingdom of God.” The New Testament proclaims God the Father’s love for us, shown in His forgiveness of our sins, and reveals the way to eternal life through Jesus Christ, as summarized in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish, but may have everlasting life.” **It is the most magnificent book in the world—greater than the Old Testament because the New Testament interprets the Old. Combined, the New and Old Testaments constitute the entire Word of God revealed to the world.**

The New Testament is God the Father’s personal revelation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Jesus was no ordinary man, wisdom-teacher or religious sage! He was God manifested in the flesh (I Tim. 3:16). However, before He was made flesh, He was the Creator, the LORD God of the Old Testament. The apostle John was inspired to reveal the truth of Jesus Christ’s divine identity when He wrote: “**In *the* beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in *the* beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and not even one *thing* that was created came into being without Him. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.**

“The true light was that which enlightens everyone who comes into the world. **He was in the world, and the world came into being through Him, but the world did not know Him.** He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him; but as many as received Him, to them He gave authority to become *the* children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name; who were not begotten by bloodlines, nor by *the* will of the flesh, nor by *the* will of man; but *by the will* of God. **And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us** (and we ourselves beheld His glory, *the* glory as of *the* only begotten with *the* Father), full of grace and truth” (John 1:1-4, 9-14). The Word—the one Who became Jesus Christ—was the LORD God of the Old Testament.

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Why Was the New Testament Written?

The reason for the New Testament's writing is found in the refusal of God's children throughout the ages to heed His guidance and admonishment. In Moses' time, the children of Israel excused their refusal on the grounds that His voice was terrifying. They begged Moses to communicate with God on their behalf, and they promised to do whatever God told them through Moses—yet they continued to rebel. It is ironic that in our day many continue to excuse their rebellion on the grounds that God's will is difficult to discern: If only He would speak to us with a voice that we could hear—so goes the argument—then we could know and do His will!

Since the creation of Adam and Eve, God has spoken audibly or face to face with relatively few men. After the flood of Noah's time, God dealt directly with Abraham and spoke with him. Nearly four thousand years ago, God established His covenant with Abraham for the benefit of all nations. The entire plan of God's salvation for the world generates from His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3, 15:4-18). This covenant contained God's promise of physical descendants through Abraham's son, Isaac, and of spiritual progeny as well: first, Jesus Christ, and then all those who are Christ's in the first resurrection at His Second Coming. The promise of physical seed was fulfilled in part by the birth of Isaac; the promise of physical blessings and national greatness was passed on through Isaac to his son Jacob. Jacob's name was later changed to Israel, and from his twelve sons came the twelve tribes of Israel.

Before the death of Jacob there was a great famine in the land of Canaan. Jacob, all his sons (except Joseph) and their wives and children left Canaan and went to Egypt to live. Jacob's son Joseph had already been in Egypt for seventeen years, having been sold into slavery in his youth by his brothers because of jealousy, and eventually elevated by pharaoh to be second in command of all Egypt due to his God-given wisdom and ability to interpret dreams. After Joseph died, another pharaoh came to power and enslaved all the children of Israel. As God had prophesied to Abraham, the children of Israel were greatly oppressed by the Egyptians. They cried out to God for deliverance, and God led Moses and his brother Aaron to bring them out of slavery. God delivered the children of Israel from bondage with His mighty hand and an outpouring of fearsome plagues. As the Israelites left Egypt, pursued by the pharaoh's soldiers and charioteers, God parted the Red Sea, allowing the Israelites to cross on dry ground. The waters then returned, inundating and drowning the Egyptians. Afterward, He brought the children of Israel safely through the wilderness to Mount Sinai (Exodus 1-19).

At Mount Sinai, according to the promises that God had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He established a covenant with the children of Israel. The LORD God, the One who later became Jesus Christ, commanded Moses to sanctify the people and have them wash their clothes in preparation for meeting Him at the foot of the mountain on the third day, which was the day of Pentecost. This was an awe-inspiring and fearful event for the children of Israel. They heard the voice of God, Who had descended from heaven to the top of Mount Sinai to speak to them. There He gave them the Ten Commandments and established a covenant with them, now called the Old Covenant. The account is recorded in Exodus 19: "And it came to pass on the third day in the morning that there *were* thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain. And the sound of the trumpet was exceeding loud so that all the people in the camp trembled. **And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God.** And they stood at the base of the mountain. And Mount Sinai was smoking, all of it because the LORD came down upon it in fire. And the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the sound of the trumpet sounded long, and became

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very strong, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice.

“And the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go down. Command the people, lest they break through unto the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish. And let the priests also, who come near to the LORD, sanctify themselves, lest the LORD break forth upon them.’ And Moses said to the LORD, ‘The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You commanded us, saying, “Set bounds around the mountain, and sanctify it.”’ And the LORD said to him, “Away! Get you down, and *only* you shalt come up, you, and Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up unto the LORD, lest He break forth upon them.” So Moses went down to the people, and spoke to them” (Ex. 19:16-25).

Then, God spoke directly to the children of Israel. They heard His awesome, powerful voice as He gave them the Ten Commandments: “And God spoke all these words, saying ...”

The First Commandment: “I *am* the LORD your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.”

The Second Commandment: “You shall not make for yourselves any graven image, or any likeness of *anything* that *is* in heavens above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down thyself down to them, nor serve them, for I, the LORD your God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, But showing mercy to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

The Third Commandment: “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.”

The Fourth Commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter; your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your livestock, nor the stranger within your gates; for *in* six days the LORD made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it.”

The Fifth Commandment: “Honor your father and your mother so that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God gives you.”

The Sixth Commandment: “You shall not murder.”

The Seventh Commandment: “You shalt not commit adultery.”

The Eighth Commandment: “You shall not steal.”

The Ninth Commandment: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

The Tenth Commandment: “You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that *is* your neighbour’s” (Ex. 20:1-17).

The sights and sounds coming from the mountain were so awesome and terrifying, the children of Israel refused to listen to the voice of God any longer. They wanted Moses to talk with God alone and then tell them what God had said: “And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking. And when the people saw, they trembled and stood afar off. **And they said to Moses, ‘You speak with us, and we will hear. But let not God speak with us, lest we die.’** And Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear, for God has come to prove you, and so that His fear may be before your faces, so that you may not sin.’ And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God *was*” (verses 18-21).

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Although the children of Israel promised to heed Moses, they did not. Only a year and a half after they left Egypt, Moses announced that God was ready to lead them into the Promised Land, but they refused to go. As a result, God sentenced them to wander in the wilderness for forty years. Furthermore, God pronounced His judgment that all Israelites older than twenty years, except Joshua and Caleb, would die in the wilderness. In spite of this punishment, time and again, the Israelites rebelled against God and Moses. (A summary of these events is found in the book of Numbers.)

When the forty years of their wandering in the wilderness had passed, God brought the next generation of the children of Israel to the border of the Promised Land in preparation to enter it. At that time, Moses again instructed them in the way of the LORD. He gave them the laws and commandments of God a second time, as found in the book of Deuteronomy. (The name of this book means the second giving of the Law.)

Moses' Prophecy About Jesus Christ

God remembered the words of the children of Israel when they refused to listen to Him after He had given them the Ten Commandments. He also remembered that they said they would listen to a man. However, during their wanderings in the wilderness, they did not listen to the man Moses as they had said. God was patient, and He offered to give them another chance to keep their promise. God announced through Moses that He would send another man, a prophet like Moses, and the people would have to listen to Him. When this Prophet came, if they would not heed Him, they would no longer have an excuse: **“The LORD your God will raise up unto you a Prophet from the midst of you, of your brethren, One like Me. To Him you shall hearken, according to all that you desired of the LORD your God in Horeb [Mount Sinai] in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, so that I do not die.’**

“And the LORD said to me, ‘They have spoken well what they have spoken. I [God the Father] will raise them up a Prophet [the coming Christ] from among their brethren, *One like you, and will put My words in His mouth. And He shall speak to them all that I shall command Him. And it shall come to pass, whatever man will not hearken to My words, which He shall speak in My name, I will require it of him.* But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in My name which I have not commanded him to speak or who shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die’ ”(Deut. 18:15-20).

God Became a Man

In order to fulfill Moses' prophecy, the Word—the One who pre-existed as God—came in the flesh as a man to speak with men. Jesus Christ was that man—the Son of God, born of the virgin Mary. But how could God become a man? Before one can understand that, one needs to know some basic facts about God as revealed in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, God—the Hebrew word is *Elohim*, a collective plural noun—is a holy family of intelligent beings composed of spirit. The God Family is eternal and all-powerful. The God Family is perfect in love, righteousness, character and purpose. The God Family is Lawgiver, Creator and Sustainer of all substance and life, upholding the universe by the power of Jesus' word (Heb. 1:3). The Scriptures reveal that the God Family created mankind “in Our image, after Our likeness” (Gen. 1:26-27). Therefore, God is the reality of the “image and likeness” from which man was created. The God Family presently consists of God the Father and God the Son. These two members of the God Family have the same form, or “Our image, after Our likeness,”

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which They have given to human beings, though They are composed of spirit.

God the Father is the supreme, glorious, divine spirit being Who is the Sovereign Ruler of the universe. He accomplishes His will through the power of His Holy Spirit. God the Father, Who has all power and all authority, is love and has perfect, holy, righteous character, full of grace and mercy. He is greater than His Son Jesus Christ but shares all that He has with His Son.

God the Father sent Jesus Christ to reveal the Father's love and grace and His magnificent plan for mankind. He came not only to reveal God the Father's plan and purpose but also to reveal God the Father Himself, to all who believe Him and His Gospel. Jesus said: "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent, and have revealed them to babes. Yes, Father, for it was well pleasing in Your sight *to do this*. **All things were delivered to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; neither does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son personally chooses to reveal Him**" (Matt. 11:25-27).

Jesus Christ was the only one Who could reveal God the Father because Jesus was God manifested in the flesh. Prior to His human birth, the One of the God Family Who became the Son eternally existed with the Other of the God Family Who became the Father. All things were created by God the Father through God the Son. The Son is revealed in the Old Testament as the LORD God and Lawgiver and in the New Testament as the Word of God. In order to become the Savior of all mankind, He willingly divested Himself of His position in the God Family, giving up His majesty, glory and power to become a fleshly human being. He was begotten of God the Father and born of the virgin Mary. The angel Gabriel instructed Mary and later Joseph to name Him Jesus (Luke 1:31; Matt. 1:21). (His full New Covenant title is Jesus Christ of Nazareth.) As a human being, having human flesh, Jesus was subject to the same temptations we face, yet He never sinned. As the perfect "Lamb of God," He gave Himself as God the Father's unique sacrifice in atonement for the sins of all mankind. Three days and three nights after His death by crucifixion, He was resurrected and reinvested with eternal life through the power of God the Father and ascended into heaven, becoming the Firstborn from the dead. Once again having been invested with the full divine nature and power of the God Family, He sits at the right hand of God the Father as High Priest, Advocate and Intercessor with the Father; and He is the Head of the Church.

Jesus Christ Was the Prophet Foretold by Moses

After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the apostles understood that the Prophet about Whom Moses had prophesied was in fact Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter made this clear when He preached to the people: "For Moses truly said to the fathers, '**A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up to you from among your brethren, like me; Him shall you hear in all things that He shall say to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be destroyed from among the people.**' Now indeed, all the prophets from Samuel and those who followed, as many as prophesied, also proclaimed these days. You are *the* children of the prophets and of the covenant that God Himself appointed to our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' Unto you first has God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you in turning each *of you* from your wickedness" (Acts 3:22-26).

John the Baptist was the first witness to declare that Jesus Christ had come from heaven and that He spoke the words of God. "He Who comes from above is above all ... and **what He has seen and heard, this is what He testifies**; but no one receives His testimony. The one who has received His testimony has set his seal that God is true; **for He**

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Whom God has sent speaks the words of God; and God gives not the Spirit by measure unto Him. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand” (John 3:31-35).

Jesus Christ confirmed that He did not speak on His own behalf but spoke all that the Father had commanded Him, just as had been prophesied in Deuteronomy 18. Moreover, He did not seek His own will but the will of the Father who had sent Him. Jesus said: “Truly, truly I say to you, the Son has no power to do anything of Himself, but only what He sees the Father do. For whatever He does, these things the Son also does in the same manner....**I have no power to do anything of Myself; but as I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father, Who sent Me**” (John 5:19-30).

By manifesting Himself as a man, God fulfilled the prophecy He gave to Moses and spoke to mankind. God has also spoken His essential words of life to us, which have been recorded by His chosen apostles to be preserved for all humanity. **The New Testament is the record of the words that God Himself would speak if He were to talk with us as humans talk. Every human being is held accountable to Him because He has spoken to us through this record.**

The act of God to become a man and to speak personally to His creation was profound. The apostle Paul clearly stated that this was the greatest thing God could do. He did not speak to us as God. He did not speak to us through angels. He did not speak to us through His prophets. He spoke to us by His Son. He offered forgiveness of sin and eternal life through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to all who would believe and repent: “God, Who spoke to the fathers at different times in the past and in many ways by the prophets, has spoken to us in these last days by *His* Son, Whom He has appointed heir of all things, by Whom also He made the worlds; Who, being *the* brightness of *His* glory and *the* exact image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His own power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at *the* right hand of the Majesty on high; having been made so much greater than *any of* the angels, inasmuch as He has inherited a name exceedingly superior to them. For to which of the angels did He ever say, ‘You are My Son; this day I have begotten You’? And again, ‘I will be a Father to Him, and He will be a Son to Me’? And again, when He brought the Firstborn into the world, He said, ‘Let all *the* angels of God worship Him.’ ” (Heb. 1:1-6).

Jesus Christ Is the Way, the Truth and the Life

The teachings of all the religions of the world count as nothing when compared to the awesome truth of what God the Father did through Jesus Christ for the sake of all mankind. Jesus made it clear—He will not give His honor to another. Contrary to the teachings of the religions of the world, there are not many ways to God. There is only one way to God the Father and salvation, and that way is through Jesus Christ. No one comes to the Father except through Him. Jesus declared, “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me**” (John 14:6).

God will not compromise with anyone. Jesus Christ is the only way! Furthermore, Jesus will not unite Himself with any ecumenical movement to bring all religions together. He is as far above all other so-called gods, goddesses, philosophies and religions as the heavens are high above the earth. There is none equal to or greater than Jesus Christ, except God the Father. This is why all who come to Jesus Christ must believe and be called by God the Father, as Jesus declared to His own disciples: “No one can come to Me unless the Father, Who sent Me, draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day....And He said, ‘For this reason, **I have said to you, no one can come to Me**

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unless it has been given to him from My Father' ” (John 6:44, 65).

The New Testament Is a Witness

God did not leave the world without a witness. The New Testament is His witness to all nations, to all religions—every human being on earth.

Witness to the World

Jesus said, the gospel of the kingdom of God would be preached in all the world as a witness, “**And this gospel of the kingdom shall be proclaimed in all the world for a witness to all the nations; and then shall the end come**” (Matt. 24:14). Not only would the gospel be preached and proclaimed, but also it **would be published** as Jesus prophesied: “But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for it is necessary for *these things* to come to pass, but the end *is* not yet. For nation shall rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be earthquakes in different places, and there shall be famines and disasters. These things *are* the beginning of sorrows. But keep yourselves on guard, for they shall deliver you up to councils and synagogues. You shall be beaten, and you shall be brought before governors and kings for My sake, **for a witness against them. And the gospel must first be published among all nations**” (Mark 13:7-10).

God could give no greater witness to mankind than to come in the flesh to speak to His creation and show His love for them by dying for their sins. His witness to the world continued after His death and resurrection. The apostles preached and witnessed through the power of the Holy Spirit and were inspired to write and preserve the words of Jesus’ witness for all generations until His return. This is how His special witness was revealed and continues to be revealed to the world today. Jesus’ words fulfill the prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:15-20, and because Jesus Christ came and gave this witness to the world, the world is accountable to God: “But I am telling you the truth. It is profitable for you that I go away because if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you. However, if I go, I will send it to you. And when that one has come, **it will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment**: Concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; concerning righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you no longer will see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged” (John 16:7-11).

Witness Against the World’s Religions and Their Leaders

After Jesus’ resurrection, thousands of Jews heeded the apostles’ witness. They believed in Jesus Christ as Messiah, repented and were baptized as recorded in the book of Acts. However, the majority of Jews rejected Jesus Christ, refusing to believe that He was the Messiah. Just as the unbelieving Jews rejected Jesus Christ, every other religion of the world has also rejected Him—Catholicism/Orthodox, Protestantism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism and all animist religions. Although some of these religions may profess Jesus, they have all rejected the teachings of Jesus Christ and the New Testament by substituting their own traditions and practices for the Word of God. Recall how Jesus castigated the religious leaders of Judaism because of their traditions: “And He answered *and* said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you hypocrites, as it is written, “This people honors Me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from Me.” But in vain do they worship Me, teaching *for* doctrine the commandments of men.

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For leaving the commandment of God, you hold fast the tradition of men, *such as* the washing of pots and cups; and you practice many other things like *this*.' Then He said to them, '**Full well do you reject the commandment of God, so that you may observe your own tradition**'" (Mark 7:6-9).

Thus, the words of Jesus Christ as preserved in the New Testament are not only a witness against Judaism but against all other religions of the world, because they have rejected the teachings of Jesus Christ in order to observe their own traditions and worship their own gods and idols.

John, in his gospel, records Jesus Christ's witness to the leaders of Judaism: "Therefore, Jesus said to them, '**If God were your Father, you would love Me, because I proceeded forth and came from God. For I have not come of Myself, but He sent Me.** Why don't you understand My speech? Because you cannot *bear* to hear My words. You are of *your* father the devil [who is the god of this world (II Cor. 4:4)], and the lusts of your father you desire to practice. He was a murderer from *the* beginning, and has not stood in the truth because there is no truth in him. **Whenever he speaks a lie, he is speaking from his own self; for he is a liar, and the father of it.** And because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. Which *one* of you can convict Me of sin? But if I speak *the* truth, why don't you believe Me? **The one who is of God hears the words of God. For this reason you do not hear, because you are not of God**'" (John 8:42-47). Just as Judaism and its teachings are not of God, so also other religions of the world are not of God.

On the night of His last Passover, Jesus told His apostles the reason for His witness against the religious leaders of Judaism, and hence, all religions and their leaders: "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have had sin; but now they have nothing to cover their sin. The one who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no other man has done, they would not have had sin; but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father" (John 15:22-24). The apostle Paul summed up the fruits of the religions of the world and their leaders, "They personally profess to know God, but in *their* works they deny Him, being abominable and disobedient, and reprobate unto every good work" (Titus 1:16).

Witness to All People

The New Testament, including the words of Jesus Christ, is a witness not only to all nations and to all religions but to every human being. The apostle John recorded Jesus words: "And even as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, in the same way it is ordained that the Son of man be lifted up, so **that everyone who believes in Him may not perish, but may have everlasting life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish, but may have everlasting life.**

"For God sent not His Son into the world that He might judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. The one who believes in Him is not judged, but **the one who does not believe has already been judged because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.** And this is the judgment: that the light [Jesus Christ] has come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who practices evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, so that his works may not be exposed; but the one who practices the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be manifested, that they have been accomplished by *the power of God*" (John 3:14-21).

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Anyone Who Rejects the New Testament Shall Be Judged by the Words of Christ

The words of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospel of John reveal that He fulfilled the prophecy of Moses in Deuteronomy: “I [God the Father] will raise them up a Prophet [Jesus Christ] from among their brethren, *One* like you, and **will put My words in His mouth. And He shall speak to them all that I shall command Him. And it shall come to pass, whatever man will not hearken to My words which He shall speak in My name, I will require it of him**” (Deut. 18:18-20).

Consequently, Jesus Christ’s words are a witness against all who reject Him, and His words will judge them. “But if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. **The one who rejects Me and does not receive My words has one who judges him; the word which I have spoken, that shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken from Myself; but the Father, Who sent Me, gave Me commandment Himself, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life. Therefore, whatever I speak, I speak exactly as the Father has told Me**” (John 12:47-50). Furthermore, if anyone rejects Jesus Christ, he is also rejecting God the Father—the Sovereign Ruler of the universe.

The New Testament was divinely inspired to be written and preserved so that every man and woman could know the words of God, the love of God and the salvation of God. It contains the words of eternal life and shows the way to God the Father through Jesus Christ. On the one hand, all who repent and believe the words of Jesus Christ and the New Testament will receive the mercy of God the Father and the forgiveness of sin through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—the Father’s only begotten Son. On the other hand, all who refuse to hear and believe the words of Jesus Christ and His Gospel as contained in the New Testament will be judged by those very same words. The apostle Paul was inspired to write of this judgment: “Or do you despise the riches of His kindness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the graciousness of God leads you to repentance? **But you, according to your own hardness and unrepentant heart, are storing up wrath for yourself against *the* day of wrath and revelation of God’s righteous judgment, Who will render to each one according to his own works; on the one hand, to those who with patient endurance in good works are seeking glory and honor and immortality—eternal life. On the other hand, to those who are contentious and who disobey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish—upon every soul of man who commits evil acts, both of *the* Jew first, and of *the* Greek; but glory and honor and peace to everyone who works good, both to *the* Jew first, and to *the* Greek, because there is no respect of persons with God**” (Rom. 2:4-11). What Paul has written confirms the prophecy in Deuteronomy 18.

A Call to Repentance

Not only is the New Testament a witness to the world, the nations, the religious leaders and every person, but it is a call to repentance! John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for Jesus Christ. He preached repentance of sins, instructing the people to believe in Jesus Christ, Who would come after him. After John the Baptist was put in prison, Jesus Christ began His ministry by preaching repentance: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, *the* Son of God ... Now after the imprisonment of John, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time

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has been fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is near at hand; **repent, and believe in the gospel**' ” (Mark 1:1, 14-15).

Jesus made it clear that He came to call sinners to repentance, “I did not come to call *the* righteous [those who think they are righteous], but sinners to repentance” (Mark 2:17); and, He left no doubt that all must repent of their sins: “Now at the same time, *there* were present some who were telling Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered *and* said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were sinners above all Galileans, because they suffered such things? No, I tell you; **but if you do not repent, you shall all likewise perish**. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, do you suppose that these were debtors above all men who dwelt in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; **but if you do not repent, you shall all likewise perish**’ ” (Luke 13:1-5).

What Is Sin?

The New Testament defines sin as the transgression of the law (I John 3:4). Anyone who transgresses the laws and commandments of God is living in a state of sin or lawlessness. A literal translation of this verse from the Greek reads: “**Everyone who practices sin is also practicing lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness.**”

There is no one in the entire history of the world who has not sinned, except Jesus Christ. That is why He alone can be our Redeemer and Savior. Every person needs to be saved from his or her sins, because “the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

In his epistle to the Romans, the apostle Paul was moved to emphatically declare that all have sinned—all have transgressed the laws and commandments of God, and all are sentenced to death. The only escape and salvation is through Jesus Christ: “What then? Are we [Jews] of ourselves better [than the Gentiles]? Not at all! **For we have already charged both Jews and Gentiles—ALL—with being under sin**. Exactly as it is written: ‘**For there is not a righteous one—not even one!** There is not one who understands; there is not one who seeks after God. They have all gone out of the way; together they have *all* become depraved. There is not *even* one who is practicing kindness. No, there is not so much as one! Their throats *are* like an open grave; with their tongues they have used deceit; *the* venom of asps *is* under their lips; whose mouths are full of cursing and bitterness; their feet *are* swift to shed blood; destruction and misery *are* in their ways; and *the* way of peace they have not known. **There is no fear of God before their eyes.**’ Now then, we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, **so that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God....For all have sinned, and have come short of the glory of God**” (Rom. 3:9-19, 23).

On the day of Pentecost, just fifty-four days after the crucifixion, the apostles began preaching Jesus Christ’s gospel of repentance. On that day, God poured out His Holy Spirit in power, and the apostles spoke in a multitude of languages as a fantastic witness to the Jews from all nations who had gathered at the temple in Jerusalem to observe the feast day (Acts 2:1-18). When they wondered what this miracle meant, the apostle Peter was inspired to powerfully preach Christ and repentance of sin. His moving witness to the Jews who had gathered at the temple ended with these words: “ ‘Therefore, let all *the* house of Israel know with full assurance that God has made this *same* Jesus, Whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ Now after hearing *this*, they were cut to the heart [convicted of their sins]; and they said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘**Repent and be baptized each one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for *the* remission of**

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sins, and you yourselves shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit... And with many other words he earnestly testified and exhorted, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’ **Then those who joyfully received his message were baptized**; and about three thousand souls were added that day” (Acts 2:36-41).

Baptism is a requirement for salvation, as these scriptures show. One must be baptized by full immersion in water, which is symbolic of the burial of the old sinful self in a watery grave. Baptism must come after true and deep repentance toward God the Father and Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul’s Call to Repentance

When the apostle Paul came to Athens, the center of the Greek pagan religions, he preached a powerful message of repentance. As it is recorded in Acts, he exhorted the Athenians to repent of their idolatries and vain religious practices: “Then Paul stood in *the* center of Mars’ hill *and* said, ‘Men, Athenians, I perceive *that* in all things you are very reverent to deities; for *as* I was passing through and observing the objects of your veneration, I also found an altar on which was inscribed, “To an unknown God.” So then, He Whom you worship in ignorance *is* the one *that* I proclaim to you.

“He *is* the God Who made the world and all things that *are* in it. Being *the* Lord of heaven and earth, He does not dwell in temples made by hands; nor is He served by the hands of men, as *though* He needs anything, *for* He gives to all life and breath and all things. **And He made of one blood all the nations of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth, having determined beforehand *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their dwelling, in order that they might seek the Lord, if perhaps they might feel after Him and might find Him; though truly, He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being**; as some of the poets among you also have said, ‘For we are His offspring.’

“Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we should not think that the Godhead *is* like that which *is* made of gold, or silver, or stone—a graven thing of art *devised* by *the* imagination of man; for *although* God has indeed overlooked the times of this ignorance, **He now commands all men everywhere to repent**, because He has set a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man Whom He has appointed, having given proof to all *by* raising Him from *the* dead” (Acts 17:22-31). Paul’s message of repentance was the same as Jesus Christ’s: “If you do not repent, you shall likewise perish.”

The Meaning of Repentance

Because of the witness that Jesus Christ has given to the world—all nations, all religions and all people—He commands all men and women to repent and turn to God with all their hearts! Today, God’s judgment is at the door. None shall escape unless he or she repents.

What is repentance? There are two kinds of repentance. One is worldly repentance, which is a shallow repentance that leads to death. The other is godly repentance that leads to forgiveness and salvation. The apostle Paul said, “For sorrow unto repentance before God works out salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world works out death” (II Cor. 7:10).

Godly repentance means a complete abhorrence of one’s sins, a complete turning from sin—from the transgression of the laws and commandments of God. Repentance is a complete amendment of life, a turning away from one’s own sinful way to the way of love and obedience, keeping the laws and commandments of God and living by every word of God as taught by Jesus Christ.

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In the book of Psalms, we find King David's prayer of repentance, uttered when Nathan the prophet came to him after David's affair with Bathsheba and the killing of her husband Uriah. This prayer shows David's complete abhorrence of sin and self as he cried out to God with tears of anguish and sorrow, begging for His mercy and forgiveness. David's repentance was to God, not to any man. He did not confess his sins to a priest. He did not confess his sins to Nathan the prophet. Just as David did, we are to confess our sins directly to God the Father and Jesus Christ, not to a man. King David's prayer has been preserved for us so that we can understand the attitude of true repentance: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of your compassion, blot out my transgressions. **Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin, for I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.**

"Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done evil in Your sight, that you might be justified when you speak and be in the right when You judge. Behold, **I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.** Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part You shall make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness that the bones which You have broken may rejoice. **Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.** Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and let Your free spirit uphold me. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall turn back to You. **Deliver me from the guilt of shedding blood, O God, O God of my salvation...."** (Psa. 51:1-14).

Repentance is the first step in the sinner's reconciliation with God the Father and Jesus Christ. God the Father through His Spirit must open a person's mind to understand that he or she is a sinner against Him. As David said, "I have sinned against You and You alone." Then one must believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, that it is because of one's own sins that He had to die. True belief brings repentance and necessitates confessing one's sins to God the Father and asking for forgiveness, remission and pardon of those sins through the blood of Jesus Christ. True, deep, godly repentance will produce a profound change in a person's mind and attitude, which will result in a continuous desire to live by every word of God. The truly repentant person will turn from evil thoughts and ungodly practices and will seek to conform his or her life to the will of God as revealed in the Holy Bible and as led by the Holy Spirit. Repentance and confession of sins is an ongoing process in a Christian's spiritual growth toward perfection in Jesus Christ.

Upon true, heartfelt repentance, God is ready and willing to forgive sin, as shown in David's prayer of repentance: "Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I cry unto You all day long. Rejoice the soul of Your servant, for to You, O LORD, do I lift up my soul, **For You, LORD, are good and ready to forgive, and rich in mercy to all those who call upon You.** Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer, and attend to the voice of my supplications. **In the day of my trouble I will call upon You, for You will answer me"** (Psa. 86:3-7).

God does not require animal sacrifices for the propitiation of sin. He does not require the sinner to perform rote prayers with the aid of a strand of beads. He does not require hundreds of reiterations of "Hail Mary" or "Our Father." God does not require a person to crawl for miles on his or her knees or to perform self-flagellation or ritual bloodletting. God requires only that the sinner have a broken and contrite heart and genuinely repent as it is written: "For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not take pleasure in burnt offering. **The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise"** (Psa. 51:16-17).

The apostle John wrote, "If we confess our own sins, He is faithful and righteous, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). If we

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repent and confess our sins to God the Father and Jesus Christ, God will certainly forgive us. Once our sins are forgiven, we are to quit living in sin. We are to stop living like the world and are to live according to the ways of God. As Jesus said, “Sin no more, so that something worse does not happen to you”; and “Go, and sin no more” (John 5:14; 8:11).

The prophet Isaiah made it clear that not only are we to repent of sin but also we are to cease from sinning: “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean [through repentance and baptism]; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes; **cease to do evil; learn to do good**; seek judgment, reprove the oppressor. Judge the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD. **Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured with the sword**; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken *it*” (Isa. 1:16-20).

The Meaning of Water Baptism

After genuine, godly repentance and acceptance of Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior, the believer must be baptized by complete immersion in water for the remission of his or her sins. Water baptism symbolizes the death and burial of each repentant believer—a spiritual conjoining into the death of Jesus Christ. Through this baptismal death the believer becomes a partaker of the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ, Whose blood is applied as full payment for his or her sins. The believer’s rising up out of the water is symbolic of his or her conjoining with Jesus Christ in the resurrection at His return. When the believer rises out of the watery grave of baptism, he or she rises to newness of life. In order to become a new person, each baptized believer must receive the begetting of the Holy Spirit from God the Father through the laying on of hands. The believer is then led by the Holy Spirit to walk in loving obedience to God the Father and Jesus Christ.

After true, godly repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sin, the new believer is justified and put in right standing with God the Father through the blood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul explained this operation of God’s grace: “*But* are being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that *is* in Christ Jesus; Whom God has openly manifested *to be* a propitiation through faith in His blood, in order to demonstrate His righteousness, in respect to the remission of sins that are past....Even *the* righteousness of God *that is* through *the* faith of Jesus Christ, toward all and upon all those who believe; for there is no difference” (Rom. 3:24-25, 22).

Salvation by Grace

Once the believer has been justified by grace, he or she continually stands in a state of grace before God. The apostle Paul makes this clear: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Whom **we also have access by faith into this grace in which we stand**, and we ourselves boast in *the* hope of the glory of God. And not only *this*, but we also boast in tribulations, realizing that tribulation brings forth endurance, and endurance *brings forth* character, and character *brings forth* hope. **And the hope of God never makes us ashamed because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us**” (Rom. 5:1-5).

Salvation by grace does not confer a license to sin with impunity. Neither Jesus Christ nor the apostles ever taught such a doctrine. Furthermore, there is no such teaching in the entire New Testament. Jesus said, if we love Him, we will keep His commandments: “If you love Me, keep the commandments—namely, My command-

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ments....The one who has My commandments and is keeping them, that is the one who loves Me; and the one who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him....If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. The one who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word that you hear is not Mine, but the Father's, Who sent Me" (John 14:15, 21, 23-24).

Paul confirms that salvation by grace is demonstrated in works—not the humanly devised traditions and works of religion but the good works of loving God and keeping His commandments. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this *especially* is not of your own selves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, so that no one may boast. **For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto *the* good works that God ordained beforehand in order that we might walk in them**" (Eph. 2:8-10).

When one has received the begetting of the Holy Spirit from God the Father, he or she is to walk in the way of the Lord and to love God the Father and Jesus Christ with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength (Mark 12:29-34). He or she is to keep the commandments of God from the heart in the spirit of the law. Finally, the believer is to grow in grace and knowledge and to be faithful unto death. Then, at the return of Jesus Christ, the believer will be resurrected to eternal life—as a glorified son or daughter of God.

The New Testament Confirms God's Promise of Spiritual Seed to Abraham

When we fully understand the Word of God, it is clear that God, in His covenant with Abraham, promised the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. God promised, saying, "**He that shall come forth out of your own loins shall be your heir**" (Gen. 15:4). God's promise to give Abraham his own physical seed was fulfilled through the birth of Isaac, who was the forefather of the twelve tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah came Jesus Christ, the promised Seed. As the apostle Paul stated, He is the true Heir of the promises that God gave to Abraham: "**Now to Abraham and to his Seed were the promises spoken.** He does not say, 'and to *your* seeds,' as of many; but as of one, 'and to your Seed,' which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16).

Next, God promised Abraham many offspring: "And He brought him forth outside and said, "**Look now toward the heavens and number the stars—if you are able to count them.**" And He said to him, "**So shall your seed be.**" **And he believed in the LORD. And He accounted it to him for righteousness** (Gen. 15:5-6). This promise does not refer to Abraham's physical descendants but to his spiritual seed, who would receive the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. Because the spiritual seed would inherit everlasting glory, God took Abraham out to show him the stars in heaven, rather than the ground beneath his feet. As the stars of heaven are high above the earth, so the promise of eternal life is exceedingly greater than the promise of physical blessings. The blessings that were offered to the physical seed through the Old Covenant were temporary, but the blessings that are offered to the spiritual seed through the New Covenant are eternal.

The apostle Paul understood that the Old Covenant could not bring the spiritual blessings God had promised in His covenant with Abraham. These blessings could only be imparted by Jesus Christ, Who is Abraham's true spiritual Seed and the Heir of the promises: "Now this I say, *that **the covenant ratified beforehand by God to Christ cannot be annulled by the law*** [the requirements of the Old Covenant], which was *given* four hundred and thirty years later [to Israel], so as to make the promise of no ef-

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fect. For if the inheritance *is* by law, *it is* no longer by promise. But God granted *it* to Abraham by promise. Why then the law? It was placed alongside *the promises* [because a ratified covenant cannot be added to] for the purpose of *defining* transgressions, **until the Seed should come to whom the promise was made**" (Gal. 3:17-19).

Paul made it clear that the Old Covenant with Abraham's physical seed was temporary. When Jesus Christ established the New Covenant, the promise of eternal life through faith superseded and replaced the promise of blessings through the requirements of the Old Covenant. Under the New Covenant, individuals of every nation and race can inherit the promise of eternal life by becoming the children of Abraham through faith: "*It is exactly as it is written: 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness.'* Because of this, *you should* understand that those who *are* of faith are **the true sons of Abraham**. Now *in* the Scriptures, God, seeing in advance that He would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.' *It is* for this reason that those who are of faith are being blessed with the believing Abraham" (Gal. 3:6-9).

The Promise of Eternal Life Through Jesus Christ

The prophet Daniel confirmed the promise of spiritual children who would inherit eternal life and shine like the stars of heaven: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth [are dead in the graves] shall awake [in the resurrection of the righteous], some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt [in the resurrection of the wicked]. **And they who are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever and ever**" (Dan. 12:2-3).

Jesus Christ also spoke of the time of the resurrection with similar words: "Therefore, as the tares are gathered and consumed in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this age. The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all the offenders and those who are practicing lawlessness; and they shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father**" (Matt. 13:40-43).

Jesus Christ was both the Seed of Abraham and the Son of God. In the same way, all those who believe in Him, have the begetting of the Holy Spirit from God the Father, and live by His words are the spiritual seed of Abraham and the children of God. Paul wrote of this truth in his letter to the Galatians: "**Because you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus**. For as many *of you* as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. **And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise**" (Gal. 3:26-29).

Like Jesus, the Firstborn from the dead, those who are the sons of God, the seed of Abraham, will be resurrected from death to immortality. They will inherit eternal life and live as glorified spirit beings in the kingdom of God: "For as many as are led by **the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God**. Now you have not received a spirit of bondage again unto fear, but **you have received the Spirit of sonship, whereby we call out, 'Abba, Father.'** The Spirit itself bears witness conjointly with our own spirit, *testifying* that we are *the* children of God. **Now if we are children, we are also heirs—truly, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer together with Him, so that we may also be glorified together with Him**. For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with **the glory that shall be revealed in us**" (Rom. 8:14-18).

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God the Father's promise of being resurrected from the dead to eternal life through Jesus Christ is sure. "And as we have borne the image of the *one* made of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly *one*. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit *the* kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit incorruption. **Behold, I show you a mystery: we shall not all fall asleep, but we shall all be changed, in an instant, in *the* twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for *the* trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.** For this corruptible must put on incorruptibility, and this mortal must put on immortality. Now when this corruptible shall have put on incorruptibility, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory' " (I Cor. 15:49-54).

The apostle John wrote that the transformation of the children of God to eternal glory will take place at Jesus Christ's Second Coming: "Behold! What *glorious* love the Father has given to us, that we should be called **the children of God!** For this very reason, the world does not know us because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be; but we know that **when He is manifested, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him exactly as He is**" (I John 3:1-2). The apostle Paul also wrote: "But for us, the commonwealth of *God* exists in *the* heavens, from where also we are waiting for *the* Savior, *the* Lord Jesus Christ; **Who will transform our vile bodies, that they may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the inner working of His own power, whereby He is able to subdue all things to Himself**" (Phil. 3:20-21).

If our vile bodies are to be transformed and conformed to His glorious body, what does Jesus Christ's glorified body look like? In a special vision, the apostles Peter, James and John all saw Jesus Christ in His glorified form. Matthew gave this account: "Jesus took with *Him* Peter and James and his brother John, and brought them up into a high mountain by themselves. **And He was transfigured before them; and His face shined as the sun, and His garments became white as the light**" (Matt. 17:1-2). Later, when John wrote the book of Revelation, he again saw Jesus in His glorified form: "And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me; and when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands; and in *the* midst of the seven lampstands *one* like *the* Son of man, clothed in *a garment* reaching to the feet, and girded about the chest with a golden breastplate. **And His head and hair were like white wool, white as snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; and His feet were like fine brass, as if they glowed in a furnace; and His voice was like the sound of many waters.** And in His right hand He had seven stars, and a sharp two-edged sword went out of His mouth, and **His countenance was as the sun shining in its full power**" (Rev. 1:12-16).

When the children of God are glorified, the words of Jesus Christ will be fulfilled: "**Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father**" (Matt. 13:43). Exactly as God promised Abraham, his seed will be an innumerable multitude who will shine like the stars: "And He brought him forth abroad, and said: '**Look now toward the heavens and number the stars—if you are able to count them.**' And He said to him, '**So shall your seed be**' " (Gen. 15:5).

Now you know what the New Testament is and why it was written. You have a choice before you. Will you repent and believe in the Son of God so that you may receive eternal life? Or will you reject Jesus Christ and His words and receive the judgment of God and eternal death? What will you do? God holds you accountable for your decision—you must choose. If you choose the path that leads to life, then the New Testament and all Scripture becomes your instruction book for eternal life. If you continue on that path until death, then when Jesus Christ returns—at the resurrection—you will be raised with a glorious spiritual body and live forever—into the ages of eternity.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS ORIGINALLY WRITTEN IN GREEK

It is vital to understand that the New Testament was written in Koine Greek, which was the common spoken and written language for hundreds of years in Palestine and the Roman Empire before the days of Jesus and His apostles. Greek was the universal language of commerce and trade. This is the language that Jesus, the apostles and early New Testament Church used.

Some erroneously teach that the New Testament was originally written in the Hebrew language and was later translated into Greek. Because they have not studied the history of Palestine, they fail to realize that Hebrew had ceased to be spoken by the Jews many centuries before the New Testament era.

Under the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires, 640-333 BC, Aramaic exerted the greatest influence. The writings of Daniel, who lived and worked during the time of the Chaldean and Persian Empires, show the extensive influence of Syriac and Chaldee, which were dialects of Aramaic. The Persians ruled Palestine from the time of Daniel and Ezra until its invasion by Alexander the Great in 333 BC. From that time, the influence of Aramaic was overshadowed by the influence of Greek. Samuel G. Green, a renowned Biblical scholar, described this significant change as follows:

“... as a direct result of the conquests of Alexander the Great and his successors, the Greek tongue had been carried into almost all the countries of the civilized world, and had become the medium of commercial intercourse, the language of the courts, and, in fact, **the universal literary tongue** of the provinces afterwards absorbed in the Roman Empire. **The natives of Alexandria and of Jerusalem**, of Ephesus, and even of Rome, **alike adopted it**; everywhere with characteristic modifications, but substantially the same. Hence it had become a necessity to **translate the Old Testament Scriptures into Greek**.... This translation, or the Septuagint, naturally became **the basis of all subsequent Jewish Greek literature, and in particular of the New Testament**” (Green, *Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek Testament*, pp. 155-156, emphasis added).

The Influence of Greek in Jewish Literature

As Green stated, the Greek translation of the Old Testament was followed by other Jewish Greek literature. Rabbi B. Z. Wacholder is one of the leading scholars in Jewish Greek literature of the period from Alexander to Christ. Martin Hengel, a Biblical scholar of modern Germany, wrote of Wacholder’s opinions of this era:

“Around the middle of the second century BCE [nearly two hundred years before the New Testament was written] the **Jewish Palestinian priest Eupolemus**, son of John, whom Judas [Maccabaeus] had probably sent to Rome with a delegation in 161 BCE, **composed in Greek a Jewish history** with the title ‘About the Kings of Judah’... B.Z. Wacholder, who analyses this work, goes very thoroughly in the last chapter of his book into **further Jewish-Palestinian literature in Greek** and traces it down to Justus of Tiberias and Josephus. In his view, its origin **lies in the priestly aristocracy**, the leading

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representatives of which had always also **had a certain degree of Greek education from the second or even third century BCE**” (Hengel, *The “Hellenization” of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*, p. 23, emphasis added).

Greek was the language of Jerusalem in New Testament times—the language not only of the priestly aristocracy but also of business and commerce. Its influence was most noticeable in the city of Jerusalem. Hengel wrote, “The most important centre of the Greek language in Jewish Palestine was of course the capital, Jerusalem. We again have a good deal of epigraphical evidence [evidence from historical inscriptions] to support this” (*Ibid.*, p. 9).

The importance of Greek in Jewish life is evidenced by the fact that the temple had a fully staffed Greek secretariat. Such offices were vital to the diplomatic, commercial and banking interests of the nation. Hengel believed that “an institution like **the temple must have had a well-staffed Greek secretariat for more than two centuries**” (*Ibid.*, p. 17, emphasis added).

It was not difficult to find Greek-speaking Jews to serve as members of the temple secretariat. Many Levitical and priestly families had contact with Greek-speaking areas outside Palestine, and some families lived in these areas. The most aristocratic of the priestly families—the old Zadokite family of the Oniads—lived in Egypt. The high priests that Herod appointed came from this and other Greek-speaking families. Herod’s selection of these high priests illustrates the active communication and freedom of movement that was taking place between Palestine and other lands:

“There was a constant and lively interchange with all the centres of the Diaspora [the lands where the Jews were dispersed]. Thus Herod first brought the priest Ananel (Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.22, 34, 39ff., 51) from Babylonia and later the priest Simon, son of Boethus, from Alexandria to Jerusalem, both presumably from the old Zadokite family of the Oniads, in order to appoint them high priests. Boethus could have been a descendant of Onias IV of Leontopolis who fled to Egypt in 164 BCE: that would explain the later status of his family in Jerusalem. The successful Simon, son of Boethus, who married a daughter, Mariam, to Herod, succeeded in founding the richest high priestly family after the clan of Annas and at the same time a particular group among the Sadducees, the Boethusians, who were evidently close to the Herodian rulers” (Hengel, *The “Hellenization” of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*, p. 14).

The high priests who returned to Jerusalem from Alexandria were Greek-speaking. The city of Alexandria, named for Alexander the Great, was renowned as a center of Greek culture and learning. It was the Jews of Alexandria who in earlier times had translated the Hebrew text into Greek for the Septuagint. When the families of the high priests returned to Jerusalem, they continued to speak Greek. As Hengel wrote, these influential upper-class families were not the only Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem:

“Be this as it may, we can assume that Greek was spoken among the families of these aristocrats who had returned. It will also be the case that **Greek was no less established among the leading families of Jerusalem than in the scriptoria and the bazaars of the city or at the tables of the money changers in the temple forecourt**” (*Ibid.*, p. 14, emphasis added).

In New Testament times, Greek was spoken not only by the elite of Jerusalem but also by those who copied manuscripts in the scriptoria, by the middle-class businessmen who ran the bazaars, and by the bankers who served as money changers in the temple. The monetary exchange that was centered at the temple and all business transactions in Jerusalem required the speaking of Greek. This was the language of business and commerce in every province of the Roman Empire, including Palestine.

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Greek Was Spoken in Galilee in New Testament Times

While Jerusalem was the commercial, cultural and banking center of Palestine, the region of Galilee did not fall far behind. Galilee was perfectly positioned at the crossroads of trade entering and exiting Palestine. The entire region was bustling with commerce, and the language of that trade and commerce was Greek.

Hengel relates that by the time of Christ, the cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias in Galilee had Greek schools of renown. As carpenters, Joseph and Jesus might have worked in Sepphoris, which was only four or five miles from Jesus' home. The Greek-speaking city of Tiberias, center of a thriving fishing industry, was near their home. These two cities of Galilee were both prominent in the Palestine of Jesus' day. As centers of commerce and trade, they depended on merchants and tradesmen who could speak fluent Greek. Their schools ranked among the best.

As Hengel related, the training received in these schools of Galilee was on a par with the great institutions of higher learning in Antioch and Alexandria: "Wacholder believes that the rhetorical training which Justus received in the Tiberias of Herod Antipas and Agrippa II was on a par with the 'cosmopolitan Greek of Antioch or Alexandria,' whereas Jerusalem could not offer Josephus educational possibilities of the same high quality" (Ibid., p. 24).

The historian Josephus, who belonged to one of the leading priestly families of Jerusalem, spoke Greek; but his Greek was far from the quality of the Greek spoken and written by Justus, who had studied Greek at Tiberias. As the following quote relates, the linguistic and rhetorical education of Justus of Tiberias was far superior to that of Josephus of Jerusalem:

"Therefore Josephus stresses at the end of his *Antiquities* that his Jewish education was more perfect than his Greek, and that he still found difficulties in speaking impeccable Greek (*Antt.* 20.262-4)...Presumably he also refers to this deficiency because his rival and opponent Justus of Tiberias had had a better linguistic and rhetorical education....The patriarch Photius of Constantinople (c. 820-886) still praised the stylistic precision and evocative character of Justus' history of the Jewish kings, which extended from Moses to the death of Agrippa II, the last Jewish king" (Ibid., p. 24).

Like Josephus, all members of the priestly families were trained in both Hebrew and Greek. Hebrew continued to be spoken by the priests in the temple and the Scribes in the synagogues for religious events and discussions only. When at home with their families or conducting business in the market, they spoke Greek. The common people, who had long before lost their knowledge of Hebrew, spoke Aramaic in general, but those who dealt in commerce and trade also spoke Greek. According to Hengel, "Judaea, Samaria and Galilee were bilingual (or better, trilingual) areas. While Aramaic was the vernacular of ordinary people, and Hebrew the ... language of religious worship and of scribal discussion, Greek had largely become established as the linguistic medium for trade, commerce and administration" (Ibid., p. 8).

Historical inscriptions attest to the fact that Galilee in the early Christian era was a bilingual society. Hengel states: "In economic terms Galilee was to a large extent dependent on the completely Hellenized Phoenician cities, especially Acco/Ptolemais and Tyre. The great cemetery in Beth-shearim between Nazareth and Haifa, which comes from between the second and fourth centuries CE, contains predominantly Greek inscriptions. Some of those buried there come from the Phoenician metropolises. After the death of R. Jehuda han-Nasi (after 200) the tombs of Beth-shearim took on a more than regional significance, like the Holy City before 70 CE. The marked increase in Greek inscriptions compared to those in Hebrew and Aramaic (218 to 28) is bound up with the

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further development of the process of Hellenization in the second to the fourth centuries CE ...” (Ibid., pp. 15-16).

Hengel points out the significance of these inscriptions, which supports the earlier findings of Schlatter and contradicts the opinion of the History of Religions school: “In the meantime we also have two bilingual inscriptions from Judaea and Galilee, quite apart from the large number of testimonies to use of the Greek language. Almost ninety years ago Schlatter had a completely correct view of the linguistic situation, a clearer one than the representatives of the History of Religions school.”

“The constant discovery of new inscriptions confirms this picture of a fundamentally multilingual society. Schlatter already drew attention to this situation in his famous study on ‘The Language and Homeland of the Fourth Evangelist’ (which is in no way taken seriously enough): ‘Here too the inscriptions are the decisive authority for assessing the linguistic question (of a bilingual situation, M.H.)’ ” (Ibid., p. 9).

Evidence That Greek Was Spoken by Jesus and the Apostles

In addition to the above evidence, the scholar Samuel G. Green wrote concerning the language spoken by Jesus and the apostles: “It was in the Greek of the Septuagint thus modified that, in all probability, our Lord and His apostles generally spoke. The dialect of Galilee (Matt. xxvi. 73) was not a corrupted Hebrew, but a provincial Greek” (Green, *Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek Testament*, p. 156).

The Gospel accounts verify that Jesus and His disciples, who were Galileans, spoke the Greek dialect of Galilee and not a corrupted Hebrew; hence Jesus’ words to the scribes and Pharisees at the temple: “Therefore, Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me, because I proceeded forth and came from God. For I have not come of Myself, but He sent Me. **Why don’t you understand My speech?** Because you cannot *bear* to hear My words’ ” (John 8:42-43, emphasis added).

In recording Jesus’ words, John shows that the scribes and Pharisees had difficulty understanding His Galilean dialect. John’s choice of the Greek word translated “speech” is **λαλια** *lalia*, which means “dialect.” The Pharisees had a problem with the Greek dialect of Jesus and His apostles throughout their ministries. As further evidence of this, Matthew comments that it was Peter’s Galilean Greek that gave him away during Jesus’ trial:

“Now Peter was sitting outside in the court; and a maid came to him, saying, ‘You also were with Jesus the Galilean.’ But he denied *it* before everyone, saying, ‘I don’t know what you are talking about.’ And after he went out into the porch, another *maid* saw him and said to those there, ‘This man was also with Jesus the Nazarean.’ Then again he denied *it* with an oath, *saying*, ‘I do not know the man.’ After a little *while*, those who were standing by came to Peter and said, ‘Truly, you also are one of them, for even **your speech shows that you are**’ ” (Matt. 26:69-73, emphasis added).

As the Greek in Peter’s epistles testifies, he was speaking and writing a better Greek than those at Jerusalem. The Greek they spoke would be the Greek that would carry the gospel message to the world and would be recorded for all time in the New Testament.

The very names of Jesus’ apostles are Greek: “Among the twelve disciples of Jesus, two, Andrew and Philip, bear purely Greek names, and in the case of two others the original Greek name has been Aramaized. Thaddaeus (*tadda’j*) is probably a short form of Theodotus (or something similar), and Bartholomew (*Bartholomaios* = *bar-talmaj*) derives from (bar) Ptolemaios. The blind beggar Bartimaeus (Bar-Timaios) in Jericho, who becomes a follower of Jesus, can also be mentioned in this connection” (Hengel,

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The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ, p. 16).

Even the areas that Jesus' disciples came from bear witness to their speaking Greek: "The information that Simon Peter, Andrew and Philip came from Bethsaida (John 1.44) could perhaps have historical value, since Herod's son Philip refounded this place soon after his accession as the *polis Julias* (before 2 BCE) in honour of Augustus' daughter Julia, and it was therefore more markedly 'Hellenized' than the surrounding villages....At all events, Simon Peter must have been bilingual, since otherwise he could not have engaged so successfully in missionary work outside Judaea....It is remarkable that Luke does not know of Peter having any problems with language—say in connection with Cornelius" (Ibid., p. 16).

The Followers of Jesus

As we find in historical records and in Scripture, those who responded to the preaching of the gospel were primarily Greek-speaking people. It is logical, therefore, to conclude that Jesus also spoke to them in Greek.

Scripture attests to the fact that many early converts were Greek speaking: "There are many references to what were in all probability bilingual members of the [early Christian] community from the upper and middle classes: mention should be made of Johanna, the wife of Chuza, the **ἐπιτροπος** of Herod Antipas, i.e., his steward; the tax farmers, like the **αρχιτελωνης** Zacchaeus in Jericho; then men like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea. The mysterious Manaen (Menachem) in Antioch, whose mother is perhaps mentioned by Papias, the boyhood friend (**συντροφος**) of Herod Antipas, Mary and her son John Mark, the relations of Barnabas, Silas-Silvanus, Barsabbas Justus, who similarly emerges again in Papias, the prophet Agabus and others may similarly belong to this milieu. Their circle is enlarged by Diaspora Jews resident in Jerusalem like Barnabas from Cyprus and Simon of Cyrene with his sons Alexander and Rufus. Simon's sons and his mother were perhaps known later in the Christian community in Rome, and Jason of Cyprus, Paul's host (Acts 21:16), whose mother tongue was already Greek, even if they still understood Aramaic or had relearned it" (Ibid., pp. 17-18).

Early Christians in Jerusalem Spoke Greek

Luke records that some of the earliest members of the church at Jerusalem were Greek-speaking Jews. Hengel's statement concerning the rapid growth of Christianity in this community follows:

"What was decisive for the subsequent course of primitive Christianity, however, was the amazingly rapid and intensive effect of the new message on the Greek-speaking Hellenists in Jerusalem....Here we have that social stratum in Jerusalem the significance of which ... has so far been neglected. The circle of Christians who came from it cannot have been all that small, otherwise their missionary activity in Jerusalem would not have provoked so much of a stir and caused such offense" (Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*, pp. 43-44).

In the book of Acts, Luke gives us insight into this early community of Greek-speaking Jews from which the first evangelists were chosen and from which the gospel spread to all Judea. Luke wrote: "Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a complaint by the Greeks [*KJV* 'Grecians' refers to Greek-speaking Jews] against the Hebrews [Jews whose native tongue was Aramaic], because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. And after calling the multitude of disciples to *them*, the twelve said, 'It is not proper *for* us to leave the Word of God in or-

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der to wait on tables. Therefore, brethren, search out from among yourselves seven men of good repute, full of *the* Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word.’ And this declaration was pleasing to all the multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and *the* Holy Spirit; and Philip; and Prochorus; and Nicanor; and Timon; and Parmenas; and Nicolas, *who was* a proselyte of Antioch. *And* they set them before the apostles; and after praying, they laid *their* hands on them. And the Word of God spread, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem was multiplied exceedingly, and a great multitude of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:1-7).

All seven of those chosen in Luke’s account bear Greek names. These Hellenized Jews spoke Greek as their native language as attested to by Hengel, who gives us linguistic evidence: “In contrast to the use of ‘Hellenizing’ and ‘Hellenism’ stamped by culture and intellectual history which is customary among theologians, and which ultimately goes back to Droysen, in antiquity the verb *ελληνίζειν* and the rare noun *Ελληνισμος* referred almost exclusively to language. Only rarely did these words have a comprehensive meaning relating to culture and civilization—with one significant exception to which we shall have to return—and there is evidence of this only in the post-Christian period. In Christian literature from the third-fourth century CE the term *Ελλην* and the other terms associated with it then generally came to mean ‘pagan.’ Before that, both terms primarily and in the first instance denoted an impeccable command of the Greek language. This also gives us a fairly clear criterion for distinction in this investigation: ‘Hellenistic’ Jews and Jewish Christians are (in the real, original meaning of the word) those whose mother tongue was Greek, in contrast to the Jews in Palestine and in the Babylonian Diaspora who originally spoke Aramaic. It is in this way, in terms of mother tongue, that Luke understands the distinction between *Ελληνισταί* and *Εβραίοι* in Acts 6.1 (cf. 9.29). The mother- (or main) language of the *Ελληνισταί* is Greek and that of the *Εβραίοι* Aramaic. However, we meet these two groups in Jerusalem itself, in the Jewish metropolis of the Holy Land—and that goes against the usual dividing line. It is too easily forgotten that in the time of Jesus, Greek had already been established as a language for more than three hundred years and already had a long and varied history behind it. As early as the third century [BC] in different parts of Palestine, we have a whole series of testimonies to Greek as a language, and they are slowly but steadily continuing to increase in number. The Greek language had already long been accepted not only in the former Philistine or Phoenician areas on the coast and (in the third century BCE) in the ‘Graeco-Macedonian’ cities in the interior, but also (though not so intensively) in areas settled by Jews and Samaritans” (Hengel, *The ‘Hellenization’ of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*, pp. 7-8).

Hengel believes that because Greek was spoken almost exclusively among this group of Hellenist Jews in Jerusalem, Jesus and His apostles must have evangelized them in Greek:

“During the lifetime of Jesus, the message of Jesus also reached Diaspora Jews in Jerusalem who almost only spoke Greek or spoke it exclusively; it was from among them that that group of Hellenists was recruited which separated because of its worship in Greek and as a special group in the community became significant in Jerusalem with such amazing rapidity. John 12.20f. could be a later reflection of this transition. Perhaps John 4.38 is a reference to their mission in Samaria (Acts 8.4ff.). At all events it is probable that the rendering of parts of the Jesus tradition into Greek and the development of a distinctive theological terminology with terms like: *αποστολος, ευαγγελιον, εκκλησια, χαρις, χαρισμα, ο υιος του ανθρωπου*, etc., must have begun very early, possibly as an immediate consequence of the activity of Jesus, which also at-

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tracted Diaspora Jews, in Jerusalem, and not, say, decades later outside Palestine in Antioch or elsewhere. In other words, **the roots of the ‘Jewish-Christian/Hellenistic’ or more precisely Greek-speaking Jewish Christian community in which the message of Jesus was formulated in Greek for the first time clearly extend back to the very earliest community in Jerusalem**, and accordingly the first linguistic development of its kerygma [preaching of the gospel] and its Christology [the study of Christ] must have already taken place there” (Ibid., p. 18, emphasis added).

The seven who were chosen to represent the Hellenist Jews in the Jerusalem church became evangelists who preached to Hellenist Jews in other parts of Judea. Hengel describes the Greek-speaking cities in which these men evangelized: “However, the significance of language was not just limited to Jerusalem. Thus a substantial Jewish population lived in the Hellenized cities of the coastal plain from Gaza to Dor or Ptolemais-Acco: in Caesarea they made up almost half the population, and in Jamnia certainly and Ashdod probably they outnumbered the Hellenized Gentile population. Philip, who came from the group around Stephen, may have preached primarily in Greek in the coastal plain and particularly in Caesarea. That Greek was the principal language in these cities is again confirmed by Jewish epitaphs and synagogue inscriptions” (Ibid., p. 14).

It is evident that Paul, whom God selected to preach to the Gentiles, also spoke Greek. Luke recorded that shortly after Saul’s conversion, he became involved in a dispute with the Greek-speaking Jews of Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-31). In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul described himself as a “Hebrew of Hebrews” (Phil. 3:5). Paul had been trained at the feet of Gamaliel, the leading rabbi of that period in Jewish history, and Paul was fully capable of speaking Hebrew to the Pharisaic Jews of Jerusalem (Acts 21:40). However, Paul did not customarily speak Hebrew. He was equally knowledgeable in the Greek language, as the same passage in the book of Acts shows (Acts 21:37-39). Paul could not have preached throughout Asia without this ability to speak Greek. Thus the records of the New Testament demonstrate that the preaching of the gospel was carried out almost exclusively in Greek.

The Gospel Was Recorded in Greek

The books of the New Testament were written between 26 and 96 AD, a period of almost seventy years. As internal evidence reveals, Jesus’ disciples recorded His message and began to circulate these writings throughout Palestine and the Empire at a very early date. These documents were later collected into the Gospel accounts—Matthew’s account may have appeared as early as 35 AD; Mark wrote his account shortly after, in 42 AD, and Luke wrote his account around 59 AD. The Gospel of John also was written about 42 AD.

In 50 AD Paul wrote the first of his epistles that would appear in Scripture. The rest of Paul’s epistles were written between 51 and 67 AD. The epistle of James was written around 40-41 AD. The epistles of Peter were written between 63 and 66 AD. Jude was written sometime around 67 AD. The letters of I, II and III John were written about 63-64 AD. The book of Hebrews was written from Rome about 61 AD. Thus the basic canon of the New Testament was completed by the time the Jewish Wars began—that is, about 66 AD. The book of Revelation, the final book of the New Testament, was written by the aged apostle John about 95-96 AD.

The early New Testament text was copied and preserved by the brethren in Asia Minor. It was this text that was generally adopted by Christians in the 4th century as the text of the New Testament. From that time forward, it has been known as the Byzantine

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text. The Byzantine text, of which the King James Version is a translation, is the most authoritative Greek text of the New Testament. Its role as the leading Greek text dates back to the beginning of the Byzantine period, for which the text is named: “The Byzantine text is found in the vast majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts. It is called *Byzantine* because it was the Greek New Testament text in general use throughout the greater part of the Byzantine Period (312-1453). For many centuries before the Protestant Reformation this Byzantine text was the text of the entire Greek Church, and for more than three centuries after the Reformation it was the text of the entire Protestant Church. Even today it is the text which most Protestants know best, since the King James Version and other early Protestant translations were made from it” (Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, p. 40).

As Hills explains, the authenticity of the Byzantine text is supported by a history dating back to the apostolic era: “This general trend in the Greek Church toward the Byzantine (true) text first evidenced itself in Antioch and Asia Minor....It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that this text had been preserved in these regions from apostolic times. Before the middle of the fourth century its circulation in this area was probably confined to the humbler believers, the more scholarly Christians (the leaders) being inclined toward the text of Alexandria, that great center of Christian scholarship, or toward the Western text, which was in vogue at Rome. But after the triumph of orthodoxy in Antioch and Asia Minor during the latter half of the fourth century, this popular text came more and more into its own. Orthodox scholars, such as Diodorus and Chrysostom, came more and more to appreciate its orthodox character and to adopt it. Soon its victory was complete, and it became the New Testament text of the whole Greek Church, of the Protestant Reformation, and of our familiar King James Version” (Ibid., p. 56).

Descriptions of the Original Manuscripts of the New Testament

Some claim that the New Testament was originally written in Hebrew and then translated into Greek. However, the records of early church history do not support this assertion. Tatian, Papias, Tertullian and Irenaeus, to name but a few writers of the early church, describe the original writings and quote from them. Yet not a single quote is taken from a Hebrew text—all are taken from Greek texts. Although Papias asserts that Matthew compiled his early reports in Hebrew, no evidence is given.

Early translations of the New Testament are all based on Greek texts. *The Harmony of Tatian*, translated in 170 AD, is based on a Greek original, as is *The Muratorian Canon*. The Old Latin version translated in 180 AD is based on a Greek original. Early Gothic, Egyptian, Ethiopian, Armenian and Palestinian versions are all based on Greek originals. Even the Aramaic versions of the New Testament are translations from the Greek (see *The Books and the Parchments*, by F. F. Bruce, p. 189). No evidence of a Hebrew original has been found in all the centuries that have followed the writing of the New Testament.

Internal Evidence in the New Testament

If the New Testament was originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic, there would have been no need for the apostles to interpret the meaning of Hebrew and Aramaic words for their readers. However, the Gospel accounts contain many such interpretations. Consider the following passage in the Gospel of John:

“On the next day, John [the Baptist] was again standing *there*, and two of his dis-

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ciples *with him*. And as he gazed upon Jesus walking, he said, ‘Behold the Lamb of God!’ And the two disciples heard him say *this*, and they followed Jesus. Now when Jesus turned and saw them following, He said to them, ‘What are you seeking?’ And they said to Him, ‘**Rabbi**, [Greek **Ραββι** *Rabbi*, meaning “my teacher”]’ (which is to say, being interpreted, Teacher [Greek **Διδασκαλε** *didaskale*]), ‘where do You dwell?’ He said to them, ‘Come and see.’ They went and saw where He was dwelling, and remained with Him that day. Now it was about *the* tenth hour. Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who heard *this* from John and followed Him. First, he found his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the **Messiah**, [Greek **Μεσσιαν** *Messiah* meaning “the Anointed”] (which is, being interpreted, ‘**the Christ**’) [Greek **ο χριστος** *Christos*]. And he led him to Jesus. And when He saw him, Jesus said, ‘You are Simon the son of Jona. You shall be called **Cephas**’ [Greek **Κηφας** *Cephas*], (which is, *being* interpreted, ‘a **stone**’ [Greek **Πετρος** *Petros*])” (John 1:35-42).

The words “Rabbi” and “Messiah” are Hebrew. The word “Cephas” is Aramaic. If John had written his Gospel in Hebrew or Aramaic, these words would not have required translation for Greek-speaking readers.

“Rabbi” is a transliteration of the Greek **Ραββι**, which is a transliteration of the Hebrew **רַבִּי** and literally means “Lord” or “Master.” The Greek **Διδασκαλε** *didaskale* is a paraphrase of the Greek **Ραββι**. John interprets this term for the sake of his Greek readers who were not familiar with the Hebrew Rabbi, and therefore would not have understood the Greek transliteration **Ραββι**.

“Messiah” is a transliteration of the Greek **Μεσσιαν** *Messian* which is a Hellenized transliteration of the Hebrew **מָשִׁיחַ** *Meshiach*. The Hellenized Jews, to whom John was writing, were not acquainted with this Hebrew term. Thus John translated it into the Greek word *Christos*, which means “the Anointed One.” If John had written in Hebrew to a Hebrew-speaking people, it would make no sense to translate into Greek.

“Cephas” is an Aramaic word meaning “little stone” or “pebble.” John felt it necessary to translate this word for the Hellenized Jews, who were no more familiar with Aramaic than with Hebrew.

Other examples of the translation of Hebrew terms can be found in John’s Gospel: “Now *as Jesus was* passing by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither did this man sin, nor his parents; rather, *this blindness came* so that the works of God might be manifested in him. I must work the works of Him Who sent Me while it is still day. When *the* night comes, no one is able to work. As long as I am in the world, I am *the* light of the world.’ After saying these things, He spat on *the* ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to the eyes of the blind man. And He said to him, ‘Go *and* wash in the pool of **Siloam**’ (which is, by interpretation, “Sent”). Then he went and washed, and came *from there* seeing” (John 9:1-7).

The name “Siloam” is a transliteration of the Greek **Σιλωαμ**, which is a transliteration of the Hebrew **הַשִּׁלּוֹחַ**. Again, it is evident that the apostle John was writing to a Greek-speaking audience that did not understand the meaning of this Hebrew term.

Evidence in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke

Evidence found in Matthew 11 shows that Matthew not only wrote in Greek but wrote at the time of Jesus’ ministry from 26 to 30 AD. The events that are recorded in Mathew 11 are also recounted in Luke. These accounts add to the evidence that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke were written early in the first century, and they were written

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in Greek: “And as they were leaving, Jesus said to the multitudes concerning John, ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by *the* wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold, those who wear soft *clothing* are in kings’ houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and *one* more excellent than a prophet. For this is *he* of whom it is written, “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who shall prepare Your way before You.” Truly I say to you, there has not arisen among *those* born of women *anyone* greater than John the Baptist. But the one who *is* least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. For from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven is taken with a *great* struggle, and *the* zealous *ones* lay hold on it. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive *it*, he is Elijah who was to come. The one who has ears to hear, let him hear. But to what shall I compare this generation? It is exactly like little children sitting in *the* markets and calling to their companions, and saying, “We have piped to you, and you did not dance; we have mourned to you, and you did not wail.” For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a man who is a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is justified by her children” (Matt. 11:7-19).

Hengel points out the profound importance of this passage in dating the Gospel of Matthew: “With exemplary method Gerd Theissen has been able to interpret Matthew 11.7f/Luke 7.25f. as specific polemic against Antipas and as support for the circle of John the Baptist by using coins minted at the foundation of Tiberias and the reed depicted on them. From his interpretation of this logion in terms of contemporary history it becomes clear how in all probability we can identify an authentic saying of Jesus here. As Antipas was banished to Gaul as early as 38 CE, this saying with its unique parallelism between a ‘reed moved by the wind’ and ‘a man in soft raiment’, ‘gorgeously apparelled and living in luxury in kings’ courts’, certainly cannot be a late ‘community construction’. **It would only be comprehensible to the immediate contemporaries of Jesus and John the Baptist**, but nevertheless has been handed down relatively unchanged. The derogatory designation of Antipas as an ever-adaptable ‘reed’ also matches the title ‘fox’ given to him in Luke 13.32” (Hengel, *The ‘Hellenization’ of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*, pp. 42-43).

Matthew’s and Luke’s use of terms known to the Greek-speaking community of Jesus’ day contradicts the claim that their Gospels were not written until later generations and verifies that they wrote in Greek to an audience that understood Greek. From the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel, it is evident that he was not writing to a Hebrew-speaking people. The following passage from Matthew illustrates this: “And the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: Now His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph; *but* before they came together, she was found to be with child of *the* Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous *man*, and not willing to expose her publicly, was planning to divorce her secretly. But as he pondered these things, behold, an angel of *the* Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to *be* your wife, because that which has been begotten in her is of *the* Holy Spirit. And she shall give birth to a son, and you shall call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins.’ Now all this came to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall give birth to a son, and they shall call His name “Emmanuel”’; which is, being interpreted, ‘God with us’ ” (Matt. 1:18-23).

The name “Emmanuel” is a transliteration of the Greek Εμμανουηλ, which is a transliteration of the Hebrew אֱמָנוּאֵל. The fact that Matthew had to interpret the meaning of this Hebrew name illustrates that he was writing in Greek to a Greek-

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speaking audience. Further evidence that Matthew wrote in Greek to a people who spoke Greek, and not in Hebrew, is furnished by two grammatical structures unique to the Greek: the articular infinitive and the genitive absolute. Neither of these grammatical structures has a comparable structure in Hebrew.

The Articular Infinitive in the Gospel of Matthew

Matthew's use of the articular infinitive offers absolute evidence that his Gospel was written in Greek. In English, the word "to" is always used with the infinitive form of the verb, as in "to be," "to come," and "to speak." The Greek infinitive is similar to the English infinitive unless it is preceded by the definite article "the." When the definite article "the" is used, the infinitive is known as an **articular infinitive**. In New Testament Greek, when the articular infinitive is combined with a preposition, it limits the infinitive to a specific time period. Dana and Mantey stated the following: "Nothing distinguishes the noun force of the infinitive more than its use with the [definite] article....**This item is one of the proofs of the general good quality of New Testament Greek**" (*A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 211).

Matthew's precise and well written Greek is illustrated by his use of the articular infinitive with the Greek preposition *en*: "Now in that same day, Jesus departed from the house and sat down by the sea. And so great a multitude gathered around Him that He went into a ship and sat down, and all the multitude stood on the shore. And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, 'Behold, the sower went out to sow. And **as he was sowing**, some *of the seed* fell by the way; and the birds came and devoured them. And some fell upon the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up **because the soil was not deep enough**; but after *the* sun rose, they were scorched; and because they did not have roots, they dried up. And some *of the seed* fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. And some fell upon the good ground, and yielded fruit—some a hundredfold, and some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold. The one who has ears to hear, let him hear.' And His disciples came to Him and asked, 'Why do You speak to them in parables?' And He answered *and* said to them, 'Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has *understanding*, to him more shall be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have *understanding*, even what he has shall be taken away from him. For this *reason* I speak to them in parables, because seeing, they see not; and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand' " (Matt. 13:1-13).

The phrase "**as he was sowing**" contains an articular infinitive. This expression in the Greek is **και εν τω σπειρειν**. When the articular infinitive is used with the preposition **εν** *en*, the definite article is dative, which means that the time at which something occurs is being expressed. Thus George Ricker Berry in his Greek Interlinear translates it "And *as* he sowed."

Another illustration of the precision and high level of Matthew's Greek is found in the very next verse, Matthew 13:5. Matthew now uses the articular infinitive with the preposition *dia*, however. Verse 5 reads, "and immediately they sprang up **because the soil was not deep enough**; but after *the* sun rose, they were scorched; and because they did not have roots, they dried up."

The expression "**because the soil was not deep enough**" also contains an articular infinitive. The Greek is **δια το μη εχειν βαθος γης** which begins with **δια** *dia*. When an infinitive is used with the preposition **δια** *dia*, the definite article is accusative with cause; i.e., "for" or "because of." Thus Berry translates this phrase "**because of not having depth of earth.**"

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More examples of Matthew's use of the articular infinitive could be given. These examples, however, are sufficient to demonstrate his mastery of literary Greek. His usage of the articular infinitive illustrates the fact that Matthew not only grew up speaking Greek but that he also had formal training in Greek rhetoric.

Matthew's Use of the Genitive Absolute

The Greek genitive case primarily signifies motion from a person, place or thing. The genitive absolute is a genitive noun that occurs in a subordinate sentence without immediate dependence on any other words; i.e., it occurs absolutely. As Green stated, "The noun, in these cases, is to be translated first, without a preposition, then the participle. In idiomatic English, a conjunction must often be supplied, either temporal (*when*), causal (*since*), or concessive (*although*). It will be observed that the genitive in this construction must refer to some other than the subject of the principal sentence. Equivalent idioms are in English the nominative absolute, in Latin the ablative absolute....The genitive absolute, says Dr. Donaldson, is originally causal, in conformity with the primary notion of the case. Hence arise, by way of analogy, its other uses as denoting accessories of time, manner, or circumstance. The tense of the participle greatly determines the force of the phrase" (*Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek Testament*, pp. 221-222). Green amplified the importance of the participle in genitive absolute constructions. He wrote, "When a participle has a subject of its own in a separate clause, the construction is the genitive absolute" (*Ibid.*, p. 330).

Three examples of the genitive absolute used by Matthew as translated by Green follow:

| | |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Matt. 1:18 | μνηστευθεισης ... Μαρίας,
<i>Mary having been betrothed</i> |
| Matt. 1:20 | ταυτα δε αυτου ενθυμηθεντος,
<i>and he having reflected on these things,</i>
i.e., when he reflected |
| Matt. 2:1 | του Ιησου γεννηθεντος,
<i>Jesus having been born,</i>
i.e., when Jesus was born |

The first example of a genitive absolute is found in Matthew 1:18. The Greek phrase is **μνηστευθεισης γαρ της μητρος αυτου Μαρίας**. Green translated this genitive absolute beginning with the noun "Mary" (without a preposition), followed immediately by the participial phrase "having been" and then the verb "betrothed": "*Mary having been betrothed.*"

The genitive absolute in Matthew 1:20 is the Greek phrase **ταυτα δε αυτου ενθυμηθεντος**, which Berry translated literally, "And these things when he had pondered." Green translated this genitive absolute beginning with the temporal conjunction "when," followed immediately by the personal pronoun "he," and then the verb "reflected": "*when he reflected.*"

The third use of the genitive absolute is found in Matthew 2:1: "Now when **Jesus was born** in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem." The Greek genitive absolute translated "Jesus was born" is **του Ιησου γεννηθεντος**.

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Greek and the Seven Evangelists

Within the text of Acts 6:1-7, it is quite evident that Greek was the mother tongue of the original seven evangelists who spread the gospel far and wide. As Hengel pointed out, their names support this conclusion. The cities in which these men evangelized were Greek-speaking communities. Hengel wrote, “Mention should of course be made here of the ‘Seven’ as the spokesmen of the Hellenist community (Acts 6.5), who all have Greek names, and naturally—above all others as far as his effect on the Christian church and world history is concerned—of Sha’ul/Paul, who studied the Torah in Jerusalem and persecuted the community of Christian ‘Hellenists’ ” (Hengel, *The ‘Hellenization’ of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*, p. 18).

Furthermore, shortly after Saul’s conversion, he became involved in a dispute with the Grecians of Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-31). The word Grecians in this passage does not refer to Gentile Greeks but to Greek-speaking Jews. Here is Scriptural evidence that Paul used the Greek language, not Hebrew.

There is no question that Paul spoke Greek, and all of his epistles were written in Greek. Hebrew was not the language of Palestine during the days of Jesus’ ministry; neither was it the language of the apostles. Therefore, it can be concluded that Jesus and all of the apostles spoke Greek, and the entire New Testament was originally written in Koine Greek. God inspired men to preserve the New Testament in Koine Greek. This text, as noted earlier in this chapter, is commonly known today as the Byzantine Text. This knowledge of *what* language the New Testament was written will lead us into *who* wrote it in the following chapter.

Later Aramaic and Hebrew Translations of Gospel of Matthew From the Original Greek: According to Johannes Weiss, the late professor of theology at the University of Heidelberg, “Among the Jewish Christians of Beroea in Coele-Syria ... who as a separate community under the earliest name of the Christians (Nazarenes) existed as late as the second half of the third century [late 200s AD], there arose after 150 [AD] a targumistic translation of the Gospel of Matthew in the Aramaic (Syriac) language and in Hebrew characters, the Gospel of the Nazarenes....[It] remained for a century and a half completely concealed from the view of [most] ecclesiastical writers, until in one exemplar it came into the hands of Eusebius of Caesarea and by him was immediately received and used as the original Hebrew Matthew of tradition, long believed lost” (Weiss, *The History of Primitive Christianity*, pp. 669-670, quoting Schmidtke, “Neue Fragmente und Untersuchungen zu den judenchristlichen Evangelien,” *Texte und Untersuchungen*). This revised gospel was mistakenly considered by many to be the original due to Eusebius’ influence. In addition, the Jewish Christians of Transjordan (Ebionites) used an excised Hebrew version of Matthew’s Gospel (with readings from Luke’s Gospel inserted), which “lacked not only a genealogy but an infancy narrative” among other segments (Ibid., pp. 736-737).

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WHO WROTE THE NEW TESTAMENT?

The answer to this question is fundamental to the authenticity and authority of the New Testament as the inspired Word of God. Some scholars and theologians believe that the New Testament is merely a collection of religious myths written decades after the deaths of those who were traditionally held to have written them. However, when one examines the New Testament, one discovers substantial evidence that those who wrote it were the original disciples of Jesus Christ and eyewitnesses of His ministry, and that what they wrote is the true, inspired Word of God.

Part One: The Compilation and Writing of the Gospels and the Book of Acts

No one today who seeks to know the authorship of the Gospels can ignore the popular theories of scholars who believe that the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were written by third- or fourth-generation storytellers and are pure folklore and myth. Robert W. Funk and the scholars in the “Jesus Seminar” in Santa Rosa, California, are perhaps the most extreme of this group in their rejection of the Gospels—and the rest of the New Testament—as the divine Word of God. They theorize that nearly all the stories about Jesus Christ contained in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are purely folklore. Their theory of the compilation of the Gospels follows:

“In the absence of hard information, scholars theorize that the New Testament gospels were composed during the last quarter of the first century by third-generation authors on the basis of folk memories preserved in stories that had circulated by word of mouth for decades. The oral stories the four evangelists recorded had been shaped, reshaped, augmented, and edited by numerous storytellers for a half century or more before achieving their final written forms” (Robert W. Funk and the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus*, p. 2).

“The followers of Jesus no doubt began to repeat his witticisms and parables during his lifetime. They soon began to recount stories about him, perhaps about his encounters with critics or about his amazing way with the sick and demon-possessed. As time went by, the words were gathered into compounds and clusters suggested by common themes or by catchwords to make them easier to remember and quote. His parables were retold and adapted to new audiences with each performance. The stories were likewise repeated by individual storytellers, who retold them in their own words, sometimes adding or omitting details as imagination or memory dictated” (Ibid., p. 2).

“Since much of the lore about Jesus was created and transmitted by word of mouth for a few decades before it was written down, it is folklore....In the manufacture and maintenance of folklore, memory does not function like a videotape. It is not possible to rewind and replay one’s memories. On the contrary, memories are constantly edited, deleted, augmented, and combined with other memories as persons call them to mind. And when one adds the element of fear, or paranoia, or conviction, or nostalgia,

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those memories can become more vivid and powerful than everyday life” (Ibid., pp. 5-6).

“Scholars of the gospels are faced with a similar problem: Much of the lore recorded in the gospels and elsewhere in the Bible is folklore, which means that it is wrapped in memories that have been edited, deleted, augmented, and combined many times over many years” (Ibid., p. 6).

“There are at least five conditions that might have prompted them to employ their imaginations. They might have created stories to fulfill a prophecy or to match scriptural language. They might have invented stories to assist in marketing the messiah to the larger world. They might have made up tales to give expression to their own convictions about who Jesus was and what he did and said. They might have imagined scenes to justify practices adopted by themselves or their communities. And they might have put into a fictive story form claims that they were making on their own behalf or on the behalf of their leaders” (Ibid., pp. 6-7).

“At the time the first written gospel was being produced, this shaping process was not, and could not be, corrected by additional evidence supplied, for example, by written documents (there were very few during the first couple of decades) or by recourse to the memories of eyewitnesses (they were no longer on the scene). That is the reason later gospel writers are dependent on earlier documents for their information” (Ibid., p. 4).

As a result of their assumptions, Funk and his colleagues have concluded that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are pure folklore—not the inspired word of God. In their words, “**The gospels are now assumed to be narratives in which the memory of Jesus is embellished by the mythic elements that express the church’s faith in him, and by plausible fictions that enhance the telling of the gospel story for first-century listeners** who knew about divine men and miracle workers firsthand” (Robert W. Funk, Roy Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels*, pp. 4-5, emphasis added). They believe that the Gospels were not written by Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, but by others, long after the original apostles and other eyewitnesses had died.

Contrary to these scholars’ theories and opinions, compilation of the Gospels began early—within one year after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—not decades later.

Isaiah Prophesied That the Disciples of Jesus Christ Would Write the New Testament

Isaiah’s prophecy foretells and also directs the specially chosen disciples of Jesus Christ to write what would become the New Testament: “**Bind up the testimony, seal the law among My disciples**” (Isa. 8:16). This prophecy clearly reveals that God did not leave the writing of the most important book in the world to those who were not disciples of Jesus Christ or eyewitnesses of His ministry. When Isaiah was given this prophecy, God commanded him not to walk in the way of the people—a significant command not only for Isaiah’s time but also for that of Jesus Christ and His apostles. Just as God commanded Isaiah not to join the confederacy of the people, neither was Jesus to align Himself with the religious leaders of His time. Likewise, the disciples of Jesus Christ were not to join any ecumenical confederacy of religions of this world—neither then nor now! Isaiah was inspired to write: “For thus the LORD spoke to me with a strong hand, and **warned me against walking in the way of this people**, saying, ‘Do not say, “A conspiracy!” to everything of which this people says, “A conspiracy!” **And do not fear their fear, nor be afraid**’ ” (Isa. 8:11-12).

As Isaiah continues, we find commands for the disciples of Jesus Christ, who

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were instructed to sanctify God and fear Him rather than men: “The LORD of hosts, Him shall you sanctify, and *let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread.* And He shall be a sanctuary *for you...*” Next, Isaiah prophesies that for those who refuse to listen to, or reject, Jesus Christ, He would be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence: “...—But [He, Jesus Christ would be] **for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, and for a trap and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble and fall and be broken, and be snared, and be taken**” (Isa. 8:13-15).

The apostle Paul quoted this prophecy to explain why Israel rejected Jesus Christ. Just as Isaiah had prophesied, Israel stumbled at Christ, who was that Rock (I Cor. 10:4). He became to them a rock of offense and a stone of stumbling. In Paul’s words: “But Israel, although they followed after a law of righteousness, did not attain to a law of righteousness. Why? Because *they did not seek it* by faith, but by works of law; for they stumbled at the Stone of stumbling, exactly as it is written: ‘Behold, I place in Sion a Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offence, but everyone who believes in Him shall not be ashamed’ ” (Rom. 9:31-33).

Dr. Ernest L. Martin, noted Biblical scholar, commented on the meaning of the prophecy of Isaiah 8:16: “Christ did not mean that he would personally add to the Law and the Prophets by composing books of his own. A reading of the Old Testament revealed to the apostles that it was *they* who were to be responsible for writing and selecting the documents which would comprise the New Testament” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, p. 297).

Martin comments on the meaning of two key words in Isaiah 8:16: “What do the words ‘bind’ and ‘seal’ signify? The Hebrew for the word ‘bind’ means ‘to close.’ The word ‘seal’ means practically the same—‘to cap off, to enclose.’ This is exactly what the apostles did with the message which the ‘Stone’ and ‘Rock’ gave them. They were to complete it. Bind it up. Close it shut. The authority to perform such an important job may have been reflected in Christ’s teaching that the apostles had the power ‘to bind on earth’ (Matthew 16:19). The word ‘to bind’ had the significance of authorization of giving judgment, just as the word ‘to unbind’ means ‘not to receive or not accept’. Recall again the intention of Matthew 5:17: ‘I am not come *to unbind* the Law or the Prophets.’ Christ did not wish to undo the Old Testament, but his disciples were commissioned ‘to add to’ and ‘to complete’ the Bible. In a word, the apostles felt that they had authority, even from the Old Testament, to bind, seal, authorize and canonize the Law and Testimony of Christ. This meant to put the teachings of Christ in a book, just like the Old Testament was given to the early Jews” (Ibid., pp. 298-299).

Isaiah concludes his prophecy by showing that Jesus Christ and His apostles and His disciples would form the New Testament Church: “Behold, I [Jesus Christ] and the children [the disciples and apostles] whom the LORD has given me *are* for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, Who dwells in mount Zion” (Isa. 8:18). Therefore, the apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ, who were eyewitnesses of His life and ministry, were the ones who wrote the New Testament. They were to “bind up the testimony” and “seal the law”—they were to complete the testimony and teach the true spiritual meaning of the law. This task would not have been left to others, living 100 to 150 years later, who never knew or met Jesus in the flesh.

The Importance of Faithful Eyewitnesses

From the commands of God in the Bible we know that God lays stress on the duty of witnesses to be truthful. In fact, the Ninth Commandment reads: “You shall not bear false witness against your” (Ex. 20:16KJ). Nevertheless, because human testimony is

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sometimes fallible, when there was a criminal case that came before the judges of Israel, God commanded that only by the mouth of two or three witnesses should a man be put to death—never on the testimony of one person: “At the mouth of two witnesses or three witnesses shall he that is worthy of death be put to death. At the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. The hands of the witnesses shall be *the* first on him to put him to death [by stoning], and afterwards the hands of all the people. So you shall put the evil away from among you” (Deut. 17:6-7). Again, “One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sins. At the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be made sure” (Deut. 19:15).

Because God is righteous and true, He will not tolerate false witnesses. God commanded that those who acted as false witnesses would suffer the same judgment that they desired to inflict upon the accused. God’s commands are very specific: “If a false witness rises up purposing to do harm against any man to accuse him of wrongdoing, Then both the men who are disagreeing shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges which shall be in those days. And the judges shall make careful inquiry. And behold, **if the witness is a false witness and has testified falsely against his brother; then you shall do to him as he had thought to have done to his brother. So you shall put the evil away from among you.** And those who remain shall hear and fear, and shall not commit again any such evil among you” (Deut. 19:16-20).

It is self-evident that truth is established by true and faithful witnesses. Jesus Christ specifically chose those who would bear true witness of His teachings and ministry. Therefore, we can have full assurance that those who wrote the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament wrote the truth and nothing less: “**A faithful witness will not lie; but a false witness will speak lies**” (Prov. 14:5). And again, “**A true witness delivers souls, but a deceitful witness speaks lies**” (Prov. 14:25).

The whole purpose of Jesus Christ’s life and ministry was to testify of the truth of God, to reveal God the Father and bring the way of salvation to mankind. Since Jesus Christ is “the way, the truth and the life,” He was and is a true witness of God the Father as aforementioned, “**A true witness delivers souls.**” Recall what Jesus told the Jews and religious leaders of Judaism: “If I bear witness of Myself, My testimony is not true [God the Father did not use only one witness]. **There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the testimony that he witnesses concerning Me is true. You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth.** Now I do not receive witness from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. **But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works that the Father gave Me to complete, the very works that I am doing, themselves bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me**” (John 5:31-36). There is no question that the witness of John the Baptist was true. More importantly, Jesus’ witness and testimony are true, because as God manifested in the flesh He would always speak the truth.

The Greek word for a witness is *μαρτυρος* *marturos*, which “... signifies one that gives testimony to the truth at the expense of his life” (*Gruden’s Complete Concordance*, 1986, p. 754). Jesus was the ultimate Witness. He died not only for the sins of the world but for the truth of God as well. In the beginning of the book of Revelation, the apostle John wrote of Jesus as “the faithful Witness” (see Rev. 1:4-5).

Jesus Christ, the faithful and true Witness, commanded His disciples in turn to preach the gospel to all nations as His witnesses. “And [Jesus] said to them, ‘According as it is written, it was necessary for the Christ to suffer, and to rise from *the* dead the third day. And in His name, repentance and remission of sins should be preached to all

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nations, beginning at Jerusalem. **For you are witnesses of these things’** ” (Luke 24:46-48).

The Gospels: Eyewitness Testimonies

As we begin to understand how the Gospels were compiled and written, we must bear in mind that the process of their writing was much different from the writing of the epistles (letters from the apostles James, Peter, John, Jude and Paul, addressed to the body of believers). They are not a detailed history of events covering many years, as are the Gospels and the book of Acts. The Epistles were generally composed by one person or dictated to a scribe over a short period of time, with perhaps several edits and rewrites before the final version was sent out. The Gospels and Acts are different because they contain material from many sources and persons that was collected over a number of years and then put into final form.

As we examine the four Gospels and the book of Acts for evidence of how the Gospels were written and compiled, we learn that the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus Christ were written by direct eyewitnesses—Jesus’ disciples—during His ministry, with the exception of Luke, who used the eyewitness accounts of many disciples. The twelve disciples who were called and ordained by Jesus as apostles were the primary eyewitnesses, and we can accept their writings and testimonies as the truth. In addition, there were many other eyewitnesses who authenticated the disciples’ testimonies. The scriptural evidence confirms that the accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry were compiled and written long before the eyewitness writers died. Contrary to the theories of some scholars, some of the accounts that later became part of the Gospels arguably were written very early—at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, in 26 AD.

The Twelve Apostles

The word *apostle* means “one sent bearing authority.” The apostles were personally commissioned by Jesus Christ to bear His authority and were sent in His name to preach the gospel in all the world. Jesus Christ called the twelve apostles when He began His ministry in Galilee. The first ones to accept the call to follow Him were Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, then James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Matt. 4:18-21). Next Jesus called Matthew, the son of Alphaeus, a Levite and a tax collector (Mark 2:13-14; Matt. 9:9). A short time later He called the other seven.

When the time came for Jesus to appoint and ordain the twelve as apostles, He prayed to God the Father all night and then selected them from among the disciples who followed Him. Those He named and ordained were Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot (Luke 6:12-16; Mark 3:13-19).

The Gospel of Matthew

Who was Matthew? D. Edmond Hiebert, Th.D., who has served on the faculties of Tabor College and Mennonite Brethren Seminary, Fresno, California, states: “The gospels record only a few historical details concerning the apostle Matthew. He was the son of a man named Alphaeus (Mk 2:14). Another disciple, James, was also identified as the son of Alphaeus (Mk 3:18; Lk 6:15), but there is no indication that these two disciples were brothers. Matthew was an employee at the tollhouse in Capernaum. He was either employed directly by Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, or he worked under a

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person who had the taxes of the district in tenure. Matthew's immediate positive response to the call of Jesus makes it obvious that he had been among the multitudes attending the preaching of Jesus and had been deeply impressed. After Jesus called him, Levi (meaning that Matthew was a Levite) gave 'a great feast in his house' (Lk 5:29) in honor of his new Master to which he had invited many other publicans [tax collectors]. This may hint that he was a man of considerable means and owned a large home" (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1, p. 61).

We know from the gospel accounts that Matthew was with Jesus Christ during His entire ministry. As a Levite, Matthew would have had knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. When we examine the Gospel of Matthew, it becomes evident that its writer used his knowledge of the Scriptures to show how prophecies were fulfilled in the life of Jesus and by the events of His ministry. As a tax collector, Matthew must have been very well educated and skilled in record keeping. In order to keep tax records for Herod Antipas, he would have had an excellent command of Greek. There is little doubt that Matthew used his varied talents to record the teachings and activities of Jesus from the beginning of His ministry in 26 AD. This is especially evident when we closely examine the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew, in chapters 5 through 7. When compared to the account in Luke 6, Matthew's account is a detailed, almost word-for-word rendition of what Jesus taught His disciples. Therefore, there is no reason to doubt that the apostle Matthew wrote the Gospel that bears his name.

The Gospel of John

The historical acceptance of the apostle John as author of the Gospel of John is based on an ancient source. As described by Hiebert: "In A.D. 324 or 325, Eusebius in his noted *Ecclesiastical History* recorded the results of his investigations concerning the four gospels. He wrote about the apostle John, 'His Gospel, which is known to all the churches under heaven, must be acknowledged as genuine.' In the same chapter he asserts, 'But of the writings of John, not only his Gospel, but also the former of his epistles, have been accepted without dispute both now and in ancient times [from the days before John died]. Thiessen declares, 'The external evidence for the early date and apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel is as great as that for any book in the New Testament'" (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1, pp. 192-193).

Hiebert (citing B. F. Westcott) also summarized the internal evidence that John was the author of the fourth Gospel: "1) the author was a Jew; 2) the author was a Jew of Palestine; 3) the author was an eyewitness of what he describes; 4) the author was an apostle; 5) the author was the apostle John. He [Westcott] supports each link in the chain with a full presentation of evidence found in the gospel itself. He established the last point through the expression 'the disciple whom Jesus loved,' as confirmed by the picture in the synoptics [the first three Gospels]" (Ibid., p. 203).

From the Gospels, we know that the apostle John was with Jesus throughout His ministry. Moreover, Jesus had an unusual relationship with John, whom he greatly loved (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). While He was dying on the cross, Jesus entrusted John with the care of His mother Mary (John 19:26-27). Furthermore, John had a special vantage point in that he (with his brother James and the apostle Peter) witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus. The Gospel of John is entirely different from the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). It contains deeper spiritual teachings than the other Gospels. When we examine the writings of the apostle John, it is evident that he was moved to write more about the love of God than were any of the other apostles. Moreover, because the chronology of the Gospel of John follows the progression of the annual holy days, it gives us an accurate, year-by-year time frame for Jesus' ministry. There can

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be little question that the apostle John wrote the Gospel that bears his name. In one of his closing remarks, John states why he wrote his account of the ministry of Jesus Christ: “Now then, Jesus did many other miracles in *the* presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book. **But these have been written, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, you may have life through His name**” (John 20:30-31).

The Gospel of Mark

This Gospel is unique in that its writer (Mark) was probably a teenager at the time of Jesus’ ministry. In his account, Mark identifies himself as the one who fled naked when Jesus was arrested, the night before His crucifixion (Mark 14:51-52). From this account we know that Mark was indeed an eyewitness to Jesus’ ministry, although he was not chosen to be an apostle. Mark lived in Jerusalem with his mother, Mary, who was also a disciple of Jesus (Acts 12:12). Beginning in 44 AD, Mark worked with Paul and Barnabas before returning to Jerusalem. After that, he continued to work for a time with Barnabas (Acts 15:37). Later, after 60 AD, Mark was with Peter in Babylon (I Pet. 5:13).

According to Hiebert, “Certain features are consistent with its [the Gospel’s] traditional association with Peter. Peter’s connection with the writing of this gospel is not necessary for its interpretation, but certain features in it take on added interest if that connection is recognized. For example, the addition of the two little words ‘and Peter’ (16:7), found only in Mark, is then freighted with emotional overtones. The connection naturally accounts for the ‘eyewitness vividness’ of many of Mark’s episodes. It seems natural that Mark’s use of ‘they’ in introducing a story concerning Jesus represents Peter’s ‘we’ in reciting events as the experience of one who had been a disciple of Jesus. The inclusion of Aramaic expressions attributed to Jesus (5:41; 7:11, 34; 14:36), not found in the other gospels, may well be due to the fact that Mark recalled ‘vividly the tone of the Apostle in relating the Master’s solemn words.’ It has also been noted that this gospel omits incidents which might honor Peter—his walking on the water (Mt 14:28-31), the promise of the keys (Mt 16:17-19), the payment of the temple tribute (Mt 17:24-27)—but elaborates on events that were to his discredit (Mk 8:33; 9:5-6; 14:29-31, 66-72). Peter’s traditional connection with the gospel is supported by the fact that it conforms to the outline of the story as given by Peter in Acts 10:34-43.

“There is, however, no need to assume that when Mark commenced the writing of his gospel he deliberately restricted himself to a reproduction of Peter’s preaching. As a youth Mark had heard the preaching of the apostles in Jerusalem. He was also familiar with the preaching of Paul and Barnabas (Ac 13:5-12; 15:39; Col 4:10-11). The Petrine preaching was, indeed, the main source upon which he drew, but he was well informed about Jesus before he became Peter’s assistant.

“We accept without hesitation the Marcan authorship of the second gospel. This view does justice to the early and strong external evidence concerning its authorship and is consistent with the internal features of the gospel” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1, pp. 86-87). Based on this information, we can conclude that the Gospel of Mark contains Peter’s and Mark’s eyewitness accounts of the ministry of Jesus Christ, written by Mark under Peter’s supervision.

Mark, under Peter’s supervision, not only wrote Peter’s eyewitness accounts in his Gospel, but also he probably helped Paul (during the latter’s second prison term in Rome) assemble his epistles for canonization by the apostle John. Mark’s usefulness in this regard is noted by Paul in II Timothy 4:11. There can be no doubt that Mark wrote the Gospel that bears his name.

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The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts

About Luke's Gospel, Hiebert wrote: "The gospel of Luke is the longest and most comprehensive of the four gospels. It is also the longest book in the New Testament. Its beautiful hymn and superb stories from the lips of Jesus, unique to this gospel, have made it a favorite with countless readers. Its attractive literary features justify the comment of a French rationalistic critic (Ernest Renan) that this gospel is 'the most beautiful book ever written.'

"Although the name of the author nowhere appears in it, the third gospel does not present itself as an anonymous work. In his prologue the author refers to himself in saying, 'it seemed good to me also' (1:3), and it is certain that Theophilus, the original recipient of the gospel, knew the writer's identity. In fact, it must have been common knowledge from the very beginning. Since the name of the author cannot with unquestioned certainty be deduced from the contents of his work, the uniform traditional ascription of it to Luke must represent information known from the first century" (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1, p. 114).

The Gospel of Luke differs from the others inasmuch as Luke was not an eyewitness of Christ's ministry as were Matthew, John and Mark/Peter. However, Luke used the accounts of eyewitnesses to compile his gospel. Furthermore, during the period recorded in Acts from Chapter 13 to the end of the book, Luke was an eyewitness to the apostle Paul's ministry. Luke was a Greek physician who apparently had been converted in Antioch, which was the location of the apostle Paul's home church, or headquarters. From Paul's epistles and the book of Acts, it is evident that Luke accompanied Paul during much of the latter's traveling ministry, serving as Paul's scribe, record-keeper and physician. (See Chronology of the New Testament, Appendix R, pages 846-849. Luke undoubtedly recorded the account of Paul's defense before the Sanhedrin and of his deliverance from his would-be murderers (Acts 23). In order to save Paul from a plot to kill him, two Roman centurions and two hundred soldiers took Paul by night to Caesarea. There he was kept under protective custody for two years (58-60 AD) in Herod's Praetorium, awaiting trial. During Paul's Caesarean imprisonment, Luke was granted ready access to him. Moreover, judging from the account in Acts 24-26, Luke undoubtedly took notes during Paul's defense before Felix, Festus and Agrippa.

Caesarea was not far from Jerusalem where the eyewitness records of Jesus' ministry must have been kept, probably under the care of the apostle James, the brother of Jesus. It is most likely that Luke would have traveled to Jerusalem to consult those records as he wrote his Gospel during Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea. Because Luke was Paul's scribe and record-keeper, we can conclude that Luke wrote his account under Paul's supervision.

Luke himself offered some important information about the writing and compilation of his Gospel. He began his account: "**Since many have taken in hand to compile a written narration of the matters which have been fully believed among us, as they delivered them to us, those who from the beginning had been eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word**, it seemed good to me also, having accurately understood everything from the very first, to write *these things* in an orderly sequence to you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you might know the *absolute* certainty of *the* things in which you have been instructed" (Luke 1:1-4).

Luke began the book of Acts in much the same way, addressing it to Theophilus: "The first account I indeed have written, O Theophilus, concerning all things that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after giving command by *the* Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen; to whom also, by many infallible proofs, He presented Himself alive after He had suffered, being seen by them

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for forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:1-3).

Hiebert summarizes the reasons for ascribing authorship of both books to Luke: “The book of Acts, like the third gospel, is anonymous, and not even its title indicates authorship. Yet in the prologue of both works the author refers to himself by the first person pronoun, and it is obvious that Theophilus, the recipient of both volumes (Lk 1:4; Ac 1:1), knew his identity....The uniform tradition of the early church ascribes this work to Luke, and no alternative suggestions are mentioned” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1, p. 248).

From the introductions to the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, it is apparent that Luke used the written records of the apostles to write his Gospel and the first twelve chapters of Acts. The rest of the book of Acts is a firsthand, eyewitness account of the apostle Paul’s ministry, written by Luke.

Writing Was a Common Practice in Jesus’ Day

From what Luke wrote, it is evident that the people of Jesus’ time were well educated. They were not uneducated or primitive type men running around in burlap bags as some modern movies portray them. From the scrolls discovered in the Qumran caves, it is clear that highly serviceable writing materials were available. That writing was a regular practice is confirmed by Luke’s account of John the Baptist’s circumcision and naming ceremony: “And it came to pass on the eighth day *that* they came to circumcise the little child; and they were calling him Zacharias, after the name of his father. Then his mother answered *and* said, ‘No! But he shall be named John.’ And they said to her, ‘*There is* no one among your kinfolk who is called by this name.’ Then they made signs to his father *as to* what he desired him to be named. **And after signaling for a writing tablet, he wrote, saying, ‘John is his name.’** And they were all amazed. Then his mouth was immediately opened, and his tongue *was loosed*; and he spoke, praising God” (Luke 1:59-64). This account confirms that writing materials were in daily use, at least among the scribes and priests. In spite of the fact that Zacharias was temporarily mute for over nine months, he would have been well educated because he was a priest of the line of Aaron.

Who Were the Many Eyewitnesses and Ministers of the Word?

Luke makes clear that many had taken it upon themselves to write accounts of what they had heard Jesus say and what they had seen Him do with their own eyes. Does the New Testament give any indication of who these writers were? Can their accounts be trusted? By examining Luke’s writings closely, we can discover the identity of many of these eyewitnesses. Based on who they were, we can decide whether their accounts can be fully trusted to be true and accurate.

According to the calculated Hebrew calendar, Jesus was crucified on Passover day, Nisan 14. On the Julian calendar, this would have been Wednesday, April 5, 30 AD. (Note: Roman dates are reckoned according to the Julian calendar.) He was in the grave for three days and three nights and was resurrected at sunset on the weekly Sabbath, during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Nisan 17 (April 8). On Nisan 18 (April 9) the first day of the week—the wave sheaf offering day—Jesus Christ ascended to heaven, being accepted by God the Father as the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (see the chart in Appendix G, pages 760-761).

After God the Father had received Jesus and accepted His sacrifice, Jesus came

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back to Jerusalem. He first appeared to two disciples on the road to the village of Emmaus. Jesus later revealed Himself to them as He broke bread later in Emmaus, and then He disappeared. The two disciples immediately ran back to Jerusalem to the eleven apostles, and while they were relating what had happened, Jesus appeared in their midst. Luke wrote this account: “Now as they were telling these things, Jesus Himself stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace *be* to you.’ But they were terrified and filled with fear, thinking *that* they beheld a spirit. Then He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled? And why do doubts come up in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I. Touch Me and see *for yourselves*; for a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see Me having.’ And after saying this, He showed them *His* hands and *His* feet. But while they were still disbelieving and wondering for joy, He said to them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ Then they gave Him part of a broiled fish and a *piece* of honeycomb. And He took these *and* ate in their presence.

“And He said to them, ‘These *are* the words that I spoke to you when I was yet with you, that all *the* things which were written concerning Me in the Law of Moses and *in the* Prophets and *in the* Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘According as it is written, it was necessary for the Christ to suffer, and to rise from *the* dead the third day. And in His name, repentance and remission of sins should be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. **For you are witnesses of these things**’ ” (Luke 24:36-48).

In the book of Acts, Luke recorded the commands that Jesus gave the apostles before He ascended to heaven the second and final time: “And while *they* were assembled with *Him*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem but to ‘await the promise of the Father, which,’ *He said*, ‘you have heard of Me. For John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with *the* Holy Spirit after not many days.’

“So then, when they were assembled together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You restore the kingdom to Israel at this time?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know *the* times or *the* seasons, which the Father has placed in His own authority; but **you yourselves shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto *the* ends of the earth**’ ” (Acts 1:4-8).

In the book of Acts, we find that whenever the apostles proclaimed Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the dead, they emphatically declared that they were His witnesses. In his first message, Peter proclaimed that he and the other apostles were eyewitnesses: “Therefore, being a prophet [King David], and knowing that God had sworn to him in an oath *that* from *the* fruit of his loins, as concerning *the* flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit upon his throne; He foresaw *this and* spoke concerning the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in *the* grave, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus has God raised up, whereof **we all are witnesses**” (Acts 2:30-32). Again, in the third chapter of Acts, Peter said: “The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Son Jesus, Whom you delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, after he had judged to release *Him*. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and requested that a man *who was* a murderer be granted to you; and you killed the Author of life Whom God has raised from *the* dead, whereof **we are witnesses**” (Acts 3:13-15).

In answer to the accusatory question put to the apostles by the Sanhedrin, Peter boldly proclaimed: “We are obligated to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus Whom you killed *by* hanging *Him* on a tree. Him has God exalted by His right hand *to be* a Prince and Savior, to give repentance and remission of sins to Israel. And **we are His witnesses of these things**, as *is* also the Holy Spirit, which God has given to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:29-32).

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Eight years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God opened the door of salvation to the Gentiles. At that time, a Roman centurion, Cornelius, saw a vision of an angel, who instructed him to send for the apostle Peter. Peter found many people gathered and waiting to hear his message when he arrived at Cornelius' house. Cornelius said to him: " 'Therefore, I sent for you at once; and you did well to come. So then, we are all present before God to hear all things that have been commanded you by God.' Then Peter opened *his* mouth *and* said, 'Of a truth I perceive that God is not a respecter of persons, but in every nation the one who fears Him and works righteousness is acceptable to Him. The word that He sent to the children of Israel, preaching the gospel of peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all), you have knowledge of; which declaration came throughout the whole of Judea, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism that John proclaimed, *concerning* Jesus, Who *was* from Nazareth: how God anointed Him with *the* Holy Spirit and with power, *and* He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with Him.

" **'And we are witnesses of all *the* things that He did**, both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed Him by hanging *Him* on a tree. *But* God raised Him up on the third day, and showed Him openly; not to all the people, but to **witnesses who had been chosen before by God, to *those of us* who did eat and drink with Him after He had risen from *the* dead.** And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to fully testify that it is He Who has been appointed by God *to be* Judge of *the* living and *the* dead. To Him all the prophets bear witness, *that* everyone who believes in Him receives remission of sins through His name' " (Acts 10:33-43). Again, Peter emphasizes that he and the other apostles were witnesses—chosen by God.

Jesus' commission of the apostles to be His witnesses "unto the ends of the earth" was fulfilled not only during their lifetimes but also after their deaths, through their writings and through those who succeeded them as witnesses. Matthew clarified that the gospel was to continue to be preached to all nations until the end of the age—until Jesus came again: "And Jesus came *and* spoke to them, saying, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. **Therefore, go *and* make disciples in all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.** And lo, I am with you always, *even* until the completion of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20). There is no question that in order to teach future disciples "to observe all things" that Jesus commanded, the disciples would need written documentation—the authoritative Word of God. Furthermore, Jesus Himself prophesied that "the gospel must first be published among all nations" as a witness, and then the end would come (Mark 13:10).

Jesus commanded the apostles to be witnesses and to preach the gospel to all nations. **We can conclude that the apostles were the primary eyewitnesses and ministers of the word that Luke wrote of in Luke 1:1-4, because they had been with Jesus from the beginning. In addition, they were chosen by God and ordained and commissioned by Jesus Christ to preach and to write the Gospel through His name and by His authority.** It was the apostles who wrote the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, directed by Jesus under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As the Head of the Church, Jesus did not leave the task of writing the most important book in the world to unknown storytellers living decades after the apostles had died.

Who Were the Rest of the Eyewitnesses?

There were indeed other eyewitnesses who contributed firsthand accounts to the formation and compilation of the Gospels. Who were they? Luke's account in the first chapter of Acts provides clues: "And after saying these things, *as* they were looking at

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Him, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. Now while they were gazing intently up into heaven as He was going up, two men in white apparel suddenly stood by them, who also said, ‘You men of Galilee, why do you stand *here* looking up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, Who was taken up from you into heaven, shall come in exactly the same manner as you have seen Him go into heaven.’ Then they returned to Jerusalem from *the mountain* called, Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem, being *about* the distance of a Sabbath’s journey.

“And after entering *Jerusalem*, they went up into the upper chamber, where both **Peter and James were staying; and John and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James, the son of Alpheus, and Simon the Zealot; and Jude, the brother of James** [the eleven apostles]. **All these were steadfastly continuing with one accord in prayer and supplications, together with the women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.** And in those days, Peter stood up in *the* midst of the disciples (**now *the* number of names together was about a hundred and twenty**)” (Acts 1:9-15).

Including the 11 apostles, about 120 disciples gathered together shortly after Jesus had ascended to heaven the second and final time. Who were the other 109 eyewitnesses of Jesus’ ministry? Luke specified that Mary the mother of Jesus and His four brothers (Mark 6:3) were included in that number. Also included were Joseph and Matthias, who were set apart, so lots could be cast before the Lord to select one of them as a replacement for Judas Iscariot. The main requirement Peter set forth for Judas Iscariot’s replacement was that he had to have been an eyewitness from the beginning: “Therefore, it is obligatory *that* from those men who have accompanied us during all *the* time in which the Lord Jesus came in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day in which He was taken up from us, one of these shall become a witness with us of His resurrection” (Acts 1:21-22). The lot fell to Matthias, and he became the twelfth apostle (Acts 1:23-25). Undoubtedly, also among the 120 were the 70 disciples that Jesus sent to preach the gospel in various villages and cities to prepare His way (Luke 10:1-20). There is no question that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome also were included in the 120 (Mark 15:40-41). Based on the Gospels and Acts, we can positively identify 88 of the 120 eyewitnesses described as early disciples of Jesus.

Although it is not possible to know exactly who the remaining 32 were, perhaps some of the others mentioned in the Gospel accounts were there. These might have included the two disciples with whom Jesus walked to the village of Emmaus; Mark, who wrote the Gospel of Mark, and his mother Mary; Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary; Nathanael, an early disciple of Jesus (John 1:46-52); Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (John 19:38-39); and various women from Galilee, perhaps numbering a half dozen. And finally, the sisters of Jesus might have been there with their mother Mary and their four brothers. We are not told how many sisters Jesus had, but there possibly were at least four (Mark 6:3). If all of these were present, then we have identified an additional 20 eyewitnesses—a total of 108 out of 120. Perhaps many of the 120 did not write their own accounts about the ministry of Jesus Christ but verified the written narrations of those who did. The other disciples’ recollections undoubtedly confirmed and supplemented the apostles’ accounts, thus assuring that their testimony was accurate and true.

The teachings of the New Testament agree with the Old Testament commandment that testimony can be accepted as true only if it is corroborated by a second witness (and if possible, a third). Jesus said, “In *the* mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established” (Matt. 18:16). However, because of the magnitude of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ—God manifested in the flesh, Who died for the sins of the

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world—He did not select only two or three witnesses. From this account in the book of Acts, we can see that in order to ensure the veracity of the Gospels, Jesus chose 40 x 3, or about 120 witnesses.

We can conclude, therefore, that in addition to the twelve apostles, all of these were eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry—His close disciples. Many of them could have written accounts of His ministry that became part of the basis for the Gospels. These were probably the “many” that Luke wrote of in Luke 1:1-2, as he compiled and wrote his Gospel: **“Since many have taken in hand to compile a written narration of the matters which have been fully believed among us, as they delivered *them* to us, those who from *the* beginning had been eyewitnesses.”**

Mary the Mother of Jesus

The most important eyewitness, after the 12 apostles, was Mary the mother of Jesus. Mary must have contributed the narrations about Zacharias and Elizabeth, the father and mother of John the Baptist; and about the angel Gabriel's announcement to her that she would bear a son and call him Jesus (Luke 1:5-38; Matt. 1:18-25).

Mary also contributed the account of her visit with Elizabeth; Elizabeth's salutation to Mary; Mary's hymn to God; the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem; the shepherds' visit as Jesus lay in the manger; and the words of Simeon and Anna when Mary and Joseph presented Jesus at the temple after Mary's purification (Luke 1:39-2:35). Undoubtedly, she contributed to the accounts of Herod's attempt to kill Jesus and of the escape of Joseph, Mary and Jesus by night to Egypt as well as their return to Nazareth (Matt. 2:1-23).

Only Mary was an eyewitness to all of these events, having experienced them firsthand. Luke wrote: “Mary stored up all these sayings, pondering *them* in her heart” (Luke 2:19), and “His mother kept all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:51). Not only did she ponder and store up all these things in her heart, but she also may have kept a written record—a journal or diary—of these events. These firsthand accounts, which only Mary the mother of Jesus knew of, are part of the record of the Gospels. Remember, Luke relates that he used the written accounts of eyewitnesses to compile and write his Gospel. However, is it possible that Luke may have interviewed Mary (who would have been in her eighties) when he wrote his Gospel? We are not told that he did, but it would not be out of the realm of possibility.

The Scriptures testify that Mary was the mother of Jesus by divine conception, and she contributed her accounts to the Gospel records. However, Mary was not exalted to the status of deity by the apostles or the New Testament Church of God. The Roman Catholic doctrines of the perpetual virginity of Mary, her assumption into heaven, her mediation with Jesus, and her status as queen of heaven and co-redeemer of mankind are all false teachings. Such doctrines are not found in the New Testament. These are abominable deceptions, false doctrines based on beliefs that originated in ancient, pagan Babylon. They are teachings of Satan, designed to enslave people to the idolatrous Babylonian Mystery Religion of the Roman Catholic Church (see *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop, ISBN 0-937958-57-3).

It is evident to those who truly study the Bible, that the Roman Catholic Church is not the true church of God, regardless of the claims made by the popes and hierarchs. The New Testament identifies the Roman Catholic Church and the religions of the world: “And one of the seven angels who had the seven vials came and spoke with me, saying to me, ‘Come here; I will show you the judgment of the great whore who sits upon many waters; with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.’ Then he carried me away in *the* spirit to a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet

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beast that had seven heads and ten horns, full of names of blasphemy. And the woman *was* clothed in purple and scarlet, and *was* adorned with gold and pearls and precious stones; *and* she had a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominations and *the* filthiness of her fornication; and across her forehead a name *was* written: ‘MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.’ And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Rev. 17:1-6).

Such churches and religions are not of God but are the usurpers of Christ—antichrist systems that have deceived the whole world under the power and influence of Satan, the devil (Rev. 12:9). It is important to fully understand these things when studying the writing and compiling of the New Testament.

Mary Magdalene

Yet another woman contributed to the compilation of the Gospels. In the Gospel of John, we find that Mary Magdalene went to Jesus’ tomb early in the morning (John 20:1-18), where Jesus appeared to her first. The account of Jesus’ conversation with Mary Magdalene must have originated with her, because she and Jesus were the only ones privy to it.

The Apostles Give Themselves to the Ministry of the Word

After His resurrection and first ascension to heaven, Jesus came back to earth and appeared to the apostles so as to open their minds to understand the Old Testament. “And He said to them, ‘These *are* the words that I spoke to you when I was yet with you, that all *the* things which were written concerning Me in the Law of Moses and *in the* Prophets and *in the* Psalms must be fulfilled.’ **Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures**, and said to them, ‘According as it is written, it was necessary for the Christ to suffer, and to rise from *the* dead the third day. And in His name, repentance and remission of sins should be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. **For you are [eye] witnesses of these things**” (Luke 24:44-48).

When we read what the apostle Peter preached in Acts, Chapters 2 through 5, it is absolutely clear that the apostles understood the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning Jesus Christ. From the beginning they realized the importance of their preaching and other work on behalf of Christ. After Peter and John were arrested for healing a man, they were brought before the high priests and the full Sanhedrin. The power of Peter’s answer to these inquisitors reveals that the apostles realized the magnitude of their witness: “Now it came to pass in the morning *that* their rulers and elders and scribes were assembled together in Jerusalem, and Annas, the high priest, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and as many as were of *the* high priest’s lineage. And after placing them in the midst, they inquired, ‘By what power or in what name did you do this?’ Then Peter, filled with *the* Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, if we are examined this day as to a good work *done to the* infirm man, by what *power* he has been cured, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that **in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarean, Whom you crucified, *but* Whom God has raised from *the* dead, by Him this *man* stands before you whole. This is the Stone that was set at naught by you, the builders, which has become the Head of *the* corner. And there is no salvation in any other, for neither is there another name under heaven which has been given among men, by which we must be saved’ ” (Acts 4:5-12).**

Later, as the apostles were healing multitudes (Acts 5:12-18), the high priests

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again had the apostles arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. Peter and the others gave a powerful rebuttal to the high priests and the Sanhedrin, in response to the command that the apostles cease preaching in Jesus' name: "And they brought them in *and set them* before the Sanhedrin. And the high priest asked them, saying, 'Did we not order you by a *direct* command not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, with *the* purpose of bringing this man's blood upon us.' But Peter and the apostles answered *and* said, 'We are obligated to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus Whom you killed by hanging *Him* on a tree. Him has God exalted by His right hand *to be* a Prince and Savior, to give repentance and remission of sins to Israel. And WE ARE HIS WITNESSES of these things, as *is* also the Holy Spirit, which God has given to those who obey Him.' Now when they heard *this*, they were cut *to the heart* and took counsel to put them to death" (Acts 5:27-33). However, a highly esteemed member of the Sanhedrin, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, stood up and persuaded the Sanhedrin not to kill the apostles: "And they were persuaded by him; and they called in the apostles *and*, after beating *them*, commanded *them* not to speak in the name of Jesus; and they released them. Then they departed from *the* presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing *that* they were accounted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and in the houses, they did not cease teaching and preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ" (verses 40-42). This event occurred in 30-31 AD, less than one year after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The number of the disciples began to multiply (see Chronology in Appendix R, page 846).

Luke's account about how the apostles devoted themselves to the ministry of the Word follows: "Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a complaint by the Greeks against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. And after calling the multitude of disciples to *them*, the twelve said, 'It is not proper *for* us to leave the Word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, brethren, search out from among yourselves seven men of good repute, full of *the* Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and **the ministry of the Word**' " (Acts 6:1-4). Again, this is only one year after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

What did Luke mean when he wrote that the apostles were giving themselves to the "ministry of the Word"? From the introduction to his Gospel, we can conclude that they were writing down and compiling the teachings of Jesus, which later became the Gospels: "Since many have taken in hand **to compile a written narration** of the matters which have been fully believed among us, **as they delivered them to us, those who from the beginning had been eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word**" (Luke 1:1-2). Here Luke equates "ministers of the Word" with "eyewitnesses." From this it is clear that these eyewitnesses were none other than the apostles, who gave themselves to "ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:4). The latter expression means that, in addition to their preaching, they were writing and compiling the accounts of Jesus' life, ministry and teachings. No doubt, because of the tremendous increase in the number of disciples, the apostles realized they had to make a written compilation of the teachings of Jesus Christ: a uniform standard was needed from which to teach all the many thousands of new disciples.

In giving themselves to the ministry of the Word, the apostles were writing their narratives. The other eyewitnesses among the 120 mentioned in Acts 1:15 probably assisted the apostles in verifying and compiling their writings, which later became the Gospels as we know them. Luke wrote that the apostles "delivered them [the written narrations] to us." From this information we can understand that the teachings of Jesus Christ were written down from the beginning. The apostle Matthew probably recorded parts of what became his Gospel much earlier, near the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

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Three Special Eyewitnesses—Peter, James and John

Jesus not only chose and ordained twelve apostles to go and bear His authority, but also from those twelve, He further selected Peter, James and John to see a vision of Him in His glorified form on the Mount of Transfiguration. Matthew wrote of this awe-inspiring event: “And after six days, Jesus took with *Him* Peter and James and his brother John, and brought them up into a high mountain by themselves. **And He was transfigured before them; and His face shined as the sun, and His garments became white as the light.** Then behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah talking with Him. And Peter answered *and* said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here. If You desire, let us make three tabernacles here: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ While he was speaking, a bright cloud suddenly overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, ‘This is My Son, the Beloved, in Whom I delight. Listen to Him!’ And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces in extreme terror. But Jesus came *and* touched them, and said, ‘Arise, and do not be terrified.’ And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus alone. **Now as they were descending from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, ‘Tell the vision to no one until the Son of man has risen from the dead’**” (Matt. 17:1-9). After the resurrection, these three would become especially powerful witnesses, greater than the rest of the twelve apostles in preaching and performing miracles.

So great was the significance of Jesus’ transfiguration, that only Peter, James and John were permitted to witness the vision of Jesus appearing as God in His glorified form. The only other man to have seen God in His glorified form was Moses. The LORD God, Who became Jesus Christ, showed His glory to Moses and talked with him face to face (Ex. 33:18-23, 34:1-9). When we understand the status of Moses, then we will understand why Jesus chose Peter, James and John to be special eyewitnesses of His glory, and what this choice meant in regard to writing and canonizing the New Testament.

The Old Testament tells of how Moses received the Law directly from God Himself. God wrote the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone. Moses wrote the book of the Law and the rest of the Law as contained in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, along with the book of Genesis. Then he officially finalized, or canonized, the first five books of the Bible and gave them to the priests and Levites for safekeeping. “And Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel” (Deut. 31:9).

Dr. Ernest L. Martin wrote about this canonization by Moses: “The Ark of the Covenant was a wooden chest enclosing the tables of stone, the rod that budded, plus the pot of manna (Heb. 9:4). It constituted the central part of Israel’s physical worship and was located in the Holy of Holies of the Temple. The scrolls of the Law were stored in specially designated sleeve compartments attached to the sides of the Ark (Deut. 31:26)” (Martin, *The Original Bible Restored*, p. 78).

Moses had God’s stamp of authority. No one in all Israel—in the entire history of the house of Israel and the house of Judah—was greater. The Law of Moses was the official and final authority for all Israelites. Moses was considered a prophet *par excellence* because he spoke to God face to face, wrote the Law, canonized the first five books of the Bible and led the children of Israel to the Promised Land. If another man attempted to set himself above Moses, he was punished as a rebel and a usurper. What happened to Korah and his followers, who attempted to remove Moses, usurp his authority and take over the priesthood, provided an example of the fate awaiting anyone who attempted to overthrow him: God caused the earth to open up and swallow Korah, his rebels, and all their families (Num. 16:1-50). Thus Moses was established as a unique prophet of God.

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Jesus Christ gave this same stamp of approval to the leading apostles—Peter, James and John. This could be the main reason why these three were the only eyewitnesses to Jesus’ transfiguration and why they saw Moses and Elijah in the vision with Christ. Until that time, Moses had been the greatest and Elijah the second greatest of the prophets of God. Just as Moses had led the children of Israel, the three apostles would lead in preaching the Gospel to all the world—not only by their spoken words but also by their writings. Just as Moses wrote and canonized the first five books of the Old Testament, they would help write and finalize the New Testament. The apostles were to “bind up the testimony and seal the law,” which means they were to write the New Testament, showing that Jesus Christ’s teachings made the law complete by revealing the spiritual meaning and intent of the laws and commandments of God.

The Apostles and Disciples Were to Do Greater Works than Jesus Had Done

On the night of His last Passover, Jesus told His apostles: **“Truly, truly I say to you, the one who believes in Me shall also do the works that I do; and greater works than these shall he do because I am going to the Father.** And whatever you shall ask in My name, this will I do that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:12-13). Thus saying, Jesus confirmed the authority He would give to Peter, James and John as well as to the other apostles, which would later be manifested in miracles of unheard-of power.

Such a miracle occurred on the day of Pentecost, when God poured out His Holy Spirit and all the apostles supernaturally spoke in other languages. The apostle Peter preached such a powerful message of repentance that three thousand were baptized and converted that very day (Acts 2). Shortly thereafter, Peter and John healed a man who had been lame for over forty years. He was lying at the temple gate called “Beautiful”, when Peter and John went into the temple. “Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, *which was* the ninth *hour*; and a certain man who was lame from his mother’s womb was being carried, whom they placed daily at the temple door which is called Beautiful, to beg alms from those who were going into the temple.

“When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. But Peter and John, intently observing him, said, ‘Look on us.’ And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, ‘Silver and gold I do not have; but what I do have, this I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarean, rise up and walk.’ Then taking him by the right hand, he raised *him* up; and immediately his feet and ankle bones were strengthened. And leaping up, he stood and walked; and he entered into the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. Now all the people saw him walking and praising God. And they recognized him, that he was the one who had been sitting at the temple gate *called* Beautiful, asking for alms; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened to him. And as the lame *man* who had been healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch *that is* called Solomon’s, *for* they were greatly amazed” (Acts 3:1-11).

Because of this miracle the multitudes gathered around. Peter preached repentance, and about five thousand were converted (Acts 4:4). Peter, John and the other apostles also gave a powerful witness to the Sanhedrin (Acts 4 and 5). After they were beaten and released from the Sanhedrin, they returned to the brethren. The following is recorded in Acts: **“And when they had prayed, the place in which they were assembled was shaken; and they were all filled with *the* Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness. And the multitude of those who believed were of one**

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heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. And with great power the apostles testified of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:31-33).

Jesus Christ had so established the power and authority of Peter and the other apostles that when Ananias and his wife Sapphira lied to Peter, they fell over dead (Acts 5:1-10). The church was greatly affected by these events: “Then great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard these things” (Acts 5:11). There was no question that God was working through Peter, John, and the rest of the apostles by the power of the Holy Spirit.

After the episode with Ananias and Sapphira, the apostles performed even greater miracles: “And many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch; and none of the others [e.g. leaders of Judaism] dared to join them, but the people magnified them; and believers were added all the more to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,) **“Insomuch that the people were bringing out the sick into the streets and putting them on beds and stretchers, so that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. And a multitude from the cities round about also came together to Jerusalem, bringing sick ones and those beset by unclean spirits; and they were all healed”** (verses 12-16). Thus the apostles fulfilled Jesus’ promise that they would do greater works than He had done.

As previously stated, Peter and John were special eyewitnesses because they, along with James, had seen Christ in His glorified form. Moreover, they were doing greater works than either Moses or Elijah had done, and God did not allow anyone to usurp Moses or Elijah’s authority. If anyone attempted to do so, God dealt with him directly and punished him severely. In the same way, Christ established the authority of the apostles. He did not allow anyone to usurp their authority or lie to them. Through the power of preaching, miracles, and wonders, coupled with the deaths of Ananias and his wife Sapphira, the authority of the apostles was fully established. All the believers knew that their authority came directly from God the Father and Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Peter—a Special Eyewitness

The vision of transfiguration affected the apostle Peter and his ministry for the rest of his life. In his first epistle, when Peter addressed the elders of the churches, he referred back to this vision of the glory of the transfigured Christ: “The elders who *are* among you I exhort, even as a fellow elder, **and an eyewitness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory that is about to be revealed.** Feed the flock of God *that is* among you” (I Pet. 5:1-2).

In his second epistle, Peter wrote that the New Testament writings of the apostles were not folklore or myth. He made it clear that those who wrote the books of the New Testament were eyewitnesses, and their accounts were true. Peter emphasized that the believers should always remember the truth they were taught and live by it: “Therefore, I will not neglect to make you always mindful of these things, although you *already* know them and have been established in the present truth. For I consider it my duty, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by causing *you* to remember *these things*; knowing that shortly the putting off of my tabernacle *will come*, even as our Lord Jesus Christ has also signified to me. **But I will make every effort that, after my departure, you may always have a *written* remembrance of these things in order to practice them for yourselves. For we did not follow cleverly concocted myths as our authority, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we**

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were eyewitnesses of His magnificent glory; because He received glory and honor from God *the Father* when *the voice* came to Him from the Majestic Glory [from the throne of God], ‘This is My Son, the Beloved, in Whom I am well pleased.’ And this *is the voice from heaven that we heard when we were with Him on the holy mountain*” (II Pet. 1:12-18).

Peter makes it absolutely clear that they—all of the apostles, but specifically he, James and John—had not followed “cleverly concocted myths,” fables or folklore when they preached about the teachings and doctrines of Jesus Christ or when they wrote to the brethren. It is evident that the transfiguration remained a defining spiritual experience for Peter and carried over into his entire ministry and his writings.

Peter described what the apostles wrote, compiled and canonized as “the confirmed prophetic Word.” This confirmed prophetic Word was not a foretelling of future events but rather the inspired writings of the books of the New Testament, confirmed by Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit: “**We also possess the confirmed prophetic Word** [the New Testament books that the apostles had] to which you do well to pay attention, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and *the morning star* arises in your hearts; **knowing this first, that no prophecy** [inspired writing] **of Scripture** [New Testament, or Old Testament] **originated as anyone’s own private interpretation** [it did not evolve from religious myths]; **because prophecy was not brought at any time** [Old Testament or New Testament] **by human will, but the holy men of God spoke** [and wrote] **as they were moved by *the Holy Spirit***” (II Pet. 1:19-21). There is no question that the New Testament is the “confirmed prophetic [inspired] Word,” and, as Paul wrote, the “prophetic [inspired] scriptures” (Rom. 16:26).

When the apostle Paul wrote to the Hebrews, he made it known that what had been received from the apostles and verified by the other eyewitnesses was the confirmed Word of God. He also warned them not to neglect the great salvation of Jesus Christ as contained in the confirmed Word: “For this reason, it is imperative that we give much greater attention to the things *which* we have heard, lest at any time we should slip away. For if the word spoken by angels was *enforced* without fail, and every transgression and disobedience received just recompense, **how shall we escape, if we have neglected so great a salvation; which was first received when it was spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*; God also bearing witness with *them* by both signs and wonders, and various miracles and gifts of *the Holy Spirit, according to His own will***” (Heb. 2:1-4).

In the third chapter of II Peter, the apostle Peter recognized the epistles of Paul as part of the confirmed prophetic Word. He wrote, “And bear in mind that the long-suffering of our Lord *is* salvation, exactly as our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has also written to you; as *he has* also in **all his epistles**, speaking in them concerning these things; in which are some things *that are* difficult to understand, which the ignorant and unstable are twisting *and distorting*, as *they* also *twist and distort the rest of the Scriptures*, to their own destruction” (verses 15-16). As one of the two remaining eyewitnesses to the vision of Jesus’ transfiguration, Peter was surely inspired to write the truth of God.

The Apostle John—a Special Eyewitness

Jesus Christ referred to John and his brother James as the “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). In many passages of the Bible the voice of God is likened to thunder. James and John were called the sons of thunder because they preached the Word of God with great power. The apostle James, the brother of John, was beheaded by Herod in 44 AD (Acts 12:1-2). Apparently, James had been preaching so powerfully that the Jews

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had persuaded Herod to have him killed. They also wanted to kill Peter (verse 3-5), but God spared him. Thus, John and Peter were the last remaining eyewitnesses of the transfiguration.

Not only was John an eyewitness of Jesus' glory, but he was also the disciple whom Jesus especially loved. Seeing Jesus in His glorified form was an awesome spiritual experience for John. Thus, he began his Gospel in a simple and elegant but powerful and revealing way that showed the impact the transfiguration had on him: "In *the* beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in *the* beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and not even one *thing* that was created came into being without Him. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men....The true light was that which enlightens everyone who comes into the world....**And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us (and we ourselves beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten with the Father), full of grace and truth....And of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace**" (John 1:1-4, 9, 14, 16). All of the apostles knew that the LORD God of the Old Testament had been made manifested in the flesh. But none of the others expressed this profound truth as powerfully and effectively as John.

Like the writings of the other special eyewitnesses, those of the apostle John are true and authentic. In his first epistle, John wrote of what he and the other apostles had experienced firsthand during Jesus Christ's three-and-a-half-year ministry: "**That which was from *the* beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our own eyes, that which we observed for ourselves and our own hands handled, concerning the Word of life;** (And the life was manifested, and we have seen, and are bearing witness, and are reporting to you the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us;) **that which we have seen and have heard we are reporting to you** in order that you also may have fellowship with us; for the fellowship—indeed, our fellowship—*is* with the Father and with His own Son, Jesus Christ" (I John 1:1-3).

The Special Help of the Holy Spirit

After His last Passover with the apostles, on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus explained that they would be aided by the power of the Holy Spirit to remember whatever was necessary for their ministry of the gospel: "But *when* the Comforter *comes*, *even* the Holy Spirit, which the Father will send in My name, **that one shall teach you all things, and shall bring to your remembrance everything that I have told you**" (John 14:26).

Jesus also told His apostles that there were many things He had yet to tell them—things they would not be able to bear until the Holy Spirit entered them. The Holy Spirit would lead them into all truth for salvation and in the writing of the New Testament. Jesus said: "I have yet many things to tell you, but you are not able to bear them now. However, **when that one has come, even the Spirit of the truth, it will lead you into all truth** because it shall not speak from itself, but whatever it shall hear, it shall speak. And it shall disclose to you the things to come" (John 16:12-13).

From these scriptures, we understand that the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth. God is a God of truth, and it is impossible for Him to lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). Therefore, what the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles to remember and write, as preserved in the Gospels and the New Testament, is the truth. The Gospel of John confirms what the apostle Peter wrote: "For we did not follow cleverly concocted myths *as our authority*, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, **but we [Peter and John] were eyewitnesses of His magnificent glory**" (II Pet. 1:16).

Additionally, Jesus told the apostles that they would be His witnesses after the

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power of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, came to reside in them: “But when the Comforter has come, which I will send to you from the Father, *even the Spirit of the truth*, which proceeds from the Father, that one shall bear witness of Me. **Then you also shall bear witness, because you have been with Me from *the beginning***” (John 15:26-27).

In all of his writings, the apostle John continually emphasized that what he wrote was the truth, inspired by the Spirit of Truth. In his first epistle John wrote, “Not one lie comes from the truth” (I John 2:21). John also emphasized the truth at the conclusion of his gospel: “This is the disciple [John] who testifies concerning these things and *who* wrote these things; and we [the other apostles with John] know that his testimony is true” (John 21:24).

The apostles knew that they were writing of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, so future generations would have the true knowledge of Him and the power of salvation and eternal life through faith in Him. John recorded Jesus saying that the words He spoke were spiritually understood and led to eternal life for those who obeyed them: “It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you, *they* are spirit and *they* are life” (John 6:63).

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostles wrote and compiled the truth contained in the Gospels. As John was concluding his Gospel, he specifically stated that through belief in Jesus Christ and His words one could have eternal life: “Now then, Jesus did many other miracles in *the* presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book. **But these have been written, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, you may have life through His name**” (John 20:30-31).

Part One of this chapter has sought to inform you about how the apostles were chosen by God to be eyewitnesses of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. As special eyewitnesses of the transfiguration, Peter and John were key instruments of God in compiling and writing the Gospels. Contrary to the opinion of many scholars, what they wrote is the true, inspired word of God the Father and Jesus Christ. Part Two will examine the remaining books of the New Testament and their authors.

Part Two: The General Epistles, the Epistles of Paul and the Book of Revelation

The Uniqueness of Epistles as Scripture

After the Gospels and Acts, God the Father and Jesus Christ inspired the rest of the New Testament to be written in the form of personal letters, or *epistles*. These are entirely different from the writings of the Old Testament, which consist of the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms, or writings. None of the books of the Old Testament were written as an epistle. The New Testament reveals that God the Father gave His Son, Jesus Christ—Who was God manifested in the flesh—as the perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. He is a personal Savior, so that each believer may receive forgiveness of sin and eternal life. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish, but may have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

When Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene after His resurrection, He instructed her to tell the brethren that He had risen from the dead: “**Go to My brethren and tell them that I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God**” (John 20:17). In saying this, Jesus revealed that our relationship to Him is

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that of a brother or sister, and to the Father, a son or daughter—a family relationship. Jesus Christ is the firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29), and true believers are those brethren.

Because believers have a personal and family relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ, God inspired that His love and instructions for them be conveyed in the form of personal letters or epistles written by the apostles. As Hiebert has pointed out: “The New Testament is striking in that practically one-third of its contents is letters. Twenty-one of the twenty-seven books are epistles.... **In this prominent use of the epistolary form the New Testament is distinct from all the other sacred writings of the world.** ‘The Scriptures of other oriental religions—the Vedas, the Zend Avesta, the Tripitaka, the Koran, the writings of Confucius—lack the direct personal address altogether.’ Pagan religions are ignorant of the new life in Christ that gave rise to the New Testament letters. The epistles unfold in terms of human experience the nature and process of God’s redemptive movements [His love and His plans].

“**This characteristic is the unique glory of the New Testament.** While the Old Testament contains numerous references to the use of letters and even preserves a few of them (cf. Jer. 29; Ezra 5:6-17), no books of the Old Testament are cast into the epistolary form. Says Bengel, ‘The epistolary form is a pre-eminence of the Scriptures of the New Testament as compared to those of the Old.’

“The use of the epistle as a medium of revelation in the New Testament reveals the difference between the ages of law and grace. Under the legal dispensation the demands of God were set forth in legal documents, sealed with the direct authority of God; in the age of grace God further makes known His will to His children through loving letters of instruction and exhortation. The difference is aptly summarized by Heward when he remarks, ‘Statutory codes [are] for subjects, letters of spiritual advice [are] for sons.’ Under the law, prophets delivered *oracles* to the *people*, solemnly setting forth their authoritative pronouncements with a ‘thus saith the Lord.’ With the inauguration of the age of grace, the apostle wrote *letters* to the *brethren* in a spirit of loving intimacy, setting forth the significance and implications of their new position in Christ. The New Testament use of the epistle as a vehicle of revelation emphasized the truth that now God’s method is that of companionship rather than that of dictation. The revelation is made not so much in the way of information as in the way of education.

“The apostles’ use of the letter to convey their teachings was eminently suited to the nature of Christianity. Christianity is basically a personal relationship between the individual and God through faith in Christ Jesus. The epistle readily lent itself to a free discussion of these personal relations in Christianity. It was likewise well adapted to an informal discussion of the fundamental theological doctrines which the readers had already accepted. Paul directed his epistles to converts who had already accepted Christ and His Gospel but whose lives revealed the need for further instruction in the outworkings of those truths in daily conduct” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 13-14, bold emphasis added).

Greater still, under the New Covenant, believers become the children of God the Father through the begetting of the Holy Spirit. Because they have a personal, spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ and God the Father, they can use terms of personal endearment when addressing the Father: “You have received *the* Spirit of sonship, whereby we call out, ‘Abba [Daddy], Father.’ The Spirit itself bears witness conjointly with our own spirit, *testifying* that **we are the children of God.** Now if *we are* children, *we are* also heirs—truly, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:15-17).

This family relationship is based on the love believers share for Jesus Christ, God the Father, and one another. The apostle John wrote: “In this *way* the love of God was manifested toward us: that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, so that we

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might live through Him. In this *act* is the love—not that we loved God; rather, that He loved us and sent His Son *to be the propitiation* for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also are duty-bound to love one another....if we love one another, God dwells in us, and His own love is perfected in us. By this *standard* we know that we are dwelling in Him, and He *is dwelling* in us: because of His own Spirit, *which* He has given to us. And we have seen *for* ourselves and bear witness that the Father sent the Son *as the Savior* of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God. And we have known and have believed the love that God has toward us. God is love, and the one who dwells in love is dwelling in God, and God in him” (I John 4:9-16).

Because believers are in a covenant relationship of love—God loves them and they love God—they are to have a spiritual fellowship directly with God the Father and Jesus Christ. This is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit through prayer, by studying God’s Word, by living by every word of God, and by fellowshiping with the brethren. John wrote: “That which we have seen and have heard we are reporting to you in order that you also may have fellowship with us; **for the fellowship—indeed, our fellowship—is with the Father and with His own Son, Jesus Christ**” (I John 1:3).

The apostle John emphasized the profound truth that we are the children of God the Father: “Behold! What *glorious* love the Father has given to us, that we should be called **the children of God!** For this very reason, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. **Beloved, now we are the children of God,** and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be; but we know that when He is manifested, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him exactly as He is” (I John 3:1-2).

The New Testament is the only book in the world that reveals the love of God for the world—God the Father’s love for His begotten children and Jesus Christ’s love for His brethren. God the Father and Jesus Christ inspired that Their personal love and instructions be conveyed to the brethren by the means of letters, or epistles, written by the apostles. This is the unique glory of the twenty-one epistles of the New Testament, and why the New Testament is the most magnificent book in the world.

The General Epistles

The general epistles are also known as the “catholic epistles,” which in no way implies that these epistles were written under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church. The church that became the Roman Catholic Church did not even begin until 325 AD—approximately 265 years after these epistles were written. At that time, the Roman emperor Constantine used the military and political power of the Roman Empire to merge pagan, sun-worshipping religions and apostate Christianity into a new ecumenical or “universal” state religion. The term *catholic*, as applied to the general epistles, merely means “general.”

In ninety-five percent of manuscripts of the Byzantine Greek New Testament, the general epistles (James; I and II Peter; I, II and III John; and Jude) are placed directly after the four Gospels and the book of Acts. Hiebert wrote of this: “The general order of the books of the New Testament in the ancient Greek *manuscripts* is as follows: gospels, Acts, general epistles, Pauline epistles (including Hebrews), Revelation....Influenced by the order generally found in ancient manuscripts, they were placed before the Pauline epistles by Tischendorf, Tregelles, and Westcott and Hort in their editions of the Greek text. But the popular Greek text of Nestle follows the order found in our English canon, which adopts the order of Jerome in the Vulgate” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, pp. 19-20).

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The seven general epistles were written by apostles of Jesus Christ: James, the brother of Jesus; Peter and John, two of three special eyewitnesses of Jesus' transfiguration; and Jude, another of Jesus' brothers, who apparently was ordained as an apostle to succeed James after the latter was martyred in 62 AD. These four men were sent by Jesus to witness to the circumcision, as were nearly all the other apostles, except Paul and Barnabas. Jesus Christ specifically sent the apostle Paul first to the Gentiles and secondarily to the Jews and Israelites (Acts 9:15).

In order to understand the general epistles, especially the Epistle of James, one needs to understand that Jesus Christ's commission to preach the Gospel to the circumcision not only included the Jews—which consisted of the tribe of Judah, part of the tribe of Levi and part of the tribe of Benjamin, known as the house of Judah—but also to the so-called ten lost tribes of Israel, known also as the house of Israel.

The Difference Between the House of Israel and the House of Judah

At the time Jesus sent the twelve apostles on their first training mission, He commanded them to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel: "These twelve Jesus sent out after commanding them, saying, 'Do not go into *the* way of the Gentiles, and do not enter into a city of the Samaritans; but go instead to **the lost sheep of the house of Israel** [not to the house of Judah only]. And *as you are* going, proclaim, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'....For truly I say to you, in no way shall you have completed *witnessing* to **the cities of Israel** until the Son of man has come [which is yet future]" (Matt. 10:5-7, 23).

When the twelve apostles went on this first mission, it is obvious that they did not leave the area of Galilee and Judea. However, from Jesus' instructions, it is evident that He meant this commission to be carried out continuously in every generation until He returns. The context of these scriptures reveals that in the end times the descendants of the ten tribes of Israel will have their own cities. Moreover, according to many prophecies in the Old Testament, by the last days before the return of Jesus Christ, these tribes would constitute distinct nations, separate from the Jews (Gen. 48:5-22; 49:1-28; Deut. 33:1-29). The ten northern tribes known as the house of Israel were never part of the Jewish nation, which was known as the house of Judah. To this day, the ten tribes of the house of Israel are not a part of the Jewish nation located in Palestine, called Israel. Furthermore, the ten northern tribes of Israel were never truly lost. (The historical truth about where the descendants of the ten tribes are today is beyond the scope of this commentary. However, it can be roughly stated that the Anglo-Saxon people of the British Commonwealth countries are the descendants of Ephraim, and the Anglo-Saxon people of the United States are the descendants of Manassah. The descendants of the other eight tribes live in the democracies of northwestern Europe. The reader who wishes to investigate this subject further might begin with *Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright* by J. H. Allen and *The "Lost" Ten Tribes of Israel...Found!* by Steven M. Collins.)

The Bible records that the ten tribes were taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 721-718 BC into Assyria, Persia and Media: "For he tore Israel from the house of David and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. And Jeroboam drove Israel away from following the LORD, and made them sin a great sin. For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did. They did not depart from them until the LORD removed Israel out of His sight as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So **Israel was carried away out of their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day**. And the king of Assyria brought *men* from Babylon and from Cuthah, and from Ava and from Hamath and from Sepharvaim and placed *them* in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel. And they possessed Samaria, and lived in its cities" (II Kings 17:21-24).

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Josephus also wrote that the kings of Assyria took the northern ten tribes of Israel captive and removed them into Persia and Media, where they later became known as Parthians (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, bk. 9:14:1; bk. 10:9:7). By the first century AD, many descendants of the ten tribes of Israel had migrated westward from Persia and Media into the area known today as Ukraine, where they became known in ancient times as Scythians.

On the Day of Pentecost 30 AD, when God poured out His Holy Spirit on the apostles and disciples, the multitude of devout Jews gathered at the temple probably included a great number of Israelites who were descendants of the northern ten tribes of Israel. In his powerful Pentecost message to those gathered at the temple, Peter made a clear distinction between Jews and Israelites, showing that both Houses were represented.

The account in the book of Acts informs us as follows: “And when the day of *Pentecost*, the fiftieth day, was being fulfilled, they were all with one accord in the same place. And suddenly *there* came from heaven a sound like *the* rushing of a powerful wind, and filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them divided tongues as of fire, and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with *the* Holy Spirit; and they began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them *the words* to proclaim. **Now *there* were many Jews who were sojourning in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven.** And when word of this went out, **the multitude came together and were confounded, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.** And they were all amazed, and marveled, saying to one another, “Behold, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? **Then how is it that we hear each one in our own language in which we were born? Parthians [Israelites] and Medes [Israelites] and Elamites [Israelites],** and those who inhabit Mesopotamia, and Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, both Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya which *are* near Cyrene, and the Romans who are sojourning *here*, both Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians; **we hear them speaking in our own languages the great things of God**” (Acts 2:1-11).

As Peter continued to address the multitudes, he demonstrated that he understood the difference between the Jews (the house of Judah) and the Israelites (the house of Israel). He specifically addressed both groups: “Then Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and spoke out to them: ‘**Men, Jews,** and all those of you who inhabit Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and pay attention to my words....**Men, Israelites,** listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarean, a man sent forth to you by God, as demonstrated by works of power and wonders and signs, which God performed by Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know” (verses 14, 22).

When Peter finished his powerful witness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, he called “all the house of Israel” to repentance. The phrase “all the house of Israel” means all twelve tribes; that is, it includes the ten northern tribes of the house of Israel as well as the Jews of the house of Judah: “‘Therefore, let **all *the* house of Israel** know with full assurance that God has made this *same* Jesus, Whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ Now after hearing *this*, they were cut to the heart; and they said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized each one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for *the* remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all those who are afar off, as many as *the* Lord our God may call.**’ And with many other words he earnestly testified and exhorted, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’ Then those who joyfully received his message were baptized; and about three thousand souls were added that day” (verses 36-41). It is important to understand this vital biblical and historical distinction between the house of Judah and the house of Israel in order to know to whom the apostle James wrote his epistle.

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The Epistle of James

After discussing various scholars' theories as to which of the four different men mentioned in the New Testament as "James" was the writer of the Epistle of James, Hiebert concludes that the author was the brother of Jesus Christ: "We are left with the conclusion that the author of this epistle was James the Lord's brother. All that we know about him from Scripture and tradition agrees with this" (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 41).

The New Testament gives some basic facts about James. Mark records that James was one of four half-brothers of Jesus Christ (Mark 6:3). This means that James and his three brothers, Joses, Judas [Jude] and Simon, grew up with Jesus. As brothers, they had a special relationship with Jesus. They were eyewitnesses of Jesus' life while He was growing up. They lived with Jesus, talked with Him, ate with Him and worked with Him on a daily basis.

Yet, in spite of this, when Jesus began His ministry, they did not become His disciples. It appears that before Jesus' resurrection, they did not really believe He was the Messiah. The apostle John recorded this account prior to the Feast of Tabernacles in the last year of Jesus' ministry: "After these things, Jesus was sojourning in Galilee, for He did not desire to travel in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was near. For this reason, His brothers said to Him, 'Leave this place and go into Judea, so that Your disciples may see the works that You are doing; because no one does anything in secret, but seeks to be *seen* in public. If You do these things, reveal Yourself to the world.' **For neither did His brothers believe in Him.** Therefore, Jesus said to them, 'My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready' " (John 7:1-6).

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to James, apparently in a personal, one-on-one meeting. This appearance must have been common knowledge, because Paul wrote of it: "He was raised up the third day, according to the Scriptures; and that He appeared to Cephas, *and* then to the twelve. Then He appeared to over five hundred brethren at one time, of whom the greater part are alive until now, but some have fallen sleep. Next **He appeared to James**" (I Cor. 15:4-7). Apparently, after Jesus appeared to James, James believed, as did his other half-brothers, because all of Jesus' brothers, along with His mother Mary, were in the assembly of the original 120 disciples mentioned in Acts 1:14.

The New Testament does not tell us when James became an apostle, but in 36 AD the apostle Paul referred to him as such. After Paul had spent three years in Arabia, where he was taught directly by Jesus Christ, he returned to Damascus and then went up to Jerusalem. Paul recounted God's calling: "But when it pleased God ... to reveal His own Son in me, in order that I should preach Him as the gospel among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. **Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Peter, and I remained with him fifteen days. But I did not see *any* of the other apostles, except James the brother of the Lord**" (Gal. 1:15-19).

Fourteen years later, in 49 AD (inclusive counting), Paul went up to the conference in Jerusalem. In his epistle to the Galatians, he mentions that he met privately with James, Cephas [Peter] and John to discuss the question of circumcision: "But *the gospel that I preach did not come* from those reputed to be something. (Whatever they were does not make any difference to me; God does not accept *the* person of a man.) For those who are of repute conferred no *authority* upon me. But on the contrary, after seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, exactly as Peter *had been en-*

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trusted with the gospel of the circumcision; (for He Who wrought in Peter for *the* apostleship of the circumcision wrought in me also towards the Gentiles); and after recognizing the grace that was given to me, **James and Cephas and John**—those reputed to be pillars—gave to me and Barnabas *the* right hands of fellowship, *affirming that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcision*” (Gal. 2:6-9). Again, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul mentions Peter and the brothers of the Lord, which certainly included James (I Cor. 9:5).

James Wrote His Epistle to the Twelve Tribes of Israel

When the apostle James wrote his epistle to the twelve tribes of Israel, he knew where they were living: “James, a servant of God and of *the* Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes, which *are* in the dispersion: Greetings!” (James 1:1.) This means that his epistle was sent to the believers—Jews and Israelites—living in the countries named in Acts 2:9-11. They were among the first converts. Furthermore, after 30 AD, Jews and Israelites, converted and unconverted, made pilgrimages to Jerusalem to observe the annual festivals and holy days of God—Passover and Unleavened Bread, Pentecost and Tabernacles. There is very little doubt that many of the nonbelieving Jews and Israelites who made the journey to Jerusalem were converted during the years following Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Hiebert writes: “That the recipients of the epistle were Christians is evident from its contents. James repeatedly addresses them as ‘brethren,’ and he bases his authority upon the fact that he is ‘a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ’ (1:1). He views his readers as having been born again [Greek “begotten again”] by the Word of God (1:19), as persons holding ‘the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (2:1); he reminds them of ‘the honorable name by which ye are called’ (2:7). The exhortation to them to ‘be patient until the coming of the Lord’ (5:7) presupposes that the readers were Christians” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, pp. 49-50).

That James authored the epistle bearing his name is attested to by the similarities between it and the letter he authored as recorded in Acts 15:13-29. Hiebert notes: “This view [that James, the brother of Jesus, wrote the epistle of James] is supported by the remarkable coincidences of language between the epistle and the speech of James at the Jerusalem Conference as well as the letter sent by the Conference, which was evidently drawn up by James. The form ‘to greet’ at the beginning of the epistle of James and the Conference letter is an unusual form. James began his speech with the address, ‘Brethren, hearken unto me’—a form also found in the epistle (2:5). The expression ‘your souls’ in the Conference letter is a Hebraic expression; it is also found in the epistle (1:21). The peculiar use of the word ‘to visit’ is found in both the speech and the epistle. These and other similarities certainly are remarkable in view of the shortness of the passage in Acts from which they come. They cause us to feel that all the time we are in contact with the same mind” (Ibid., pp. 41-42).

“The epistle is characterized by the Jewish coloring of its contents. Hayes asserts that James ‘is the most Jewish writing in the New Testament.’ The very opening address is Jewish in origin (1:1); he speaks of Abraham as ‘our father’ (2:21); he draws his illustrations from the Old Testament—Abraham (2:21), Rahab (2:25), Job (5:11), Elijah (5:17-18). He is the only New Testament writer who employs the Old Testament designation of ‘the Lord of Sabaoth’ in speaking of God” (Ibid., p. 56).

When all the evidence is combined and analyzed, there is very little doubt that the apostle James, the son of Joseph, the brother of Jesus Christ, was the author of the Epistle of James.

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The Epistles of First and Second Peter

First Peter: The apostle Peter wrote the first epistle that bears his name. At the beginning of his epistle, Peter clearly identifies himself: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 1:1). There is no credible evidence that the first epistle of Peter was written by anyone else; however, at the end of this epistle, we find that Silvanus and Mark were with Peter in Babylon (I Pet. 5:12-13). Therefore, it is very probable that Peter used Mark or Silvanus as his scribe.

Hiebert relates, “The early Church had no doubts concerning the authenticity of 1 Peter. The evidence for the epistle is early and clear, and it is as strong as for any other book in the New Testament. It was universally received as an acknowledged part of the Christian Scriptures” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 105).

Peter and his brother Andrew were the first two disciples that Jesus called (John 1:39-44; Mark 1:16-18; Matt. 4:18-20; Luke 5:1-9). When Jesus selected the twelve apostles, Peter was named first (Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14). As we have seen, the apostle Peter was one of the special eyewitnesses, along with the apostle John and his brother James, who saw the glory of Jesus’ transfiguration on the holy mount (Matt. 17:1-9). These three were the initial leaders of the twelve apostles, although the book of Acts makes it clear that Peter and John fulfilled the primary leadership roles (Acts ch. 2-5).

Peter was a bold leader, but he had his weaknesses. The most notable one was his denial of the Lord three times the night Jesus was arrested and tried (Matt. 26:69-74; Mark 14:66-71; Luke 22:56-61; John 18:17-27). On Jesus’ last Passover night, prior to His arrest by the authorities, Jesus revealed to Peter that Satan had demanded to have him but He had prayed for him so that his faith would not fail: “Then the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon, listen *well*. Satan has demanded to have you, to sift *you* as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and when you are converted, strengthen your brethren [indicating a major leadership role for Peter]’ ” (Luke 22:31-32).

After His resurrection, sometime during the forty days before His final ascension to heaven, and apparently because Peter had denied Jesus three times, Jesus wanted Peter’s confession that he would feed the sheep of God. In the Gospel of John, Jesus specifically asked Peter three times whether he loved Him and then commanded him to feed the sheep: “Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, *son* of Jonas, do you love Me more than these?’ *And* he said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord. You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Feed My lambs.’ He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, *son* of Jonas, do you love Me?’ *And* he said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord. You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Shepherd My sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, *son* of Jonas, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ *And* he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed My sheep’ ” (John 21:15-17).

Peter Was Not the First Pope: Although Jesus used Peter as one of the initial leaders of the apostles, he was not the first pope. Some traditions make the claim that Peter was the first pope, and, he ministered in Rome for twenty-five years and was martyred there. However, most biblical scholars consider these traditions invalid because they have no factual basis in the New Testament Scriptures. Hiebert writes: “Tradition uniformly asserts that Peter did go to Rome, that he labored there, and that he was martyred there. The elaborately developed ‘Legend of St. Peter,’ setting forth his relations to Rome and long received in the Roman Catholic church, may be safely set aside as unreliable. Scripture is silent concerning Peter’s residence and martyrdom at Rome, and the question is still debated, but the uniform tradition of the Church, when stripped of its embellishments, is strong enough to make it reasonably certain [that these traditions are not

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true]. That Peter was the bishop of Rome for twenty-five years may confidently be rejected as ‘unquestionably a colossal chronological mistake,’ and the claim is abandoned by some modern Catholic scholars” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, pp. 112-113).

The claims of the Roman Catholic Church notwithstanding, there is no place in the New Testament where Jesus Christ or the apostles authorized any man to assume the exalted office and title of pope, or “holy father.” Furthermore, Jesus commanded the apostles never to call any man “Rabbi” or “Father.” He instructed his disciples to be humble and not to seek status as their religious leaders had done: “They do all their works to be seen by men. They make broad their phylacteries and enlarge the borders of their garments; and they love the first place at the suppers, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘**Rabbi, Rabbi.**’ **But you are not to be called Rabbi; for one is your Master, the Christ, and all of you are brethren. Also, do not call anyone on the earth your Father; for one is your Father, Who is in heaven. Neither be called Master; for one is your Master, the Christ.** But the greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever will exalt himself shall be humbled; and whoever will humble himself shall be exalted” (Matt. 23:5-12).

It is evident that the apostles practiced and taught what Jesus commanded. Therefore, neither Peter nor any of the other apostles would have established the office of “pope.” Such an exalted religious position is diametrically opposed to the teachings of Jesus Christ, Who set the example of love and service during His three-and-one-half-year ministry. Furthermore, He commanded the apostles never to exalt themselves over the brethren: “But Jesus called them to *Him and* said, ‘You know that the rulers of the nations exercise lordship over them, and the great ones exercise authority over them. However, **it shall not be this way among you; but whoever would become great among you, let him be your servant; and whoever would be first among you, let him be your slave; just as the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many**’ ” (Matt. 20:25-28). Therefore, it is clear that Jesus Christ did not establish Peter as the first pope or create the office of pope.

Peter’s first epistle demonstrates that he practiced what Jesus had commanded and taught. Moreover, he commanded other elders to feed the sheep as Jesus had commanded him: “The elders who *are* among you I exhort, even as a fellow elder, and an eyewitness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is about to be revealed: **Feed the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight not by compulsion, but willingly; not in fondness of dishonest gain, but with an eager attitude; not as exercising lordship over your possessions; but by being examples to the flock of God.** And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, you shall receive an unfading, *eternal* crown of glory” (I Pet. 5:1-4).

The contents of I Peter further establish that the apostle Peter wrote this epistle. Hiebert concurs, stating: “Ebright cites thirty-two passages in 1 Peter which find equivalents in the teachings of Jesus and concludes that they definitely prove the writer’s acquaintance with Jesus. And Farrar, in proof of the Petrine authorship, points out the natural way in which we may trace in the epistle the influence of the prominent events which occurred during Peter’s associations with Jesus....The general contents and tone of the epistle are consistent with the Petrine authorship” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, pp. 107-108).

Second Peter: Because there is a notable difference in the style of writing and language of II Peter as compared to I Peter, many ancient and modern scholars have doubted that Peter wrote it. Hiebert commented on this: “Second Peter was regarded with doubts in many sections of the early Church. Questions concerning its authenticity

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were again raised during the time of the Reformation, and in modern times many otherwise quite conservative critics are either noncommittal or feel that they must join forces with the negative critics in the rejection of Petrine authorship of the epistle. It is fair to say that 2 Peter has been the most controverted book in the New Testament. Yet the objections to it are not so conclusive as to silence those who defend its authenticity” (Ibid., pp. 133-134).

Perhaps the primary reason for the slow acceptance of Peter’s second epistle, as well as the rejection of his authorship, was that the false teachers who were leading the apostasy at that time condemned and discredited it. They must have realized that Peter’s excoriating denunciation of false teachers exposed them for what they really were: “But there were also false prophets among the people, as indeed there will be false teachers among you, who will stealthily introduce destructive heresies, personally denying *the* Lord who bought them, and bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many people will follow *as authoritative* their destructive ways; *and* because of them, the way of the truth will be blasphemed. Also, through insatiable greed they will with enticing messages exploit you for gain; for whom the judgment of old is in *full* force, and their destruction is *ever* watching” (II Pet. 2:1-3).

The apostasy sweeping the churches of God was so vicious and insidious in perverting the true gospel of Jesus Christ that Peter condemned those false teachers in the strongest language possible. Undoubtedly, this is why the style and language of Peter’s second epistle is so different from that of his first epistle. (Please read II Peter 2 in its entirety to understand the full force of Peter’s fiery condemnation of false teachers.)

When the internal evidence of II Peter is closely examined, there is very little doubt that Peter wrote this epistle. He begins his second epistle as he began his first epistle, by identifying himself: “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained *the* same precious faith as ours by *the* righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (II Pet. 1:1). Hiebert notes, “The claim to Petrine authorship is stronger in this epistle than in 1 Peter. The writer calls himself Simon Peter (1:1) and identifies himself as a witness of the transfiguration (1:16-18). He places himself on a level with the apostle Paul (3:15), identifies himself as the writer of a previous epistle (3:1), and recalls the Lord’s prediction concerning his death (1:14)” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 139).

While strongly condemning false teachers, Peter exhorts the believers to be diligent and develop godly Christian character through faith and understanding that are perfected through the love of God (1:5-11). Because Peter knew that the end of his life was near, he promised that he would leave them a written remembrance of the teachings of Jesus Christ (1:12-21). He also wanted to stir up their minds to remember the words of “the holy prophets, and of the commandment of the Lord and Savior, *spoken* by us, the apostles” (3:1-2). Finally, he encourages the brethren not to give up hope because “the day of the Lord” and His Second Coming did not appear to be imminent. He reminds them that in spite of the scoffers, the promises of God were sure and “the day of the Lord” would happen at its set time, regardless of when it took place in the future (3:1-14).

When all the evidence is examined, there is very little doubt that Peter wrote the second epistle that bears his name.

First, Second and Third John

First John: This epistle was written in an unusual style. It does not open with a declaration of the writer’s name, nor does it give addressees. The writer was so well-known and had such an intimate relationship with the intended recipients of his epistle

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that he had no need to identify himself. It is clear that they knew who he was and recognized his apostolic authority.

John opens his epistle with a special preamble showing that he was an intimate disciple of Jesus Christ who had been with Him from the beginning of His ministry: “That which was from *the* beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our own eyes, that which we observed for ourselves and our own hands handled, concerning the Word of life; (And the life was manifested, and we have seen, and are bearing witness, and are reporting to you the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us;) that which we have seen and have heard we are reporting to you in order that you also may have fellowship with us; for the fellowship—indeed, our fellowship—is with the Father and with His own Son, Jesus Christ. These things we are also writing to you, so that your joy may be completely full” (I John 1:1-4).

That the author of this epistle was the apostle John is attested to by Polycarp, who was a contemporary of the apostle John during the last twenty years of John’s life: “The earliest definite trace of this epistle is in Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (c. 69-115). In his *Epistle to the Philippians* (c. 115) he writes: ‘For whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is antichrist, and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the cross, is of the devil’ (chap. vii). These words seem clearly to have been inspired by 1 John 4:2-3. When we remember that the word ‘antichrist’ occurs in the New Testament only in John’s epistles ... and that ‘confess,’ ‘witness,’ and ‘to be of the devil’ are characteristically Johannine expressions, the conclusion seems certain [that the apostle John was its author]” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 183).

Another early witness of the apostle John’s writings was Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis (80-155 AD). Eusebius wrote of him: “Papias has left us five volumes entitled *The Sayings of the Lord Explained*...Papias himself in the preface to his work makes it clear that he was never a hearer or eyewitness of the holy apostles, and tells us that he learnt the essentials of the Faith from their former pupils: ‘I shall not hesitate to furnish you, along with the interpretations, with all that in days gone by I carefully learnt from the presbyters and have carefully recalled, for I can guarantee its truth. Unlike most people, I felt at home not with those who had a great deal to say, but with those who taught the truth; not with those who appeal to commandments from other sources but with those who appeal to the commandments given by the Lord to faith [to the faithful ones] and coming to us from truth itself. And whenever anyone came who had been a follower of the presbyters, I inquired into the words of the presbyters, what Andrew or Peter had said, or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew, or any other disciple of the Lord, and what Aristion and the presbyter John, disciples of the Lord, were still saying. For I did not imagine that things out of books would help me as much as the utterances of a living and abiding voice’ ” (Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 3:39:2, pp. 101-102).

There appears no doubt whatsoever that the apostle John wrote the epistle of I John: “In fact all Fathers, Greek and Latin, accept this epistle as being by John....Thus the evidence shows that this epistle, undoubtedly one of the latest of the New Testament books to be written, took an immediate and permanent position as an authoritative writing of inspiration” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 184).

The First Epistle of John Compared With the Gospel of John: When the style and language of John’s first epistle is compared with that of the Gospel of John, there can be no question that the apostle John wrote these books. In both, the language is simple and direct, revealing the spiritual love and power of God the Father and Jesus Christ. One of the most interesting features in John’s writings is the contrast of opposites to show the difference between the way of God and the way of Satan and the world:

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GOD'S WAY *The Spirit of Truth* *The Children of God in Light*

- True Christianity is founded on:
- 1) Light
 - 2) Truth
 - 3) Love of God

 - 4) Faith and hope in Jesus Christ and God the Father
 - 5) Repentance and confession of sins; cleansing and forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ
 - 6) Receiving the Holy Spirit of God

 - 7) Living in loving obedience and commandment-keeping

 - 8) Growing in the grace of God and knowledge of Jesus Christ

 - 9) Eternal life

THE DEVIL'S WAY *The Spirit of Deception* *The Children of the Devil in Darkness*

- False Christianity is founded on:
- 1) Darkness
 - 2) Deception and lies
 - 3) Love of the world and hatred of the true God and His children
 - 4) False knowledge and a false faith and hope
 - 5) Denial of sinful nature and sinful actions

 - 6) Influence of the devil and a counterfeit begetting—possible demon possession
 - 7) Living in disobedience and commandment-breaking, all sorts of lawlessness and transgression
 - 8) Sinking into the depths of Satanism and knowledge of the occult
 - 9) Eternal death

Hiebert notes: “This similarity of the two writings [1 John and the Gospel of John] is all the more remarkable when it is remembered that the nature of the fourth gospel is objective narrative, while the epistle is hortatory and polemical. This conclusion concerning the identity of authorship of the two writings greatly strengthens the evidence for the Johannine authorship of 1 John since tradition with unanimity and emphasis ascribes the fourth gospel to the apostle John” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 187).

Second and Third John: The similarity in content, language and style of these two short epistles clearly demonstrates that they were written by the apostle John. These epistles further strengthen the teachings in his first epistle and his gospel. Hiebert writes that “The relationship of these letters to 1 John further makes it clear that all three must have come from the same hand. Second John bears the closest resemblance to the first. More than half of its contents are also contained in 1 John. Both of these epistles have many phrases which recall, or are identical with those of the first epistle” (Ibid., p. 218).

“The internal evidence is overwhelmingly in favor of the traditional view. The historical situation reflected in these brief letters harmonizes with our information concerning the closing years of John’s life. The contents of the epistles point to the Johannine authorship. We conclude with Salmon that ‘no account of the matter seems satisfactory but the traditional one, that the writer was the Apostle John’ ” (Ibid., p. 221).

The Epistle of Jude

In the first verse of this short epistle, the author identifies himself as the brother of James. The salutation here is very similar to that in the epistle of the apostle James, which begins: “James, **a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.**” The opening of Jude’s epistle is nearly identical: “Jude, **a servant of Jesus Christ** and brother of

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James, to the called *saints*, sanctified by God *the* Father and kept in Jesus Christ.”

Very little is known about Jude. However, we know that Jude or Judas was the third of the four half brothers of Jesus, which means that he was probably much younger than James (Mark 6:3). Also, Luke noted that all of Jesus’ half-brothers were counted among the original 120 disciples (Acts 1:14). Jude was not only a disciple but also a special eyewitness of Jesus’ life. He lived with Jesus, talked with Him, ate with Him, and worked with Him on a daily basis.

The Epistle of Jude is the only important document from which we can glean an understanding of Jude’s character. Hiebert illustrates as follows: “This brief letter offers practically the only material available for an evaluation of the character of Jude. The epistle reveals him to have been possessed of keen mental abilities. It shows that he was a ‘man of clear perceptions, vivid imagination, intense sensibility, and strong will.’ He had the ability to give clear and forceful expression to his thoughts. His metaphors are vivid and incisive. He was a man of resolute purpose and strong desires. He had profound convictions and the courage to contend for those convictions.

“The impression left by the epistle is that Jude was a man of stern and unbending character. Yet he may well have been of a more tender nature than the epistle would suggest. In dealing with the insidious errors which were rearing their heads within the churches, loyalty to Christ demanded an uncompromising opposition which found expression in vehement denunciation. His love for the truth of God and the souls of men compelled him to speak forth in fiery denunciation against the destructive influences of the false teachers. But when addressing the brethren, there are glimpses of an affectionate nature and a tender spirit. Thrice he addresses the readers as ‘beloved’ (vv. 3, 17, 20). He has a heart concern for those who have been ensnared in the evils being combated and counsels a compassionate and saving attitude toward them (vv. 22-23)” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, pp. 167-168).

There is no record, from history or scripture, as to when Jude became a prominent leader in the Church. However, it is probable that he replaced James as the overseer of the church in Jerusalem after James was martyred in 62 AD. After James was killed, many of the Jewish believers began to leave Christianity and turn back to Judaism and to Jewish gnosticism. This development coincided with a rising opposition to the Romans, which led to the Jewish revolt that began in 66 AD. At this time, a “great apostasy” was sweeping the churches, as noted in the three epistles of John, II Peter and many of the epistles of Paul.

Jude probably wrote his epistle from Jerusalem and witnessed these events firsthand. His epistle shows that many believers were following ungodly men who had stealthily crept in and had established themselves in positions of authority. They were perverting the grace of God by granting license to sin. Jude warned that if the brethren followed them, they would be rejecting the teachings of Jesus Christ and abandoning the true faith. They were going “the way of Cain,” following “Balaam’s delusion,” and would perish as those in “the rebellion of Korah.” In short, they were committing the unpardonable sin. If they did not immediately turn back and repent, they would surely lose their salvation.

Apparently, the apostasy was so powerful and the situation was so desperate that Jude urged the believers to fight for the faith. If they did not fight for “the faith once delivered,” they would lose it! One can hear the tone of urgency in his message: “Beloved, when personally exerting all *my* diligence to write to you concerning the common salvation, **I was compelled to write to you, exhorting you to fervently fight for the faith, which once for all time has been delivered to the saints.** For certain men have stealthily crept in; those who long ago have been written about, condemning them to this judgment. *They are* ungodly men, who are perverting the grace of our God, *turning it into*

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licentiousness, and are personally denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 3-4).

In the most powerful language possible, Jude showed God’s judgment against Israel in the wilderness, against the angels that had sinned, and against those ungodly sinners who were leading the believers away from the true Christ. Next, he exhorted the brethren to build up their holy faith and to reach out and help other brethren who were falling victim to the apostasy: “But you, beloved, *be* building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in *the* Holy Spirit, *so that* you keep yourselves in *the* love of God *while* you are personally awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. Now on the one hand, show mercy to those individuals who are doubting; but on the other hand, save others with fear, snatching *them* out of the fire, hating even the garment *that has been* defiled by the flesh. Now to Him Who is able to keep them from falling, and to bring *them* into the presence of His own glory, blameless in exceeding joy, to *the* only wise God our Savior, *be the* glory and greatness, *the* might and authority, even now, and into all the ages of eternity” (Jude 20-25).

The parallels between Jude and II Peter 2 are remarkable. Some scholars think that Jude must have copied from Peter; others have suggested that Peter copied from Jude. However, when the two epistles are closely compared, it is clear that although they cover the same “great apostasy,” they were written from slightly different points of view. In his second epistle, Peter warned the church that the apostasy was coming—it was imminent. In contrast, Jude wrote of it as having already begun and gaining in strength and power. Apparently Peter wrote his second epistle to the church abroad; whereas, Jude, from the tone of his epistle, was addressing Jerusalem and Judea, where the apostasy had already taken hold.

Hiebert discusses the parallels between II Peter and Jude: “Even a casual reading of 2 Peter and Jude makes it obvious that there is a close relation between the two epistles. This relation is confined to 2 Peter 2:1-3:4 and Jude vv. 4-18. The rest of 2 Peter bears no resemblance to Jude. In both there is a discussion of false teachers, of an anti-nomian type, whose character and influence threaten the Church. The similarities in thought and structure are so remarkable that they cannot be merely accidental. For points of resemblance between the two, compare Jude 7 with 2 Peter 2:6; Jude 8 with 2 Peter 2:10; Jude 9 with 2 Peter 2:11; Jude 10 with 2 Peter 2:12; Jude 16 with 2 Peter 2:18; and Jude 17-18 with 2 Peter 3:2-3.

“But it is equally clear that the two epistles reveal remarkable differences. Obviously one is not merely a copy of the other. Whichever was written later was penned by a writer who maintained his own independence throughout. He adds to, leaves out, and rearranges the material being used in accordance with his own purpose” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 168). Thus, there is no reason to doubt that Jude, the brother of James and Jesus, wrote the Epistle of Jude.

The Epistles of the Apostle Paul

The Apostle Paul

The New Testament contains more information about Paul than about any other apostle. He wrote of himself in many of his fourteen epistles. In addition, the book of Acts contains firsthand, detailed accounts of Paul’s conversion, his ministry and his travels. The *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* contains this synopsis: “We are dependent on Acts alone for most of our knowledge of Paul’s career. That he was born in Tarsus, and was a citizen of Tarsus by birth; that he was named Saul; that he was educated in Jerusalem ‘at the feet of Gamaliel’ (Acts 22:3); that he was present at the stoning of Stephen

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and was a persecutor of the Jerusalem church; that he made a persecuting trip to Damascus and was converted as he approached this city; that he subsequently engaged in three distinct missionary journeys; that he was arrested in Jerusalem, appealed to Caesar as the right of a Roman citizen, and was sent to Rome for trial—all this we know only from Acts. Paul himself never mentions any one of these items” (vol. 3, pp. 683-684).

Saul was a Roman citizen by birth and was extremely well-educated. As a boy growing up in Tarsus, he must have been educated in the Roman schools and by the local rabbis as well. He also must have been extremely gifted, because he was selected to go to Jerusalem for advanced studies in Judaism. Saul was taught there by Gamaliel, a Pharisee, the most renowned Jewish teacher of his day. There is no indication of Saul’s age when he went to Gamaliel’s school. Since Paul does not mention that he was in Jerusalem or Judea during Jesus Christ’s ministry, it can only be assumed that he returned to Tarsus before Jesus began preaching.

A bit more information about Saul’s education can be gleaned from W. J. Conybeare. He wrote that Tarsus, the city of Saul’s birth, was most famous for its advanced schools in philosophy and general education: “Strabo says that, in all that relates to philosophy and general education, it was even more illustrious than Athens and Alexandria. From his description it is evident that its main character was that of a Greek city, where the Greek language was spoken and Greek literature studiously cultivated” (Conybeare, *Life, Times, and Travels of St. Paul*, p. 22). Conybeare continues: “Where had he been during ... the years in which the foundations of Christianity were laid? We cannot assume that he had remained continuously in Jerusalem. Many years had elapsed since he came, a boy, from his home at Tarsus. He must have attained the age of twenty-five or thirty years when our Lord’s public ministry began. His education was completed; and we may conjecture, with much probability, that he returned to Tarsus....It is hardly conceivable that if he had been in Jerusalem during our Lord’s public ministration there, he should never allude to the fact. In this case, he would surely have been among the persecutors of Jesus and have referred to this as the ground of his remorse, instead of expressing his repentance for his opposition merely to the Saviour’s followers.

“If he returned to the banks of the Cydnus [at Tarsus], he would find that many changes had taken place among his friends in the interval which had brought him from boyhood to manhood. But the only change in himself was that he brought back with him, to gratify the pride of his parents, if they were still living, a mature knowledge of the Law, a stricter life, a more fervent zeal. And here, in the schools of Tarsus, he had abundant opportunity for becoming acquainted with that Greek literature, the taste for which he had caught from Gamaliel, and for studying the writings of Philo and the Hellenistic Jews ... to the point where the ‘young man, whose name was Saul,’ reappears at Jerusalem, in connection with his friends of the Cilician Synagogue, ‘disputing with Stephen’ ” (Conybeare, *Life, Times, and Travels of St. Paul*, pp. 64-65).

Saul, the zealous persecutor who ravaged the churches of God, was the last person that anyone, other than God, would have called to be the apostle to the Gentiles. On his last mission for the high priest in Jerusalem, Saul had letters of authorization to arrest disciples of Jesus Christ in Damascus and bring them bound to Jerusalem for punishment and death. Luke wrote: “Now Saul, still breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, asking him *for* letters *to take* to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who were of that way, he might bring *them* bound, both men and women, to Jerusalem. But it came to pass while he was journeying, as he drew near to Damascus, that suddenly a light from heaven shined round about him. And after falling to the ground, he heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting. *It is hard for you to kick against the pricks.*’ Then trembling and as-

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tonished, he said, 'Lord, what will You have me to do?' And the Lord *said* to him, 'Get up and go into the city, and you shall be told what you must do' " (Acts 9:1-6).

Then, in a vision, the Lord said to Ananias that he was to go to Saul, lay hands on him to receive his sight and baptize him: "And the Lord *said* to him, 'Arise *and* go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in *the* house of Judas for *one* named Saul, from Tarsus; for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming and putting *his* hands on him, so that he may receive sight.' Then Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many *people* about this man, how many evil things he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And *even* in this place he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.' But the Lord said to him, '**Go, for this man is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before *the* Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel; for I will show him what great things he must suffer for My name.**' Then Ananias went away and came into the house; and after laying *his* hands on him, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord has sent me, *even* Jesus, Who appeared to you on the road in which you came, so that you might receive sight and be filled with *the* Holy Spirit.' And it was as *if* scales immediately fell from his eyes, and he instantly received sight; and he arose *and* was baptized" (Acts 9:11-18).

From that time forward, and perhaps to this very day, many Jewish religious leaders have considered Saul the worst defector Judaism ever had. Some leading rabbis have been known to say, "Jesus we understand, but Paul we will never forgive." Jesus specifically chose Saul, who was a zealous Pharisee, steeped in Judaism, to ensure that Judaism and its traditional works of law would never supplant the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Frank J. Goodwin wrote of Paul's calling: "A severe training as a strict Pharisee does not seem the most promising preparation for the future Apostle to the Gentiles. But Paul's weakness was his strength. 'We may safely say that if Saul had been less of a Jew Paul the apostle could have been less bold and independent. His work would have been more superficial and his mind less unfettered. God did not choose a heathen to be the apostle to the heathen; for he might have been ensnared by the traditions of Judaism, by its priestly hierarchy and the splendors of its worship, as indeed it happened with the Church of the second century. On the contrary, God chose a Pharisee. But this Pharisee had the most complete experience of emptiness of external ceremonies and the crushing yoke of the law [the traditional laws of Judaism]. There was no fear that he would ever look back, that he would ever be tempted to set up again what the grace of God had justly overthrown, Gal. 2:18. Judaism was wholly vanquished in his soul, for it was wholly displaced" (Goodwin, *A Harmony of the Life of St. Paul*, 1988, p. 16). Thus, Jesus' calling of Saul fulfilled the long revered saying, "God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform."

After being baptized by Ananias, Saul remained in Damascus for a short time, testifying that Jesus was the Christ: "Then Saul was with the disciples in Damascus *for* a number of days. And in the synagogues he immediately began to proclaim Christ, that He is the Son of God. And all who heard *him* were amazed and said, 'Is not this the man who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and who came here for this *purpose*, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?' But Saul increased *even* more in power, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this is the Christ" (Acts 9:19-22).

In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul wrote that after his conversion he went into Arabia for three years. During that time Jesus Christ personally taught him in visions. Therefore, the gospel that Paul preached did not come from any of the other apostles. It came directly from Jesus Christ: "But I certify to you, brethren, that the gospel that was preached by me is not according to man; because neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught *it by man*; rather, *it was by the* revelation of Jesus Christ. For you heard of my

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former conduct when I was in Judaism, how I was excessively persecuting the church of God and was destroying it; and I was advancing in Judaism *far* beyond many *of my* contemporaries in my *own* nation, being more abundantly zealous for *the* traditions of my fathers.

“But when it pleased God, Who selected me from my mother’s womb, and called *me* by His grace, to reveal His own Son in me, in order that I might preach Him as the gospel among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but **I went away into Arabia**, and returned again to Damascus. Then after **three years**, I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Peter, and I remained with him fifteen days. But I did not see *any* of the other apostles, except James the brother of the Lord” (Gal. 1:11-19).

Aside from the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Lord’s call and conversion of Saul, who became Paul the apostle to the Gentiles, is perhaps the greatest act of grace recounted in the New Testament. Because Paul had received this most profound grace, he fully understood the grace of God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, in the same way that God used the apostle John to teach and write more on the love of God than any other apostle, He used the apostle Paul to teach and write more about the magnificent grace of God than any other apostle.

Paul’s Ministry and Apostleship

In the book of Acts, Luke added more details about Paul’s visit to Jerusalem after he returned from Arabia in 36 AD: “And when Saul came to Jerusalem, he attempted to join himself to the disciples; but all were afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. Then Barnabas took him *and* brought *him* to the apostles [James and Peter], and related to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. And he was with them, coming in and going out in Jerusalem, and speaking boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then he spoke and disputed with the Greeks, but they attempted to kill him. And when the brethren learned of *it*, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus” (Acts 9:26-30).

Paul remained in Tarsus until 40 AD. By that time, through the preaching of the disciples, God had raised up a great number of Gentile believers in Antioch, the first converts to be called Christians. The apostles sent Barnabas to minister to them, but there were so many disciples that Barnabas went to Tarsus and found Paul and brought him to Antioch to help him minister to them (Acts 11:20-26).

Nearly four years later, in the late spring of 44 AD, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Barnabas and Paul were ordained as apostles. Then they went on their first evangelistic tour: “Now there were certain prophets and teachers in the church that was at Antioch, including Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch), and Saul. And as they were ministering and fasting to the Lord, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Separate both Barnabas and Saul to Me for the work to which I have called them.’ And when they had fasted and prayed, they laid hands on them *and* sent *them* out. So then, after being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed away to Cyprus” (Acts 13:1-4). During this first extended tour, Saul was renamed Paul (verse 9).

The Nature of Paul’s Epistles: During the next twenty years of the apostle Paul’s ministry, he and his helpers traveled extensively. God used him to raise up numerous churches throughout Asia Minor, Galatia, Greece, Rome, Italy, Spain and perhaps other countries not mentioned in the book of Acts. Paul wrote epistles to the various churches to instruct them in the gospel of Jesus Christ and to address questions pertaining to

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Christian living. Fourteen of the New Testament epistles were authored by Paul. Nine were written to seven specific churches: Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and I and II Thessalonians. Four are called “pastoral epistles” because they were written to ministers who had worked with Paul: I and II Timothy, Titus and Philemon. The book of Hebrews can be categorized as a general epistle because it was written to the Greek-speaking church at large, rather than to a specific congregation or individual.

Apparently the only epistle that Paul wrote with his own hand was that addressed to the Galatians (Gal. 6:11). He usually dictated his epistles to a scribe. It is known that he used Luke quite extensively, along with Silas, Timothy, and perhaps Mark and others as his scribes. Hiebert writes: “Paul made it a practice to dictate his letters to an amanuensis (scribe), writing the concluding words himself. Tertius, the scribe to whom Paul dictated the Epistle to the Romans, even added a greeting of his own in the letter (Rom. 16:22). Paul’s concluding words to his epistles constituted the evidence of their genuineness (2 Thess. 3:17; 1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18). Apparently he adopted this method of authenticating his letters because of a case of forgery where someone had written a letter to the Thessalonians in Paul’s name teaching that the Day of the Lord was already upon them (2 Thess. 2:1-2, Gr.).

“The epistles bear obvious traces of dictation. Shaw says, ‘We feel we are all the time listening to a *speaker*—one whom we may imagine walking up and down his room, while the pen of the shorthand writer flies swiftly over the parchment to keep pace with the utterance. All the Epistles have this air of being spoken, reported, and passed on without much revisal.’ Yet we must not assume that his letters were dashed off without preparation. They reveal careful planning [and editing]. A close study reveals a careful choice of words in the development of his subject. In epistles like Romans and Ephesians the course of the argument must have been fully worked out before pen was put to paper” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 19-20).

Hiebert has further explained: “The needs and capacities of the readers governed the contents of the epistle directed to them and influenced the application of the Gospel truths contained in it. In a letter Paul could treat important subjects with accuracy and fullness, and yet do so in immediate connection with actual life situations. His epistles are not abstract doctrinal dissertations on some particular aspect of the Christian faith. They were written to meet specific needs and were adapted to the occasion. The epistolary method enabled Paul to stress the truths of Christianity again and again in different contexts and with different applications, all according to the needs of his readers.

“However, the use of the epistolary form, which places Paul on a level of companionship with his readers, does not rob these writings of their authority as Scripture. Everywhere in the lofty, unwavering testimony of the writer there is that sense of authority which gives these writings their force and finality. And the added fact of direct prophetic revelation in his epistles, furthering the progress of Christian doctrine, diffuses over them that certainty and majesty which stamps them as inspired Scripture....It must be admitted that there is in them a lofty spirit and tone that forever distinguishes them from the ordinary letter of that day. In the words of Pratt, ‘The epistles of the N. T. are lifted into a distinct category by their spiritual eminence and power, and have given the word *epistle* a meaning and quality that will forever distinguish it from *letter*. In this distinction appears that Divine element usually defined as *inspiration*: a vital and spiritual endowment which keeps the writings of the apostles permanently “living and powerful,” where those of their successors pass into disuse and obscurity’ ” (Ibid., pp. 14-16).

Based on the internal and historical evidence, there is no question that the apostle Paul wrote the epistles that bear his name. God inspired the apostle Paul to write his epistles in a unique and authoritative manner in order to establish and communicate the

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essential eternal truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the churches of God in his time, and for all ages until Jesus returns.

The Book of Revelation

The book of Revelation, also known as the Apocalypse, is the most intriguing, mysterious and enigmatic book in the Bible. It is fitting that it stand as the last book of the New Testament and of the entire Bible. What God began as recorded in the book of Genesis, He is going to end as recorded in the book of Revelation. The first chapter of Revelation marks the beginning of the end, when Jesus said, “**I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the Ending,**” says the Lord, ‘Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come—the Almighty’ ” (1:8). When all the events in Revelation have been fulfilled, from chapter one through chapter twenty-one, Jesus proclaimed that His work will be done—the end will have arrived. What He started in the beginning, He has finished: “And He said to me, **It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.** To the one who thirsts, I will give freely of the fountain of the water of life’ ” (21:6). Genesis and Revelation, encompassing all of Scripture, reveal the plan of God in microcosm. It is fitting that what Genesis began, Revelation finishes.

Concerning Revelation, Hiebert writes that “The book of Revelation is the true capstone of the Bible. It is the only distinctively prophetic book of the New Testament. Other New Testament books contain various prophetic portions, but none of them provides such a sustained prophetic picture of the future as is given in this concluding book of biblical canon. Without it our Bible would be quite incomplete—like a stirring story without an ending or a drama without its climax. It brings the eschatological expectations of the Church to their fitting conclusion [the return of Jesus Christ to earth and the establishment of the kingdom of God]. It ‘supplies the finishing touch to the whole panorama of the biblical story.’ It is truly the book of consummation. That which is begun in the book of Genesis is brought to its conclusion in the book of Revelation. It is irreplaceable. For those who have spiritually illuminated eyes, the Apocalypse is one of the most precious and extraordinary writings in the world” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 231).

Many people desire to understand the book of Revelation, but this book is far more difficult to understand than the epistles of Paul. To those who love God and keep His commandments and have a thorough understanding of both the Old and New Testaments, the book of Revelation reveals. To those who do not love God and who transgress His commandments, the book of Revelation conceals.

Hiebert notes this: “Its strange symbolism and grotesque imagery are difficult for the modern reader to envision, leaving the uneasy impression that they are devoid of sober significance. Its sweeping apocalyptic visions of devastating world judgments seem unreal and far removed from the experiences of the common man, striking him as improbable of realization. Although the book presents itself as a ‘revelation,’ not a few have felt that it might more appropriately be designated a ‘concealment.’ For many readers it remains a closed book. It is unquestionably one of the most misunderstood and misused books of the New Testament” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, pp. 231-232).

The Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation

The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation complement one another. Daniel tells half of the story and Revelation tells the rest of the story. When Daniel desired to under-

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stand the prophecies that God had given to him, an angel of God told him that it was not for him to know their meaning. Rather, the prophecies he wrote would not be understood in his day, but only at the time of the end: “But you, O Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, even to the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased....” And I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, “O my lord, what shall be the end of these things?” And he said, “**Go thy way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and made white, and refined. But the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand**” (Dan. 12:4, 8-10).

But who are the wise? How is it that they will understand and the wicked will not? The wise are those who love God, fear Him and keep His commandments; and because they do, they will understand. “**The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever**” (Psa. 111:10). In the book of Revelation, the people of God are those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony and faith of Jesus Christ: “Then the dragon was furious with the woman and went to make war with the rest of her seed, **who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ**....Here is *the* patience of the saints; here *are* the ones who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17; 14:12). Therefore, the true people of God are the ones who are wise, and according to the promises of God, they will understand.

In the opening verses of Revelation, Jesus Christ tells John that He had received the revelation from God the Father. Giving it to John, He commanded him to write it in a book and send it to the seven churches in Asia (1:11): “*The* revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him, to show to His servants the things that *are* ordained to come to pass shortly; and He made *it* known, having sent *it* by His angel to His servant John; who gave witness *to* the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, and all the things he saw. Blessed *is* the one who reads, and those who hear the words of this prophecy and who keep the things *that are* written therein; for the time *is* at hand. John to the seven churches that *are* in Asia: Grace and peace *be* to you from Him Who is, and Who was, and Who *is* to come; and from the seven spirits that are before His throne; and from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him Who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to God and His Father; to Him *be* the glory and the sovereignty into the ages of eternity. Amen” (Rev. 1:1-6).

Jesus furthermore revealed that His sayings in Revelation would be understood only by those who have the Spirit of God. Seven times He said to the churches, “The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches,” and once, “The one who has an ear, let him hear.” Likewise, in the Gospels, Jesus made this statement eight times: “The one who has ears to hear, let him hear.” In saying this, Jesus was clearly talking to the disciples who heard His voice. These sayings were recorded in the New Testament so that future disciples would hear His voice in the written Word. According to the promises of God, they will understand because they willingly hear and obey both Jesus Christ and God the Father.

Jesus made it clear to the apostles, and subsequently to all believers, that they would understand spiritual things that the world would not understand. Although the multitudes did not understand the parables He spoke to them, Jesus revealed the true meaning of the stories to His disciples—and they understood: “And His disciples came to Him and asked, ‘Why do You speak to them in parables?’ And He answered *and* said to them, ‘Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has *understanding*, to him more

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shall be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have *understanding*, even what he has shall be taken away from him.

“ ‘For this *reason* I speak to them in parables, because seeing, they see not; and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, “In hearing you shall hear, and in no way understand; and *in* seeing you shall see, and in no way perceive; for the heart of this people has grown fat, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and should hear with their ears, and should understand with their hearts, and should be converted, and I should heal them.” **But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous men have desired to see what you see, and have not seen; and to hear what you hear, and have not heard** ’ ” (Matt. 13:10-17).

The entire book of Revelation is much like the parables that Jesus spoke to the multitudes. Revelation was written to reveal to the people of God what the world will be like in the end times. Because it was not written to the people of the world or for the world, the world does not understand it. Only those who have the Spirit of God, love God and keep His commandments will understand. Those who do not have the Spirit of God cannot understand. Hiebert commented: “The book of Revelation makes serious demands upon the would-be interpreter. It was originally given to God’s ‘servants’ and was communicated to them through ‘his servant John’ (1:1). By its very nature, the Apocalypse cannot be expected to yield its true message to one who lives in the open disregard of God and His will (cf. Rev 22:10-15).

“Like other Scriptures, it demands that the interpreter attentively ‘hear what the Spirit saith to the churches’ (2:7). Intellectual acumen and speculative ingenuity are not adequate equipment for the proper unfolding of its message. Spirit-guided receptivity is essential.

“For an adequate unfolding of its message, the interpreter needs a knowledge of the rest of the Bible. As the capstone of the biblical revelation, the Apocalypse is rightly to be understood only in the light of that prior revelation. Ideally, the interpretation of the Revelation should constitute the acme of biblical interpretation. Admittedly the book demands prolonged and diligent study. Smith appropriately remarks, ‘Because of its symbolism, its saturation with Old Testament passages and themes, the various schemes of interpretation that have developed concerning this book through the ages, and the profundity and vastness of the subjects that are here unveiled, I believe that the Apocalypse, above every other book of the Bible, will yield its meaning only to those who give it prolonged and careful study’ ” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, pp. 233-234).

Who Wrote the Book of Revelation? The writer of the book of Revelation identifies himself four times as “John” (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). This “John” was none other than the apostle Jesus loved, the one who wrote the Gospel of John and three epistles. Most people do not realize that Jesus prophesied that the apostle John would write the book of Revelation. This is recorded in the last chapter of the Gospel of John. After Jesus had commanded Peter three times to feed His sheep, He revealed to Peter how he would die. Then Peter wanted to know what would happen to John: “But when Peter turned, he saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had sat at the supper and *leaned* on His chest, and had said, ‘Lord, who is it that is betraying You?’ Seeing him, Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, what *shall* happen to this one?’ Jesus said to him, ‘**If I desire that he remain alive until I come, what *is it* to you? You follow Me.**’ Then this saying went out among the brethren, that that disciple would not die. However, Jesus did not say to him that he would not die; but, ‘If I desire that he remain alive until I come, what *is it* to you?’ (John 21:20-23).

Although he did not live to see the literal return of Jesus Christ, John remained alive to see the return of Jesus in a vision. Therefore, what Jesus said of John in John 21:22-23 was, in fact, a prophecy that he would write the book of Revelation. Moreover,

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as recorded in the first chapter of Revelation, the first vision that John saw was the return of Jesus in the clouds of heaven: “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen” (verse 7).

Because of their lack of understanding, some scholars do not accept the apostle John’s authorship of the book of Revelation. However, the early historical evidence and traditions of the early church point to him as the author. Hiebert concurs: “The external testimony for apostolic authorship is solid and early. But the internal evidence admittedly presents serious difficulties to that view. Those scholars who are strongly impressed with the internal difficulties generally conclude that these difficulties overrule the external evidence. But advocates of nonapostolic authorship find it equally or more difficult to identify a John who fits the demands presented by the book. The most certain factor in the confusion of views is the external evidence supporting apostolic authorship. If the apostle John wrote the book, the traditional view has a natural explanation; no other view can satisfactorily explain that tradition. We concur with the conclusion of Hayes. ‘We prefer to agree that the tradition of the church is the best authority in the matter, and that this greatest of the New Testament seers and theologians is that apostle of the living heart who lay upon the Master’s bosom at the daily meal and came to have the deepest insight into the Master’s mind during the life ministry, then was granted the revelation of the Master’s ultimate triumph in the visions of the Patmos exile’ ” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, pp. 251-252).

It can be concluded that the apostle John did, in fact, write the book of Revelation. It was fitting that the disciple whom Jesus especially loved was granted the blessing of writing the last book of the New Testament and Bible.

A Final Summary

Much of the historical and biblical evidence about who wrote the books of the New Testament has been examined. Scripture has informed us that God the Father and Jesus Christ specifically chose certain deeply converted men to write the most important and magnificent book in the world. Contrary to the opinions of scholars, they did not leave the task to nonbelievers and happenstance. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God the Father and Jesus Christ inspired these chosen men to write the New Testament. Inspired by the Spirit of Truth from the God of Truth, they wrote the truth of God. As the apostle John wrote, “Not a single lie comes from the truth.”

In all the commentaries that have been written about the New Testament, this very obvious fact has been overlooked: **God the Father and Jesus used only eight men to write the entire New Testament.** Six of them were chosen apostles of Jesus Christ. Three were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life and ministry—the apostles Matthew, Peter and John. Two were brothers of Jesus Christ—James and Jude. One, Paul, was specially called to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and for three years Jesus Christ personally taught him in visions. The last two men were Mark, who wrote the Gospel of Mark under Peter’s supervision, and Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke and Acts under Paul’s supervision. Furthermore, when one considers the fourteen epistles that the apostle Paul wrote, together with the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, which were written under his direction, one finds that the apostle Paul was responsible for writing more than one-half of the New Testament.

The New Testament was written by, or the writing was supervised by, the chosen apostles of Jesus Christ. Therefore, one can have full faith and confidence that the original Greek text, as preserved in the Byzantine text, contains the words of God.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHEN WAS THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITTEN?

In Chapters One through Three it has been established, from Scripture and from history, who wrote the New Testament and in what language. But when was the New Testament written? The opinions and hypotheses of scholars vary widely. On the one hand, some view the New Testament as a collection of fables and myths verbally passed on by storytellers for generations before any written documents were made. On the other hand, many scholars believe that most of the New Testament was written before the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

Robert W. Funk and the Jesus Seminar have presented the following chronological framework for the compilation of the Gospels: “It is essential in assessing the historical reliability of the gospels to bear in mind that sayings ascribed to Jesus and individual stories told about him circulated orally for two decades or more before the first written records were created. It was another two decades or more before the first narrative gospel was composed. And then it was another decade or two before the derivative gospels were composed. In round numbers, the chronology of the written gospels may be divided into twenty-year periods:

- 30 C.E. death of Jesus
 - 50+ C.E. written collections of sayings (Q)
 - 70+ C.E. first narrative gospel (Mark)
 - 90+ C.E. derivative gospels (Matthew, Luke, John)”
- (*The Acts of Jesus*, p. 8).

In their chronology of the compilation of the Gospels, the only year that is correct is the year of Jesus’ crucifixion—30 CE, or 30 AD. All the other dates are far too late. To support their hypotheses, these scholars have posited a chronological framework for the writing of the Gospels that spans sixty years. By using such a scheme, they are able to discount the possibility that any of the Gospels were completed before 70-90 AD. This chronology is not based on the true facts of history or the verifiable dates of historical persons mentioned in the Gospels. It also ignores the internal evidence in other books of the New Testament that clearly testify as to when the Gospels were written. The framework is inaccurate because it is based on contrived theories.

Other Chronologies for the Writing of the New Testament

In his book, *Redating the New Testament*, John A. T. Robinson masterfully demonstrated that the books of the New Testament were written relatively early. Robinson also presented many hypotheses that various other scholars had developed. From Robinson’s book comes this summary of Harnack’s chronology: “Harnack’s survey, which has never been repeated on so comprehensive a scale, gives a good indication of where critical opinion stood at the turn of the century [1900]. It still carried many of the marks of

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the Tübingen period and continued to operate with a span of well over a hundred years. Isolating the canonical books of the New Testament ... we have the following summary:

| | |
|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 48-49 | I and II Thessalonians |
| 53 | I and II Corinthians, Galatians (?) |
| 53-54 | Romans |
| 57-59 | Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians (if genuine), Philippians |
| 59-64 | Pauline fragments of the Pastoral Epistles |
| 65-70 | Mark |
| 70-75 | Matthew |
| 79-93 | Luke-Acts |
| 81-96 | (‘under Domitian’) I Peter, Hebrews |
| 80-110 | John, I-III John |
| 90-110 | I and II Timothy, Titus |
| 93-96 | Revelation |
| 100-130 | Jude |
| 120-140 | James |
| 160-175 | II Peter” |

(Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, 1976, pp. 4-5).

Robinson also summarized the chronologies of W. G. Kummel and Norman Perrin, who offer dates ranging from 50 to 140-150 AD for the writing of the New Testament. Conversely, most of the dates in the third century, assigned by other scholars, are far too late.

In spite of the late dates assigned by some scholars, it is possible to determine when the books of the New Testament were written. However, in order to establish more accurately when these books were written, it is essential to begin with known scriptural facts and historical dates that are verifiable.

The Gospel of Matthew

Matthew, who was a Levite and a tax collector, was one of the first disciples that Jesus had called to be an apostle. From the internal evidence of his Gospel, it seems probable that he was taking notes of Jesus’ teachings from the beginning of His ministry in 26 AD. Later, the book of Acts describes how the apostles gave themselves to “the ministry of the Word”; that is, they began to write and compile the teachings of Jesus within the first year after His crucifixion in 30 AD (Acts 6:4). Furthermore, because of the thousands of new believers (Acts ch. 2-5), it was necessary for the apostles to write down Jesus’ words of the New Covenant before the Passover of 31 AD (Matt. 26:17-30, John 13-17). Otherwise, the thousands of new believers would not be able to properly observe their first New Covenant Passover. In Robinson’s opinion, “This first stage must have gone back to the earliest days of the Christian mission and the instruction of converts in the 30s and 40s, and was doubtless perpetuated after the demand for more complex formulations arose” (Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, p. 96).

Robinson further suggests that the apostle Paul must have had some version of “the words of the Lord” that he took with him on his first evangelistic mission: “Inasmuch as Paul went out in the first instance as the delegate of this church [Antioch], we may suppose that this was primarily the tradition of the ‘words of the Lord’ which he took with him, and it would explain the otherwise rather unexpected affinity alike in doctrine and in discipline between Paul and Matthew, especially in early writings like the Thessalonian epistles....If this is the case, it would go a long way to explain the external

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tradition that Matthew was the first gospel” (Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, p. 97).

Matthew emphasized the need for the apostles to clearly distinguish between the teachings of Jesus and the teachings of Judaism as espoused by the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Gospel tells of how Jesus warned the apostles to beware of the doctrines of the latter groups: “And Jesus said to them, ‘Watch out, and be on guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’ Then they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘*It is* because we did not take bread.’ But when Jesus knew *this*, He said to them, ‘O *you* of little faith, why are you reasoning among yourselves that *it is* because you did not bring bread? Do you still not understand? *Do you* not remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you took *up*? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets you took *up*? How is it that you do not understand that I was not speaking of bread *when I told* you to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees?’ **Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees**” (Matt. 16:6-12).

It was necessary for them to distinguish between Christ’s teachings and the doctrines of the Pharisees and Sadducees as soon as possible because all the early believers were converts from Judaism. Robinson made this point: “Matthew’s gospel shows all the signs of being produced for a community (and by a community) that needed to formulate, over against the main body of Pharisaic and Sadducaic Judaism, its own line on such issues as the interpretation of scripture and the place of the law, its attitude toward the temple and its sacrifices, the sabbath, fasting, prayer, food laws and purification rites, its rules for admission to the community and the discipline of offenders, for marriage, divorce and celibacy, its policy toward Samaritans and Gentiles in a predominantly Jewish milieu, and so on. These problems reflect a period when the needs of co-existence [as with churches within synagogues] force a clarification of what is the distinctively Christian line on a number of practical issues which previously could be taken for granted [as previously taught by the religious establishment of Judaism—the Pharisees and Sadducees]” (Ibid., p. 103).

As a Levite familiar with the Scriptures, “Matthew understood the way in which Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. More references [from the prophet Isaiah] appear in his gospel to this fact than in any of the other three gospels” (William Steuart McBirnie, *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, p. 176).

The internal evidence gives a fairly good idea of when Matthew began writing his Gospel. However, there is no direct indication as to when he finished it or when it was in general use. Robinson concurs: “Matthew could therefore in a real sense turn out to be both the earliest and [because of later edits] the latest of the synoptists” (Ibid., p. 102). An attempt to determine when the writing of the Gospel of Matthew began and ended logically should begin with an examination of when the Epistle of James was written, because the apostle James’ epistle was the first New Testament epistle completed, and it is saturated with Jesus’ teachings as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Thus, the Gospel of Matthew must have been written before James wrote his epistle.

The Epistle of James

The Internal Evidence of James

From the internal evidence of the Epistle of James as well as other historical writings, it can be determined that James wrote his epistle very early. First, James addressed his epistle “To the twelve tribes, which *are* in the dispersion” (1:1). This means that his epistle was sent to the Jewish communities scattered in all the countries around the Medi-

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terranean Sea, as well as to Babylon, Persia, Media, Parthia, Scythia and Europe. Furthermore, this is clear evidence that the Jews during the time of the apostles knew where ten tribes of Israel were located—they were not lost, as later Jewish historians have claimed.

Second, the churches that James wrote to were still a part of the synagogue system. He wrote: “Now then, **if a man comes into your synagogue** wearing gold rings *and dressed* in splendid apparel, and *there* comes in also a poor man in lowly apparel, and you give preference to the one who is wearing the splendid apparel, and say to him, ‘Seat yourself here in the best place’; and you say to the poor man, ‘Stand over there,’ or, ‘Sit here under my footstool’; then have you not passed judgment among yourselves, and have made yourselves judges *with evil opinions*?” (James 2:2-4). And in chapter five there is this instruction: “**Is anyone sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church**, and let them pray over him after anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick one, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” (verses 14-15). What James wrote is significant because he clearly shows that the early Jewish and Israelite churches in the Diaspora were offshoots of the synagogues, with no indication of Gentile converts.

Third, in 38 AD, Peter was the first apostle that God used to preach to the Gentiles—Cornelius and his household in Caesarea. As Peter was speaking, God miraculously gave the Holy Spirit to the uncircumcised Gentiles (Acts 10). Two years later, about 40 AD, there were many Gentiles in Antioch who believed (Acts 11:19-21). When the apostles in Jerusalem heard about it, they sent Barnabas to Antioch to teach them (Acts 11:22-24). But when he saw that there were a great number of Gentile believers, Barnabas knew that he needed help to teach them. So he traveled to Tarsus to find Saul and bring him back to Antioch to help him (Acts 11:25-27). They continued to teach the Gentile believers in Antioch for four years. In 44 AD, because of the famine in Jerusalem and Judea, Barnabas and Saul brought food and famine relief from the Gentile brethren in Antioch to the brethren in Jerusalem (Acts 11:29-30). They stayed in Jerusalem a short time and then returned to Antioch (Acts 12:25).

Fourth, when God later began to call the Gentiles, there was an influx of Gentiles into the churches, as in the case of the church at Antioch, which was mostly Gentile. However, James makes no mention of any Gentiles in his epistle. This shows that he wrote his epistle well before there were many Gentile converts in the churches and well before circumcision became a burning issue.

Fifth, Saul and Barnabas were ordained as apostles in Antioch in late spring 44 AD (Acts 13:1-3). They immediately set out on their first evangelistic tour, which lasted from late spring 44 AD to the fall of 46 AD (Acts 13:4-14:26), and then returned to Antioch, remaining there until 49 AD (Acts 14:28). At that time, certain teachers of the sect of Pharisees, who believed, came from Jerusalem, teaching that it was obligatory to circumcise the Gentiles in order for them to be saved (Acts 15:1-5). After many heated debates with them, the church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to settle the question. The Jerusalem Conference occurred in the fall of 49 AD, probably around the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. The apostle James wrote a letter to the Gentiles in Antioch about the conference’s decisions concerning circumcision and other matters and sent it to them by the hand of Paul and Barnabas. Judas and Silas were also sent to explain the decision to the brethren (Acts 15:6-35). The fact that James wrote the letter of Acts 15 to the Gentiles indicates that he had to have written his epistle well before 49 AD, because he makes no mention of Gentile converts or the issue of circumcision in his epistle.

Hiebert, defending an early date for the Epistle of James, writes: “Among those who reject the authorship of James, the dates assigned to the epistle vary greatly. Even

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among those who accept that authorship there is considerable divergence of opinion. Some would date it shortly before the martyrdom of James, while others place it early, even before the Jerusalem Conference. The contents of the epistle seem to point to an early date.

“One phase of the evidence for an early date is the ‘very slight line which appears to exist between Judaism and Christianity.’ There is likewise an absence of developed Christian phraseology and a lack of elaborated Christian doctrine. The Christian distinctives mentioned in the epistle—the lordship of Christ and the hope of His early return (1:1; 2:1; 5:8)—were characteristic of Christianity from its very inception.

“The fact that there is no mention of circumcision points to a time before this burning question arose in the Church. Before the admission of Gentiles into the Church, the obligation of the ceremonial Law [and circumcision] upon the believers was taken for granted by Jewish Christians, hence needed no discussion. But with the Jerusalem Conference this became a critical problem, and it seems unlikely that James in writing to Jewish Christians would have nothing to say about it if the problem had already arisen.

“The total absence of any reference to Gentiles and their relation to Christianity is strange indeed if Gentile Christians are already a prominent element in the Church. The epistle gives no hint of the existence of Gentile churches. Neither does it contain any directions concerning the social relations between Jewish and Gentile believers, a problem which was acute after the Jerusalem Conference (cf. Gal 2:11, ff.)....

“It is highly improbable that the epistle was written after the outbreak of the controversy concerning faith versus works [as in the epistles of Paul]....The epistle [of James] belongs to a period before the finer distinctions which arose out of that question were developed. Thus Smith says, ‘There was, when the letter was written, no need to distinguish between *works*, *good works*, and *works of the Law*, but these distinctions became vital for subsequent controversialists. The word *justification* had evidently not acquired a technical sense, and the author shows no acquaintance with the doctrine of Paul.’

“We conclude that the evidence points to a date before the Jerusalem conference. The date may thus be suggested as about A.D. 46, at least before A.D. 49. This view makes James the earliest book in the New Testament” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, pp. 52-53).

Robinson also understood that James was written very early: “Perhaps ... we should date the epistle of James early in 48—not later, and possibly a year or so earlier: let us say 47-8....This early dating has had surprisingly persistent support....The problem of a letter written in Greek to an audience inside as well as outside Palestine remains. But it is no more difficult then than ten years later....If ... the gospel of Matthew, whose tradition is closest to that of this epistle, was also beginning to take shape, in Greek, in a similar milieu at the same time, then the epistle of James will no longer be an anomalous exception. It can take its place, alongside other literature in the process of formation in the second decade of the Christian mission, as the first surviving finished document of the church” (Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, pp. 138-139).

The “second decade of the Christian mission” refers to the 40s AD. It is quite possible that James wrote his epistle in 40-41 AD—only ten to eleven years after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ—rather than in the mid-to-late 40s. Moreover, in 40 AD the only Gentile church was in Antioch, and the question of circumcision had not yet become an issue there, so there would have been no need for James to write of it in his epistle. However, that soon changed. During Paul and Barnabas’ first evangelistic tour in 44-46 AD, they established many Gentile churches on the island of Cyprus and in Asia Minor.

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At the same time, the number of Gentile believers undoubtedly increased in Antioch. Therefore, it can be further estimated, based on the evidence of the book of Acts as well as the internal evidence of the Epistle of James and James' extensive use of the Gospel of Matthew, that James wrote his epistle much earlier than Robinson's date of 47-48 AD or Hiebert's date of 46 AD. It is more probable that James wrote his epistle in 40-41 AD—much earlier than most scholars have concluded.

The Similarities Between the Epistle of James and the Gospel of Matthew

Key to understanding when Matthew's Gospel was written are the similarities between the Epistle of James and the Gospel of Matthew. These similarities are profound because they suggest that Matthew's Gospel was completed and used extensively to teach new converts long before James wrote his epistle. Hiebert noted fourteen similarities between the Epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount as found in Matthew 5-7: "The epistle offers a larger number of similarities to the Sermon on the Mount than any other book in the New Testament. If the apostle Paul developed the significance of the death of Jesus, it may be said that James developed the teaching of Jesus. Scott asserts, 'There is scarcely a thought in the Epistle which cannot be traced to Christ's personal teaching' " (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 57).

The fact that James' epistle is saturated with the teachings of Jesus is even more profound, because during Jesus' ministry James was not a disciple of Jesus. He probably knew very little about Jesus' teachings. Neither he nor his brothers believed that Jesus was the Messiah (John 7:2-5). However, after Jesus was resurrected, He revealed Himself to James. It is apparent that after that time, James believed in Jesus and, therefore, was part of the 120 original disciples (Acts 1:15). This means that James had to have learned the teachings of Jesus from the other apostles. More importantly it suggests that James also used and extensively studied the writings of Matthew, which became the Gospel of Matthew. Therefore, the extensive similarities between the Epistle of James and the Gospel of Matthew are all the more profound.

In addition, a more extensive analysis of James and Matthew reveals far more similarities than the fourteen noted by Hiebert. There are a total of sixty-seven direct or indirect references to Jesus' teachings as recorded by Matthew in his Gospel that are incorporated by James into his epistle. This indicates that James (and undoubtedly all the apostles) used and studied Matthew for a prolonged period of time before James wrote his epistle in 40-41 AD.

A Comparison Between the Epistle of James and the Gospel of Matthew, in Three Sections

A detailed comparison of the sixty-seven parallel references between the Epistle of James and the Gospel of Matthew is given below. This comparison reveals that by the time James wrote his epistle, he had thoroughly incorporated the teachings of Jesus into his thinking.

Section One:

| <i>James</i> | <i>Matthew</i> | <i>James</i> | <i>Matthew</i> |
|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| 1:1 | 10:5 | 1:18 | 13:23, 30,37 |
| 1:2-3 | 5:10-12 | 1:19 | 5:22 |
| 1:4 | 5:48 | 1:21 | 5:5, 17 |
| 1:5 | 7:7-12 | 1:22 | 5:22 |

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| | | | |
|---------|----------|-------|-----------------|
| 1:6-7 | 21:18-22 | 1:23 | 7:26-27 |
| | 14:25-31 | 1:25 | 5:17-21 |
| 1:8 | 6:24 | | 7:26-27 |
| 1:9 | 5:3 | | 19:17-19 |
| 1:10-11 | 6:27-28 | 1:26 | 5:37 |
| 1:12 | 5:10-12 | | 15:10-11, 17-20 |
| 1:13-15 | 15:18-21 | 2:1-4 | 7:1-5 |
| 1:17 | 7:11 | 2:5-6 | 18:10; 11:15-30 |

Section Two:

| <i>James</i> | <i>Matthew</i> | <i>James</i> | <i>Matthew</i> |
|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| 2:7 | 7:12 | 3:2 | 18:1-10 |
| | 22:37-40 | 3:5 | 12:33-37 |
| 2:11 | 5:27 | 3:12 | 7:16-21 |
| | 5:21 | 3:15 | 16:21-23 |
| 2:12 | 9:10-13 | 3:16 | 20:20 |
| 2:13 | 5:7 | 3:17-18 | 5:9 |
| | 6:14-15 | 4:4 | 6:19-24 |
| 2:14 | 7:21-23 | 4:6 | 23:4-12 |
| 2:15-16 | 25:31-46 | 4:7 | 4:1-11 |
| | 21:21 | | 16:21-23 |
| 2:18 | 19:16-23 | | 4:17 |
| 2:19 | 8:29-33 | 4:8 | 5:3-4 |
| 2:20 | 21:28-31 | 4:10 | 12:1-8 |
| 2:24 | 5:16 | 4:12 | 16:24-27 |
| | 9:20-22 | | |

Section Three:

| <i>James</i> | <i>Matthew</i> | <i>James</i> | <i>Matthew</i> |
|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| 5:1-3 | 6:19-21 | 5:14 | 10:1 |
| 5:6 | 23:29-36 | | 21:22 |
| 5:10 | 5:12 | 5:15 | 7:7-12 |
| 5:12 | 5:33-37 | | 17:15-21 |
| | | 5:16 | 6:7 |

The evidence is overwhelming that the apostle James used the Gospel of Matthew as a basis for much of his epistle. Thus, it can be concluded that Matthew was written and completed (perhaps with some further edits later) and was in general use well before 40-41 AD. But **it is also possible that Matthew had completed his Gospel as early as 33-35 AD.** This supposition would fully harmonize with the fact that the apostles gave themselves to “the ministry of the Word” in the first year after the crucifixion. As a Levite, Matthew undoubtedly was in charge of writing and compiling the teachings of Jesus, as described in Acts 6:4. That is why the Gospel of Matthew was the first gospel account to be completed and why it is the first book of the New Testament.

From the chronology in the book of Acts and also from tradition, it is known that the apostles remained in Jerusalem from 30 to 42 AD. Beginning in 42 AD they began to preach the gospel to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, who were scattered throughout the world in the Diaspora. Jesus commanded the apostles to carry the gospel to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:5-23). Tradition is almost unanimous that in

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42 AD most of the apostles left Jerusalem to preach the gospel not only to the house of Israel but also to all nations (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:47-48; Acts 1:8). (See Appendix R, pages 846-849 for details of where the apostles traveled.)

The apostle James must have written his epistle to “the twelve tribes in the Diaspora” in 40-41 AD, about a year before most of the apostles left Jerusalem to preach to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He probably sent his epistle to them shortly after it was written, to prepare the way for the other apostles who would preach the gospel to them.

The Jews and Israelites—believers and nonbelievers alike—who attended the synagogues in the Diaspora always looked to Jerusalem for leadership. In their synagogues they kept copies of the Old Testament in both Hebrew and Greek. Prior to the coming of Jesus Christ, they always looked to the priests and Levites in Jerusalem as authorities in religious matters. Consequently, after Christ had completed His ministry, the believers in the scattered synagogues of the Diaspora would have respected the leadership of the apostle James. He was in charge of the Jerusalem church, and he was the brother of the Lord, of the house of David. Hiebert substantiates this fact: “As Jews, the readers [of his epistle] had been accustomed to look to Jerusalem for religious leadership. This background conditioned them to look for and accept guidance and doctrinal instruction from James, the recognized leader of the Jewish Christians at Jerusalem. As the leader of the Jerusalem church, the care of these Jewish Christian congregations [yet in the synagogues] would in a special way fall to the province of James. He would come into contact with various representatives of these congregations as different members came to Jerusalem for business or to attend the Jewish national feasts. His discovery of conditions among them led him to use the epistolary method to meet their needs, a method also proposed by him at the Jerusalem Conference” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 51).

Those in the Diaspora must have received James’ epistle about a year prior to the other apostles’ departure from Jerusalem. Thus other apostles’ preaching of the gospel would have had James’ added authority. Assuming that the Gospel of Matthew was completed and in use by 35 AD, the apostles leaving Jerusalem in 42 AD would undoubtedly have taken copies of the Gospel of Matthew with them to teach those in the Diaspora. Additionally, since the Old Testament was written, compiled and canonized by Levites, from Moses to Ezra, it was important that Matthew, a Levite, be the first to complete and publish his account of the gospel. This fact made it clear to those in the Diaspora that the teachings of Jesus Christ had God’s personal stamp of approval. Moreover, the Jews and Israelites could also perceive in Matthew’s account the linkage between the priestly tradition and the ministry of the gospel, which shared processes and patterns:

- 1) teaching, preaching and prophesying;
- 2) writing down the teachings and prophecies to create a permanent record for teaching and preaching in the future;
- 3) canonizing for the final, God-breathed and God-approved publication.

Thus, when the apostles went to those in the Diaspora, they had the authority of Jerusalem—the place where God had placed His name; the authority of prophecy from the Old Testament; and the authority of Jesus’ teachings, written by a Levite—the apostle Matthew. For the Jews and Israelites in the Diaspora, the authority of the apostles was additionally confirmed by God through the apostles’ preaching of the gospel and through miracles the apostles performed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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The Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark, written in the most elementary Greek, is the shortest of the four Gospels. Because of this, when the United Bible Societies translates the New Testament into various languages, it generally begins with the Gospel of Mark. As of December 31, 2001, Harold P. Scanlin of the United Bible Societies reported that “at least one book of the Bible has been translated into 2,287 languages.” Because the Gospel of Mark is usually the first book of the New Testament translated, one can conclude from this remark that it has been translated into more than 2,000 languages. Thus, a prophecy of Jesus found in Mark 13:10 has been fulfilled, “the gospel must first be published among all nations,” before He returns.

When Was the Gospel of Mark Written?

According to Hiebert, “The traditional testimony concerning the dating of Mark is divided. Irenaeus, according to the more natural meaning of his testimony, placed it after the death of Peter and Paul. This dating is supported by the *Anti-Marcionite Prologue*. The testimony of Papias is not explicit on this point, but he is generally held to support the position of Irenaeus, since Irenaeus seems to have drawn his testimony from Papias. But Clement of Alexandria and Origen, on the other hand, placed the composition of the gospel during the lifetime of Peter. The latter view makes possible a much wider range in the proposed dating of the gospel.

“Robertson feels that ‘these contradictory traditions leave us free to settle the date of Mark’s Gospel apart from the stories in Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria.’ Accordingly, the suggested dates for Mark have varied greatly, from A.D. 44 to 130. A. B. Bruce remarks that ‘the endless diversity of opinion means that the whole matter belongs sharply to the region of conjecture.’ Scholars who date the gospel during the lifetime of Peter advocate ‘the fifties or late forties’ ” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1, p. 92).

The archaeological discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls helps us pinpoint an earlier date for Mark. In his book, *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, McBirnie wrote concerning the Gospel of Mark: “ ‘Professor Jose O’Callaghan, a Spanish scholar of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, has identified 19 tiny scraps of papyrus, found in 1947 among the Dead Sea Scrolls as fragments of a copy of St. Mark’s gospel written around 50 A.D.

“ ‘The date is what matters. Biblical scholars have long assumed that Mark’s gospel, based on recollections of the Apostle Peter, was set down in writing shortly before Peter’s death in Rome, which would date it around 68 A.D.

“ ‘Since Jesus was crucified about 33 A.D. [actually, 30 AD], the previous dating of Mark’s gospel—generally regarded to have been the first one written—left a hiatus of 35 years in which the historical details of the life of Jesus either were transmitted by word of mouth or by now-lost records (such as the famous “Q” document which scholars have long postulated but never found).

“ ‘O’Callaghan’s papyrus fragments, established by scientific methods as having been in a Palestinian library in 50 A.D., indicate that Mark’s gospel may well have been in circulation within about a dozen years of the time of Jesus’ death.

“ ‘This is very important because it means Mark’s record had to survive the acid test of any journalistic or historical writing—being published at a time when it could be read, criticized, and if unauthentic, denounced, by thousands of Jews, Christians, Romans and Greeks who were living in Palestine at the time of Jesus’ ministry’ (*Glendale*

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News Press, Saturday, April 15, 1972, United Press International, Louis Cas-sels)" (McBirnle, *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, p. 251).

It is an astonishing fact that fragments of the Gospel of Mark were scientifically dated as having been in a library in 50 AD. Since Peter was an apostle to the circumci-sion—that is, to the Jews—such a finding means that under Peter's supervision, Mark must have written his gospel very early. As the article quoted by McBirnle indicates, Mark's gospel "may well have been in circulation within about a dozen years of the time of Jesus' death." That would mean that it was written about 42 AD.

There is no reason why Mark's account of the gospel could not have been written by 42 AD. According to the chronology in the book of Acts, the apostle Peter returned to Jerusalem in 38 AD, after he had preached the gospel to Cornelius and his household. When he arrived in Jerusalem, he was questioned by those of the Circumcision Party about why he went to uncircumcised Gentiles. Peter answered that God had inspired the whole event (Acts 11:1-18). After that, since there is no record that Peter left Jerusalem or Judea, he apparently remained there until 44 AD. At that time Herod Agrippa I be-headed the apostle James—the brother of John—and had Peter arrested and put in prison. After an angel helped Peter escape from prison, he left Jerusalem (12:3-17). This means that Peter and Mark could have recorded their account of the gospel between 38 and 44 AD. They were both in Jerusalem during those six years. Therefore, 42 AD is the most realistic date for the Gospel of Mark to have been completed.

It is also important that Mark was a Levite because Levites were educated to copy and preserve the Old Testament. Paul confirmed this when he wrote that Mark was a cousin of Barnabas: "Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you received in-structions (if he comes to you, receive him)" (Col. 4:10). In the book of Acts, Luke re-corded that Barnabas was a Levite of substantial means: "And Joses, who was surnamed Barnabas by the apostles (which is, being interpreted, 'son of consolation'), a Levite, born *in the country* of Cyprus, had land; *and* he sold *it*, *and* brought the money and laid *it* at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:36-37). Thus, God used a Levite to write a second gospel, the Gospel of Mark.

However, Mark did not write of his own accord. As Peter's secretary or amanu-ensis, Mark wrote his account under Peter's direct supervision. Of this, Ernest L. Martin wrote: "As for the Gospel of Mark, it has long been known that John Mark was recog-nized as the secretary, or amanuensis, of the apostle Peter. Indeed, the great humility of Peter is conspicuous in all parts of the Gospel of Mark. Where anything is related which might show Peter's weakness, we find it recorded in detail; whereas the other Gospels often show Peter's strengths. In Mark there is scarcely an action by Christ in which Pe-ter is not mentioned as being a close observer or communicant. All of this affords a rea-sonable deduction that the writer of the Gospel of Mark was an eyewitness and close ob-server of the events recorded about Christ's life from the baptism of John to his crucifix-ion in Jerusalem. The ancient testimony of Papias, in the early second century, that Mark was the secretary of the apostle Peter (and not the actual eyewitness himself) has such good credentials, and the internal evidence of the Gospel itself is so compatible to this view that it seems evident that the Gospel of Mark is really the Gospel of Peter" (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, pp. 335-336).

Furthermore, Peter was one of the three special eyewitnesses of Jesus' transfigu-ration. When we combine this with the fact that Mark was a Levite, we see God's dou-ble stamp of approval on the Gospel of Mark. Peter, a leading apostle and special eye-witness, related the life and teachings of Jesus to Mark, a Levite, who wrote them down.

Scientific dating of the fragments of the Gospel of Mark found in the Dead Sea scrolls establishes that the Gospel of Mark was widely circulated by 50 AD. Moreover, it can be concluded that the apostle Peter distributed copies of the Gospel of Mark among

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the churches in Jerusalem and throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria, thus fulfilling his mission as an apostle to the circumcision. This typifies the pattern that God has always used throughout the Old and New Testaments: 1) Preach the Word and 2) Follow up the preaching with the written Word so that the believers can have a permanent record.

The book of Acts gives no indication of where Peter went after he left Jerusalem in 44 AD. It merely says that after he had escaped from prison by the hand of an angel, Peter “related to them [the brethren gathered at Mark’s mother’s house] how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, ‘Report these things to James and the brethren.’ Then he departed and went to another place” (Acts 12:17). It is quite possible that as an apostle to the circumcision, Peter went to Babylon (I Peter 5:13), where the greatest number of Jews in the world lived at that time. Undoubtedly, Peter took with him a copy of Mark’s Gospel, which contained his narration of Jesus’ ministry.

Because of all the evidence—from history, the chronology of the book of Acts, and the scientific dating of the fragments of the Gospel of Mark—one can confidently identify 42 AD as the most probable year of the book’s completion.

The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts

The Gospel of Luke

When was the Gospel of Luke written? As Hiebert writes, the opinions of scholars vary greatly: “The third gospel does not contain specific information to which we can appeal as unmistakable evidence for a precise date. Suggestions for the date of composition range from A.D. 50 to 150. The date assigned to the gospel is related to the date accepted for Acts, since it was written before Acts (Ac 1:1-2)” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1, pp. 135-136).

Contrary to the opinions of some scholars, from the chronology of the book of Acts it is quite possible to know when Luke wrote his account of the gospel. Luke traveled with the apostle Paul on his second and third evangelistic tours, or missionary journeys. In the summer of 58 AD, he was with Paul when the latter was arrested in Jerusalem and taken to Caesarea. Paul was held under house arrest for just over two years, until 60 AD. During Paul’s Caesarean protective custody (58-60 AD), Luke had free access to Paul. It was during this time that Luke must have written his gospel account and compiled nearly all of the information for the book of Acts. Jerusalem was not far from Caesarea, and it would have been easy for Luke to go to Jerusalem, where the eyewitness records of Jesus’ ministry must have been kept—probably under the care of the apostle James, the brother of the Lord.

Hiebert has suggested that Luke must have written his Gospel during the time that Paul was in prison in Caesarea, stating: “Apparently Luke remained in Palestine during Paul’s two-year imprisonment in Caesarea (Ac 24:23-27). Luke must have used the time to travel extensively in Palestine in search of further information. He would not only talk with the leaders but would endeavor to gain additional information from any believers who remembered their personal contacts with Jesus some thirty years before. Various individuals would recall listening to the gracious teaching and parables of Jesus and recite the thrill of His healing ministries. Luke’s reference to various women by name indicates that he visited women who were closely connected with the story of Jesus (Lk 8:1-3, 24:10). It is not improbable that Luke personally visited Mary the mother of Jesus, who apparently was living in the care of the apostle John. Certainly his infancy narrative (Lk 1-2) was drawn from a special source. He relates the nativity story from

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Mary's standpoint and includes numerous reminiscences, which only a loving mother would be able to supply. Luke indicates in the prologue that he had access to various written accounts of the story of Jesus (Lk 1:1-2)" (Ibid., pp. 134-135).

Hiebert continues: "A strong point in favor of this early date is the fact that during Paul's two-year imprisonment at Caesarea (Ac 24:27) Luke would have had ample opportunity to carry out his investigations and write his gospel. That Luke did use the time to make his investigations seems unquestionable, but it does not prove that he put his Gospel into final form during that time. It is possible that he began writing at Caesarea and finished later, at Rome, or elsewhere" (Ibid., p. 139).

Because Luke was scribe and record-keeper for the apostle Paul, we can conclude that Luke wrote his Gospel account under Paul's supervision, during the latter's imprisonment in Caesarea. It is most likely that Luke completed his Gospel in 59 AD.

The Book of Acts

Luke must have begun writing the book of Acts while still at work on his Gospel, in 58-59 AD. In order to write chapters 1 through 13, Luke must have had access to records that were in Jerusalem, under the apostle James' care. These chapters contain information that was known only to the original 120 disciples as recorded in Acts 1:13-15. However, from chapter 14 to the end of the book (chapter 28), Luke has recorded the ministry of the apostle Paul. Luke accompanied Paul on many journeys and was an eyewitness of the events that he recorded in Acts.

Luke was with Paul on the journey to Rome, as we find in his account in Acts 27:1-44; 28:1-16. On reaching Rome, Paul hastened to carry out the instructions that Jesus had given him to witness to the Jews there, as he had witnessed to those in Jerusalem: "Now *on* the following night [after he had witnessed to the Jews in Jerusalem], the Lord stood beside him *and* said, 'Be of good courage, Paul; for as you have fully testified the things concerning Me at Jerusalem, so you must bear witness in Rome' " (Acts 23:11). Only three days after being placed under house arrest in Rome, there the apostle Paul called for the religious leaders of the Jews. Luke wrote: "And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the commander of the camp; but Paul was allowed to remain by himself with the soldier who kept him. Now it came to pass *that* after three days, Paul called together those who were chief among the Jews" (Acts 28:16-17). Paul preached Christ and the resurrection to them. Some believed and others did not believe (verses 17-29).

Luke concluded the book of Acts very abruptly, without the customary "Amen" that was normally used to signify that the book was indeed finished. Without any explanation he suddenly jumped ahead from the beginning of Paul's two-year imprisonment in Rome to the end of it: "And Paul remained two whole years in his own hired house, welcoming all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, no man forbidding *him*" (verses 30-31). The book of Acts ends with these two verses. The very abruptness of this ending may furnish a clue as to when Acts was completed. We know that Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment in 63 AD. Luke might well have concluded his writing of the book of Acts shortly before Paul's release, because Luke gives no indication that Paul had been released. Based on the historical and internal evidence of the book of Acts, Luke probably began to write the book in 58 AD and finished it in 63 AD.

Hiebert states that: "The earliest possible date for the completion of Acts is two years after Paul's arrival in Rome as a prisoner (Ac 28:30-31). The exact time of that arrival is uncertain, but it was probably the spring of A.D. 61; thus A.D. 63 would be the earliest possible date for Acts. Acts must have been composed later than the third gos-

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pel, since the reference in Acts 1:1 to ‘the former treatise’ is a natural reference to that gospel. Thus the date of Acts is naturally connected with the date accepted for Luke” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1, p. 259).

After a lengthy discussion of various scholars’ conclusions on the dating of Luke and Acts, Robinson concurs that Luke and Acts were written at this time: “There is nothing, as far as I can see, in the theology or history of the Gospel or Acts that *requires* a later date if the prophecies of the fall of Jerusalem do not. From the internal evidence of the two books we should therefore conclude (as did Eusebius) that Acts was completed in 62 or soon after, with the Gospel of Luke some time earlier” (Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, p. 92).

The Gospel of John

The dating of the Gospel of John has presented scholars with many difficulties. John was one of the three special eyewitnesses who saw the vision of the transfiguration of Jesus Christ. Also, in the first chapters of the book of Acts, John was described as one of the leading apostles, along with Peter. Moreover, there is little doubt that John helped to compile and write Jesus’ teachings, along with the other apostles and eyewitnesses, after the crucifixion in 30 AD and before the Passover of 31 AD (Acts 6:4).

Hiebert comments on the divergence of opinion concerning the date of the Gospel of John: “No precise date for the writing of the fourth gospel can be established. The old view of the radical scholars that the gospel arose during the middle or end of the second century has been effectively silenced by the papyrus discoveries in Egypt. The latest possible date for the composition of the gospel is A.D. 98, for according to the testimony of Irenaeus, John continued to live at Ephesus until the time of Trajan (A.D. 98-117). Eusebius, in summing up the earlier tradition concerning the gospels’ order of appearance, asserts that John knew of the synoptics and that he finally wrote down what he had been proclaiming orally....

“That John could have written the gospel last of all, as late as A.D. 95, cannot be summarily denied by reason of his advanced age. Clement of Alexandria relates that even after John’s return from Patmos he carried on an active ministry as overseer of the churches in Ephesus and the surrounding districts. It is clear that John must have continued to be physically strong and mentally vigorous into old age....

“In recent years there has been support for a date before A.D. 70. This is largely due to the recognition that the intellectual milieu behind the fourth gospel can be reconciled with the general atmosphere prevailing in Palestine before A.D. 70. This view receives impetus from the generally accepted Aramaic element behind this gospel as well as the thought climate revealed by the Dead Sea Scrolls. The view of Gardner-Smith that the fourth gospel is independent of the synoptics also supports an early date. The present tense in John 5:2, ‘Now there *is* in Jerusalem by the sheep gate,’ is pointed out as internal evidence that it was written before A.D. 70, since the writer otherwise would have used ‘was’.

“Turner and Mantey hold that the picture of the conflict between Judaism and Christianity, with Christianity on the defensive, is more appropriate to a date before A.D. 70, since with the collapse of the Jewish state and the rise of Christianity the situation was altered. But it may be replied that the conflict as described is due to the author’s faithful depiction of the scene as it existed at the time of his story, although he wrote later” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1, pp. 222-223).

Although Hiebert brings out some very strong facts for an early dating of the Gospel of John, he himself holds to a later date: “While a date before A.D. 70 is appealing, it faces the difficulty of being forced to reject the established tradition of the church

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that the gospel of John was written sometime in the last quarter of the first century. We hold that the most satisfactory date falls between A.D. 80 and 95” (Ibid., p. 223). In contrast, Robinson postulates an earlier date for the beginning of the Gospel of John: “If we envisage the various gospels coming into being more or less concurrently, and in the case of John largely independently, there is no objection to seeing, as Brown does, some limited cross-fertilization—in either direction—between Johannine and other developing traditions, particularly the Markan and Lukan....Yet, while the gospels were being formed concurrently, the span of development seems to have been somewhat more prolonged in John than with the synoptists, making John still the last gospel to be finished—though possibly also the first to be put down in a consecutive form. For the units of its tradition are not so much isolated *pericopae* [desparate accounts from various sources] as ordered wholes shaped by a single mind, originally no doubt, as Eusebius says, for preaching purposes. We might therefore hazard the following very rough and tentative timetable:

- 30-50 formation of the Johannine tradition and proto-gospel in Jerusalem
- 50-55 first edition of our present gospel in Asia Minor
- 60-65 II, III and I John
- 65 + the final form of the gospel, with prologue and epilogue”
(Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, pp. 306-307).

From the internal evidence, it appears that the main body of the Gospel of John was indeed written earlier than Hiebert suggests. Although the prologue and the epilogue were added later, John also wrote these sections. If Matthew was completed in 35 AD and Mark in 42 AD, there is no reason to hold to the late date of 95 AD for the Gospel of John. Therefore, it can be concluded that John must have finished the main body of his Gospel and taken it with him when he and most of the other apostles left Jerusalem in 42 AD. The prologue and epilogue must have been added during John’s final canonization of the New Testament, which probably took place sometime after 95 AD.

The Epistles of the Apostle Paul

The New Testament contains more information about Paul than about any of the other apostles. Moreover, the apostle Paul wrote more books of the New Testament than any other writer. In the book of Acts, we have a very detailed account of his life and ministry. He himself wrote that he labored more than the other apostles (I Cor. 15:10). All but one of Paul’s epistles were written within the span of thirteen years. We are greatly aided in dating Paul’s epistles by the chronology in the book of Acts.

Robinson’s Chronology of the Epistles of Paul

As the basis for his redating of the New Testament, John A. T. Robinson compared Paul’s epistles with the chronology found in the book of Acts. He found no reason to doubt that the apostle Paul did, in fact, write the epistles that bear his name, as well as the book of Hebrews. The chronology that Robinson presents seems much more realistic than the chronologies set forth by other scholars, which indicate much later dates. Here is Robinson’s chronology of the events in Acts and the life of the apostle Paul:

- 33 Conversion
- 35 First visit to Jerusalem
- Second (famine-relief) visit to Jerusalem

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- 47-48 First missionary journey
- 48 Council of Jerusalem
- 49-51 Second missionary journey
- 52-57 Third missionary journey
- 57 Arrival in Jerusalem
- 57-59 Imprisonment in Caesarea
- 60-62 Imprisonment in Rome (Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, 1976, pp. 52-53).

Based on the chronology of the book of Acts, Robinson designates the approximate dates when Paul wrote his epistles, as shown in the following chart:

| | |
|------------------|------------------------|
| I Thessalonians | early 50 |
| II Thessalonians | 50-51 |
| I Corinthians | spring 55 |
| I Timothy | autumn 55 |
| II Corinthians | early 56 |
| Galatians | later 56 |
| Romans | early 57 |
| Titus | late spring 57 |
| Philippians | spring 58 |
| Philemon | summer 58 |
| Colossians | summer 58 |
| Ephesians | later summer 58 |
| II Timothy | autumn 58 |
| Hebrews | c. 67 (Ibid., p. 352). |

Robinson's approach—using the chronology of the book of Acts as the basis for determining the approximate dates of the epistles of the apostle Paul—is the correct approach. Robinson believed that once the approximate dates for the epistles of Paul were established, the other books of the New Testament could be dated more accurately. Robinson, like Martin (*Restoring the Original Bible*), understood that the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD was a key event for establishing the approximate dates of writing of nearly all the New Testament books. The reason that 70 AD is such an important date is because none of the New Testament writers mentioned the destruction of Jerusalem as a past event—only as an event that had been prophesied and had yet to occur. Robinson rightly concluded that all the books of the New Testament were, therefore, written before 70 AD, with the possible exception of parts of the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation.

When Paul's Epistles Were Written: An Assessment Based on a Revised Chronology of Acts

In developing any chronology of the epistles of the apostle Paul based on the chronology of the book of Acts, it must be remembered that the dates are approximate and, there can be some slight variations—whether slightly earlier or slightly later. Robinson notes that the dates of his chronology could vary slightly: “It must be stressed again that the absolute datings [of the books of the New Testament] could be a year or so out either way” (Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, p. 84).

The revised chronology presented in this commentary is likewise as close an approximation as possible to the year and season in which the apostle Paul wrote his epis-

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tles. There is no question that Paul wrote all the epistles that bear his name. Yet from the first century until now, there has been a great deal of scholarly debate about the authorship of the book of Hebrews. Because the style of writing in Hebrews is very close to Luke's, some have concluded that Luke wrote it. However, when the internal evidence is closely examined, it reveals that this book also originated with the apostle Paul. He undoubtedly used Luke as his scribe. Nevertheless, with the exception of Hebrews, Paul made it clear that the epistles he wrote were from him. From the very first, Paul signed all his epistles, whether he personally wrote them or had others assist him in the writing. For example, at the close of II Thessalonians, Paul wrote, "The salutation of Paul by my *own* hand, which is *the* sign in every epistle—so I write" (II Thes. 3:17). Also see: I Cor. 16:21, Gal. 6:11, Col. 4:18 and Philem. 19. (For a detailed chronology of Acts, see Appendix R, pages 846-849.)

The Revised Chronology: Below is a postulated chronology of key events in the book of Acts, which diverges somewhat from that of Robinson. (All years are AD):

- 33 Saul's conversion
- 36 Saul's first visit to Jerusalem
- 40-44 Saul in Antioch with Barnabas
- 44 Saul's second visit to Jerusalem with Barnabas, bringing famine relief
- 44 (Late spring) Saul and Barnabas ordained as apostles
- 44 First evangelistic journey—late spring 44 to fall 46
- 46-49 Paul and Barnabas minister in Antioch
- 49 Jerusalem Conference, Paul and Barnabas separate
- 49-52 Paul's second evangelistic journey
- 53-58 Paul's third evangelistic journey
- 58 Paul and company journey from Macedonia to Jerusalem
- 58 (Around Pentecost) Paul in Jerusalem, witnessing to the Jews; rescued by Roman centurion and soldiers, taken as prisoner to Caesarea under protective custody
- 58-60 Paul prisoner in Caesarea, sent to Rome in fall of 60
- 61-63 Paul prisoner in Rome in his own hired house
- 63 (Spring) Paul released
- 67 Paul back in prison in Rome

Based on this amended chronology of the book of Acts, a revised chronology of when Paul wrote his epistles follows. (Again, all years are AD.):

- 1) I Thessalonians written from Corinth in 50
- 2) II Thessalonians written from Corinth in 51
- 3) Galatians written from Antioch in spring 53
- 4) I Corinthians written from Ephesus in late winter of 56 before Passover of 57
- 5) II Corinthians written from Philippi in late summer 57
- 6) Romans written from Corinth in winter 57
- 7) Gospel of Luke written by Luke in 59
- 8) Hebrews, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, 61-63
- 9) I Timothy and Titus written after Paul's release from house arrest in Rome in 63; Paul goes to Spain and probably Britain
- 10) II Timothy written while in prison in Rome the second time in 67

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When these dates are compared side by side with Robinson's, it is evident that they diverge. Substantial differences from Robinson's chronology are explained below. (Differences that are slight—those of one and a half years or less—are inconsequential and therefore are not explained.) The comparison chart below shows the differences between the two chronologies.

The Revised Chronology

I Thessalonians, 50
II Thessalonians, 51
Galatians, spring 53
I Corinthians, winter 56
II Corinthians, late summer of 57
Romans, winter 57
Gospel of Luke by Luke and Paul, 59
Hebrews, Ephesians, Philippians,
Colossians and Philemon, 61-63

I Timothy, 63
Titus, 63
II Timothy, 67

Robinson's Chronology

I Thessalonians, early 50
II Thessalonians, 50-51
Galatians, late 56
I Corinthians, spring 55
II Corinthians, early 56
Romans, late spring 57

Hebrews, 67
Ephesians, late summer 58
Philippians, summer 58
Colossians, summer 58
Philemon, summer 58
I Timothy, autumn 55
Titus, spring 58
II Timothy, autumn 58

Explanations of Differences in Dates Between the Two Chronologies

Galatians: After the Feast of Tabernacles, in the autumn of 52 AD, Paul returned to Antioch, where he stayed until early summer 53 AD (Acts 18:23). However, in the spring of 53 AD, perhaps just before the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the apostle Peter visited Antioch. During the Feast, certain Jews from James also came from Jerusalem to visit. They were of the "Circumcision Party" and demanded that Gentile converts to Christianity be circumcised as Judaism had mandated for all Gentile proselytes. In addition, they practiced many other traditional laws of Judaism, such as, "It is unlawful for a man who is a Jew to associate with or come near to anyone of another race" (Acts 10:28; 11:2-3). Therefore, Christian Jews in Jerusalem, apparently with the apostle James' approval, continued to separate themselves from Gentiles when they ate, and they pressured Barnabas and the apostle Peter, who was an apostle to the circumcision, to do the same.

Peter knew better, because fifteen years earlier, in 38 AD, God had first directed him to preach to the Gentiles—Cornelius and his household in Caesarea. In Acts 10:9-17, God gave Peter a special vision, showing him that he should not call any man common or unclean. By the time Peter came to Caesarea, for the first time in his life, he understood through the vision God had given him that it was not unlawful to associate with Gentiles and eat with them. When Peter entered Cornelius' house, he said: "**You know that it is unlawful for a man who is a Jew to associate with or come near to anyone of another race. But God has shown me that no man should be called common or unclean. For this reason, I also came without objection when I was sent for....Of a truth I perceive that God is not a respecter of persons, but in every nation the one who fears Him and works righteousness is acceptable to Him**" (Acts 10:28-29, 34-35).

Then Peter expounded the gospel of Jesus Christ to Cornelius and his entire

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household. In response to his preaching, they believed. While Peter was still speaking, God poured out His Spirit upon them, just as He had done to the apostles and the believers on the day of Pentecost in 30 AD (Acts 2). By pouring out the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius and his household, God again demonstrated to the apostle Peter that He accepted uncircumcised Gentiles who believed. Cornelius and his household were immediately baptized, without first being circumcised as Judaism required of Gentile converts (Acts 10:47-48). Then Peter stayed with them for a number of days, undoubtedly eating and drinking with them. When Peter came back to Jerusalem, he was immediately confronted by members of the circumcision faction, who demanded that he explain why he had gone into a Gentile's house and eaten with them: "And when Peter went up to Jerusalem, those of *the* circumcision disputed with him, saying, 'You went in to men who were uncircumcised, and did eat with them' " (Acts 11:2-3). After Peter fully explained what had transpired, they all agreed, although perhaps very reluctantly, that God had indeed given the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles without the requirement of physical circumcision (Acts 11:4-18).

God first sent Peter to preach the gospel to the Gentiles in 38 AD. Only one year later, in 39 AD, God raised up many Gentile believers in the city of Antioch in Syria (Acts 11:19-21). When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that many Gentiles believed, they sent Barnabas to minister to them. Barnabas found a great number of new Gentile believers and enlisted Saul to assist him. Later Saul was ordained an apostle and renamed Paul. The apostle Paul's ministry to the Gentiles began when Barnabas brought him to Antioch in 40 AD to help teach the Gentiles. In 49 AD, eleven years after Peter first preached to the Gentiles, some Pharisaic teachers who professed belief in Jesus Christ came to Antioch when Paul and Barnabas were there. They insisted that the Gentiles were obligated to be circumcised and observe the traditions of Judaism, without which they could not be saved.

These false teachers caused a great deal of trouble because the church in Antioch consisted primarily of uncircumcised Gentiles: "Now certain men who had come down from Judea were teaching the brethren, *saying*, 'Unless you are circumcised after the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved' [the Greek, *ου δυναμαι*, *ou dunamai*, meaning the impossibility of being saved]. Therefore, after a great deal of strife and arguing with them by Paul and Barnabas, the *brethren* appointed Paul and Barnabas, and certain others from among them, to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this question....But there stood up certain of those who believed, who were of the sect of the Pharisees, saying, 'It is obligatory to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses' " (Acts 15:1-2, 5).

Those Pharisees, who believed, were demanding that the Gentile disciples of Christ be circumcised, as were Gentile converts to Judaism, or be condemned as unregenerate. In addition, they were demanding that the disciples keep the Law of Moses according to their Pharisaic traditions. However, Jesus Himself imposed no such requirements. In fact, as recorded in Mark 7, Jesus Christ rebuked the Pharisees, because by practicing their traditions, they were deliberately rejecting the commandments that God delivered to Moses as recorded in the Book of the Law.

At the Conference in Jerusalem, Peter stood up and related how God had first used him to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. Next, Paul and Barnabas recounted the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles. Then the apostles and elders, under James' leadership, agreed that the Gentiles were not required to be circumcised or to observe the other traditional laws of Judaism. Their decision was not a rejection of the laws that God delivered to Moses, but a rejection of the Pharisees' traditional religious laws and legalistic interpretations of God's law (Acts 15:7-32).

Later, when Peter came to the Gentile church in Antioch in 53 AD—the apostle

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Paul's home church—he played the hypocrite in reverting to practicing the traditional laws of Judaism that Jesus Christ had denounced and the apostles in 49 AD had rejected. The pressure exerted by the Jews who had come from James was so intense that even the apostle Barnabas, who was a Levite, joined Peter in this hypocrisy.

Peter had no excuse. He had been present when Jesus Christ soundly condemned these traditional practices as contrary to the laws of God (Mark 7:1-13). Therefore, the hypocritical behavior of Peter and Barnabas, and of James' emissaries, violated and perverted the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their actions amounted to a public repudiation of God's calling of the Gentiles, as well as of the apostles' decree in Jerusalem in 49 AD concerning the Gentiles and physical circumcision. If Paul had not contested these practices and instead had allowed them to continue and take root, his entire ministry to the Gentiles, as well as the preaching of the Gospel to the world in the future, might have been jeopardized. This is why, in the presence of the entire congregation in Antioch, Paul publicly rebuked the apostle Peter, Barnabas and the rest of the Jews for attempting to judaize the Gentile believers.

So vehement was Paul against compulsory circumcision and the traditions of Judaism that at the Jerusalem Conference, in 49 AD, he faced off alone against James, Peter and John. He refused to back down: "And I went up [to Jerusalem] according to revelation, and laid before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those of repute, lest by any means I should be running, or had run in vain; (But indeed, Titus, who *was* with me, being a Greek, was not compelled to be circumcised.) Now *this meeting was private* because of false brethren brought in secretly, who came in by stealth to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, in order that they might bring us into bondage; **to whom we did not yield in subjection, not even for one hour**, so that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. But *the gospel that I preach did not come* from those reputed to be something. (Whatever they were does not make any difference to me; God does not accept *the* person of a man.) For those who are of repute conferred no *authority* upon me. But on the contrary, after seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, exactly as Peter *had been entrusted with the gospel* of the circumcision; (For He who wrought in Peter for *the* apostleship of the circumcision, wrought in me also towards the Gentiles;) And after recognizing the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John—those reputed to be pillars—gave to me and Barnabas *the* right hands of fellowship, *affirming* that we *should go* to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcision" (Gal. 2:2-9).

Furthermore, God inspired Paul to preserve in his epistle to the Galatians the entire episode of Peter's hypocrisy, so circumcision and the traditions of Judaism would never be mixed with the gospel of Jesus Christ: "But when Peter came to Antioch, I withstood him to *his* face, because he was to be condemned; for before certain *ones* came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles. **However, when they came, he drew back and separated himself from the Gentiles, being afraid of those of the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews joined him in this hypocritical act, insomuch that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.**

"But when I saw that they did not walk uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in the presence of them all, 'If you, being a Jew, are living like the Gentiles, and not according to Judaism, why do you compel the Gentiles to judaize? We who are Jews by nature—and not sinners of *the* Gentiles—knowing that a man is not justified by works of law, but through *the* faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order that we might be justified by *the* faith of Christ, and not by works of law; because by works of law shall no flesh be justified.

" 'Now then, if we are seeking to be justified in Christ, *and* we ourselves are found to be sinners, *is* Christ then *the* minister of sin? MAY IT NEVER BE! For if I

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build again those things that I destroyed, I am making myself a transgressor. For I through law died to law, in order that I may live to God. I have been crucified with Christ, yet I live. *However*, it is no longer I, but Christ lives in me. For *the life* that I am now living in *the flesh*, I live by faith—that *very faith* of the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me. **I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness is through works of law, then Christ died in vain’**” (Gal. 2:11-21).

During this same period, other preachers of the circumcision party were apparently active in the churches in Galatia. Because of this, after Paul’s encounter with Peter and the Jews from James in Antioch, and undoubtedly as soon as Paul heard that judaizers were troubling the churches in Galatia, probably in the late spring of 53 AD, he wrote his epistle to the churches of Galatia from Antioch (Gal. 1:1-16; 5:12; 6:12-13). In the opening greeting of his epistle, Paul included all the brethren who were with him: “Paul, *an* apostle, not *sent* from men nor *made* by man, but by Jesus Christ and God *the* Father, Who raised Him from *the* dead; **and all the brethren who are with me**, to the churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:1-2). There is very little doubt that these were the brethren of the church in Antioch who had witnessed Paul’s rebuke of Peter and the other Jews.

The conditions were so grave that Paul warned the Galatians that those who preached a mixture of Judaism and Christ were perverting the gospel of Jesus Christ. The force of his words reveals how desperate the situation in the churches of Galatia had become: “I am astonished that you are so quickly being turned away from Him Who called you into *the* grace of Christ to different gospel, which *in reality* is not another *gospel*; **but there are some who are troubling you and are desiring to pervert the gospel of Jesus Christ**. But if we [the apostles] or even an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel to you *that* is contrary to what we have preached, LET HIM BE ACCURSED! As we have said before, I also now say again. If anyone is preaching a gospel contrary to what you have received, LET HIM BE ACCURSED! Now then, am I striving to please men, or God? Or am I motivated to please men? For if I am yet pleasing men [by teaching and practicing the traditions of Judaism], I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:6-10).

Because of all these factors, the epistle to the Galatians must have been written earlier than most other chronologies show. (Harnack alone has posited the date of 53 AD.) When examining the circumstances that underlay the writing of the epistle, it becomes evident that Robinson’s date of 56 AD is far too late. In 56 AD, Paul was in Ephesus, and there is no mention of Ephesus in Paul’s epistle to the Galatians. Moreover, Paul would have been derelict in his duty to God and the brethren if he had allowed the false gospel—a mixture of circumcision and Judaism—to flourish three more years before confronting the problem. Paul was not typically so slow to act. Therefore, when all these facts are considered, there can be little doubt that he wrote the epistle to the Galatians immediately after his confrontation with Peter and the Jews from James.

Finally, as the book of Acts records, Paul immediately followed up his epistle to the Galatians with a third evangelistic tour beginning in the summer of 53 AD. He went first to the churches in Galatia to strengthen the brethren there and then to Phrygia (Acts 18:23). After that he sojourned in Ephesus for more than three years.

Hebrews: Robinson dates the epistle to the Hebrews at 67 AD, during Paul’s second Roman imprisonment. However, this is far too late, because by 67 AD nearly all Christians had fled Jerusalem and Judea because of the Jewish revolt against Rome, which began in 66 AD. Some Christian and non-Christian Jews escaped to Pella. Most Christian Jews of Judea and Galilee probably fled to Asia Minor and Ephesus, where there were a large number of believers. Thus, it is likely that Paul wrote the epistle to the Hebrews soon after he arrived in Rome in 61 AD.

Before his Caesarean imprisonment (58-60 AD), Paul had given witness to those

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in Jerusalem (Acts 22:1-21) and to the Jewish leaders of the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1-10). The night after Paul's final appearance before the Sanhedrin, Christ appeared to him while he was under Roman protective custody in Fort Antonia. Paul recounted what the Lord said to him: "Now *on* the following night, the Lord stood beside him *and* said, 'Be of good courage, Paul; for as you have fully testified the things concerning Me at Jerusalem, so you must bear witness in Rome' " (Acts 23:11). Because Paul had appealed to Caesar, Paul and Luke were put on a ship bound for Rome by Festus in the fall of 60 AD. The ship left port just before winter, and the voyage was rough. Paul and Luke were shipwrecked, but God spared their lives, and they arrived in Rome late winter 61 AD (Acts 27:1-44; 28:1-13).

When Paul arrived in Rome, he was again placed under house arrest. While awaiting his hearing, he was freely allowed to meet with many people, to whom he boldly preached the gospel. Only three days after his arrival, he called for the chief Jewish religious leaders. As Jesus had told Paul in a special vision, he was to witness to the Jewish religious leaders in Rome: "And when they appointed a day *for* him *to speak*, many came into his lodging to *hear* him; *and* he expounded to them from morning until evening, fully testifying *of* the kingdom of God and persuading them *of* the things concerning Jesus, both from the law of Moses and *from* the prophets. And some were truly convinced of the things that were spoken, but some did not believe: and they departed in disagreement with one another after Paul had spoken *these* words; 'Well did the Holy Spirit speak by Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, "Go to this people and say, 'In hearing you shall hear, and in no way understand; and *in* seeing you shall see, but in no way perceive. For the heart of this people has grown fat, and their ears are dull of hearing, and they have closed their eyes; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and should be converted, and I should heal them.' " Be it known to you, that the salvation of God has therefore been sent to the Gentiles; and they will hear.'

"And after he had said these things, the Jews went away with much debate among themselves. And Paul remained two whole years in his own hired house, welcoming all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, no man forbidding *him*" (Acts 28:23-31).

Shortly after Paul witnessed to the Jewish leaders, at the very beginning of his first imprisonment in Rome, in 61-63 AD, he must have written the book of Hebrews. God clearly inspired him to write the book of Hebrews as an additional written witness and warning to underscore his spoken witness. However, instead of writing his missive in the usual epistolary form, Paul chose to style it as a homily or sermon. Undoubtedly, Paul had preached this sermon many times over. Perhaps he had already written out much of the material that went into the composition of Hebrews in something akin to sermon notes. As William L. Lane notes, "Grasser calls Hebrews 'a sermon sent from one place to another' " (Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 47A, p. lxxi). Hebrews contains the most refined Greek passages in the New Testament, according to Lane, "far superior to the Pauline standard both in vocabulary and sentence building" (Ibid., p. xlix). Perhaps this is why some scholars feel that Paul could not have written Hebrews. But Paul might well have refined his text through frequent preaching. Furthermore, the sermon style in Hebrews shows a similarity with the style of Paul's preaching as found in Acts 13:15-41 and also in Romans 10:15-21 and 15:9-12. Adding to this the many similarities with the Gospel of Luke, the book of Acts, and II Corinthians, which Luke wrote for Paul, it seems likely that Paul dictated the text of Hebrews to Luke.

Many scholars have wondered: If Paul wrote Hebrews, why didn't he sign his name to the book of Hebrews, as he had done with all his other epistles? The answer is that Paul could not have signed his name or even given a hint that he wrote it. Why?

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When Paul was in Jerusalem, the Jews who found him in the temple seized him with the intent to kill him. But the Roman soldiers rescued Paul from their hands, and the centurion allowed him to speak to the multitude in Hebrew. They all listened attentively to him until he mentioned the word “Gentiles.” At that point a riot ensued, and they would have killed Paul, but the centurion and his soldiers rescued him and brought him to the safety of Fort Antonia (Acts 21:40; 22:1-21). Later, the centurion and two hundred Roman soldiers escorted Paul by night to Caesarea because forty assassins had conceived another plot to kill him. Therefore the apostle Paul would not have signed his name to the book of Hebrews, because even those Jews in Jerusalem and Judea who had professed Christ would never have heeded anything written by him. Had Paul made his authorship known, the Jews would have destroyed the message—and possibly the messenger.

Another very important reason why Paul must have written the book of Hebrews in early spring 61 AD is that he does not mention the martyrdom of James, which took place in the spring of 62 AD. The warning message contained in Hebrews would most likely have been delivered first to Rome and then to Jerusalem and the churches in Judea before James was brutally killed by the zealots. Some who participated in this ignominious act had been counted by James among the believers in Jesus Christ when Paul had visited James and the elders in Jerusalem, just before Paul’s Caesarean imprisonment in 58 AD. Luke wrote: “Paul went with us to *see* James; and all the elders *were* assembled. And after greeting them, he reported one by one the things that God had worked among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard *this*, they glorified the Lord. Then they said to him, ‘Brother, you see how many thousands of Jews there are who believe, and they are all zealous of the law’ ” (Acts 21:18-21).

James was killed in the spring of 62 AD, during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Josephus provides this account of the death of James: “But this younger Ananus, who ... took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews ... when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned” (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. XX, ch. IX, pt. 1).

Eusebius, a noted historian of the Catholic Church, reports the following concerning the death of James: “When Paul appealed to Caesar and was sent to Rome by Festus, the Jews were disappointed of the hope in which they had devised their plot against him and turned their attention to James the Lord’s brother, who had been elected by the apostles to the episcopal throne at Jerusalem. This is the crime that they committed against him. They brought him into their midst and in the presence of the whole populace demanded a denial of his belief in Christ. But when, contrary to all expectation, he spoke as he liked and showed undreamt-of fearlessness in the face of the enormous throng, declaring that our Saviour and Lord, Jesus, was the Son of God, they could not endure his testimony any longer, since he was universally regarded as the most righteous of men because of the heights of philosophy and religion which he scaled in his life. So they killed him, seizing the opportunity for getting their own way provided by the absence of a government, for at that very time Festus had died in Judaea, leaving the province without governor or procurator. How James died has already been shown by the words quoted from Clement, who tells us that he was thrown down from the parapet and clubbed to death” (Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, bk. 2: 23).

In the last chapter of the book of Hebrews, there are additional clues that indicate

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Paul must have written this book during the first part of his imprisonment in Rome in the spring of 61 AD, while James was living. Paul's concluding remarks imply that James was still alive. He exhorts his readers: "**Remember your leaders**, who have spoken the Word of God to you, considering the outcome of *their conduct, and imitate their faith*"; and "**Follow your leaders, and be submissive**; because they are looking out for your spiritual well-being, as *those who must be ready to give account to God*; in order that they may do this with joy, and not *with groanings*, because that *would be unprofitable for you*....Now I admonish you, brethren, to patiently listen to this message of exhortation, for I have written to you in only a few words. *I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released; with whom, if he comes soon enough, I will see you. Greet all your leaders* [another indication that James was alive], and all the saints [they had not fled to Pella or Asia Minor]. **Those from Italy send greetings to you.** *May God's grace be with all of you. Amen*" (Heb. 13:7, 17, 22-25).

If Paul had written Hebrews in 67 AD, as Robinson suggests, James would have been dead five years, and only a vestige of the church would have remained in Jerusalem and in Judea because most of the believers would have fled to Pella and Asia Minor before the Jewish rebellion in 66 AD.

The comment "Those from Italy send greetings to you" indicates that Paul finished writing Hebrews during his first imprisonment in Rome. At that time he had his own hired house, and many brethren would come to visit him and hear him preach every Sabbath. This comment also shows, the brethren were aware that he was writing to the Hebrews. Furthermore, a notation at the end of Hebrews indicates that Timothy delivered Paul's written message to them: "To *the Hebrews*, written from Italy, *delivered by Timothy*."

Based on these facts, it can be concluded that Paul wrote to the Hebrews from Rome in the spring of 61 AD. He sent his missive to the churches in Rome and in Jerusalem as a final written witness and warning before the martyrdom of James in 62 AD and the Jewish revolt against Rome, which began in 66 AD. In spite of Paul's warnings, when the revolt against Rome began, many of the zealots who had previously professed Christ rejected Him and His teachings. If Hebrews had been written in 67 AD, as Robinson thought, then the warnings that God inspired Paul to write would have arrived too late.

It can be ascertained, then, that the book of Hebrews was completed in the spring of 61 AD and immediately sent to the churches in Rome and Jerusalem. Because of the importance of the book of Hebrews, by late 61 AD, early 62 AD, copies were made and distributed to all the churches of God in Judea and Galilee. Later, because of the profound teachings in this book on the priesthood of Jesus Christ, copies of Hebrews were sent to all the churches—Jewish and Gentile.

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon: In his chronology, Robinson has Paul writing these four epistles, as well as the epistle to Titus, during his Caesarean imprisonment in 58-60 AD. However, the internal evidence shows that these epistles were more likely written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome in 61-63 AD. Ephesians and Colossians must have been written in early spring of 63. The city of Laodicea, which was nearly destroyed by an earthquake in 60 AD, is not mentioned by Paul in his epistle to the Colossians. Furthermore, the notation at the end of each epistle shows that they were written from Rome rather than Caesarea, and there is no internal evidence in these epistles to indicate that the closing notations might be incorrect: "to *the Ephesians*, written from Rome *delivered by Tychicus*"; "to *the Philippians*, written from Rome, *delivered by Epaphroditus*"; "to *the Colossians*, written from Rome *delivered by Tychicus and Onesimus*"; and "to Philemon, written from Rome, *delivered by Onesimus, a servant*."

In the book of Acts, Luke recorded that during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome

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he was not restricted in his preaching or in receiving people. “And Paul remained two whole years in his own hired house, welcoming all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, no man forbidding *him*” (Acts 28:30-31). During Paul’s two-year imprisonment in Rome he had communications with the ministers and churches that God had raised up through his ministry. Apparently, Tychicus—an elder from Colossae—delivered Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians as well as to the Colossians. Onesimus accompanied him and delivered Paul’s epistle to Philemon. Epaphroditus, an elder from Philippi, visited Paul in Rome and delivered Paul’s epistle to the Philippians.

In each of these epistles Paul made specific references to being in prison. In the epistle to the Ephesians, Paul declared: “For this cause I Paul **am the prisoner of Christ Jesus** for you Gentiles” (Eph. 3:1). “Therefore, I, **the prisoner of the Lord**, am exhorting you to walk worthily of the calling to which you are called” (Eph. 4:1). Paul also wrote that being in prison was working for good: “So then, I beseech *you* not to faint at **my tribulations for you, which are working for your glory**” (Eph. 3:13). “And for me, that boldness of speech may be given to me, so that I may open my mouth to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which **I am an ambassador in chains**; that I may speak with boldness, as it behooves me to speak. Now that you may also know the things concerning me *and* what I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful servant in *the* Lord, will make everything known to you” (Eph. 6:19-21).

When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he again mentioned his time in prison: “Brethren, I want you to know that **the things befalling me have turned out rather unto the advancement of the gospel**, so that **my bonds in Christ** have become manifest in the whole palace, and to all others; and most of the brethren, trusting in *the* Lord, have been **emboldened by my bonds to speak the Word more abundantly without fear**” (Phil. 1:12-14). Paul was confident that he would eventually be released and come to see them; but until then Epaphroditus, who had delivered the things they sent to Paul, would make known to them how he was: “Now I have confidence in *the* Lord that I myself also shall come soon; but I felt *it* necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and soldier, but your messenger and minister for my need, since he was longing after all of you, and *was* deeply depressed because you had heard that he was sick” (Phil. 2:24-26). “But I have all things and abound. I am full after receiving from Epaphroditus the things you sent, a sweet smelling savor, a sacrifice acceptable *and* well pleasing to God. But my God will supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:18-19).

Paul’s closing comments in his epistle to the Colossians reveal the relative freedom that he had in receiving people and in writing and preaching the gospel while he was under house arrest in Rome: “Tychicus, a beloved brother, and a faithful servant and fellow servant in *the* Lord, will make known to you everything concerning me; I sent him to you for this very reason ... together with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is *one* of you. They will make known to you all the things *that have taken place* here. Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, salutes you; and Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you received instructions (if he comes to you, receive him). And Jesus *who is* called Justus; who are *all* of *the* circumcision. They *are* my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God, who have been a consolation to me. Epaphras, a servant of Christ who *is* from among you, salutes you. He is always striving for you in *his* prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.... Luke, the beloved physician, salutes you, and Demas *does also*. Salute the brethren in Laodicea; and Nymphas, and the church in his house.... **Remember my bonds**” (Col. 4:7-18).

The short, personal epistle that Paul wrote to Philemon likewise names Paul’s companions during his first imprisonment in Rome: “Paul, *the* **prisoner of Christ Jesus**,

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and Timothy, a brother, to Philemon, our beloved and fellow worker, **Epaphras, my fellow prisoner** in Christ Jesus, salutes you; *as do also* Mark, Aristarchus, Demas *and* Luke, my fellow workers” (Philemon 1, 23-24).

I Timothy: Robinson’s proposed date for the writing of I Timothy—autumn 55 AD—is far too early, because Timothy was with Paul in Ephesus for three years, from late 54 to 57 AD. There would have been no need for Paul to write to Timothy in 55 AD. Rather, all the evidence points to a time shortly after Paul’s release from his imprisonment in Rome in 63 AD. (See detailed Chronology in Appendix R, pages 846-849.)

The following is a review of the chronology of Paul’s travels beginning with his departure from Ephesus in the fall of 57 AD and ending with his imprisonment in Caesarea in 58-60 AD: When Paul and Timothy left Ephesus, they went to Macedonia and then to Corinth, where Paul wintered and wrote the epistle to the Romans. After coming to Corinth, Timothy was with Paul, or with Luke’s party until they came to Assos, a short time after the Days of Unleavened Bread in the spring of 58 AD (Acts 20:1-2). Then they sailed to Miletus where Paul summoned the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:3-17). When the elders had assembled, Paul warned them of the coming apostasy (Acts 20:18-38).

After Paul’s meeting with the elders in Miletus, Timothy is mentioned no more. It is most probable that Timothy returned to Ephesus with the other elders after Paul and Luke departed. Paul and Luke and others sailed from Miletus and arrived in Jerusalem in the late spring of 58 AD—perhaps by Pentecost. By early summer in 58 AD, Paul was awaiting trial in Caesarea. He was under house arrest and under the protection of the Roman government from this time until the fall of 60 AD.

In Caesarea, Paul had appealed to Caesar for the final disposition of his imprisonment, and he was sent to Rome in the fall of 60 AD. He and his party arrived in late winter of 61 AD, and Paul was again placed under house arrest until the spring of 63 AD. After his release from his first imprisonment in Rome, 61-63 AD, Paul probably went to Crete and visited Titus. When Paul left Crete, he instructed Titus to set things in order and ordain elders as he had appointed. Next, Paul probably went to Ephesus to visit Timothy. From Ephesus he journeyed to Nicopolis in Macedonia near the city of Actium, not far from the Adriatic Sea. From there, Paul probably wrote I Timothy and his epistle to Titus in late 63 AD.

When I Timothy is examined, it is obvious that Paul wrote to Timothy because Paul was going to be traveling, perhaps to Spain and Britain. In this epistle Paul gives Timothy instructions on how to administer a local congregation in his absence with regard to: 1) dealing with false teachers; 2) selecting elders; 3) discerning the doctrines of demons; 4) having personal godliness and being an exemplary overseer; 5) preaching; 6) handling assistance to widows; and 7) correcting elders who sin.

By 63 AD, Timothy must have had in his possession the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and Mark and most of the Gospel of John. This can be deduced from what Paul wrote: **“If anyone teaches any different doctrine, and does not adhere to sound words, even those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the doctrine that is according to godliness, he is proud and knows nothing! Rather, he has a morbid attraction to questions and disputes over words, from which come envy, arguments, blasphemy, wicked suspicions, vain reasonings of men who have been corrupted in their minds and are destitute of the truth—men who believe that gain is godliness. From such withdraw yourself!”** (I Tim. 6:3-5) This passage strongly suggests that Timothy had in his possession accurate written documents as the standard. Since Timothy never personally heard Jesus preach or teach, he could not have known precisely what the words of Jesus Christ were without written records of the gospel accounts.

Titus: Robinson proposed that the epistle to Titus was written in spring of 58 AD,

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during Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea. However, there is no record of Paul having traveled to the island of Crete before he was imprisoned in Caesarea. Rather, Paul probably went to Crete after his release from his first imprisonment in Rome, in 61-63 AD. He left Titus there to set things in order and ordain elders as he had appointed. Then Paul probably stopped in Ephesus to visit Timothy on his way to Nicopolis of Macedonia, whence Paul probably wrote his epistle to Titus and his first epistle to Timothy in late 63 AD before proceeding to Spain and Britain.

II Timothy: Robinson's chart shows that II Timothy was written in 58 AD, during Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea. From the tone of this epistle, it is obvious that he was in prison. However, at no time during his imprisonment in Caesarea or his first imprisonment in Rome was Paul facing sure death. In contrast, when he was imprisoned the second time in Rome in 67 AD, his situation was very different. At that time, Paul believed that his execution was imminent, and he feared that he might never see Timothy again. Therefore, he pleaded with Timothy to come to Rome with all speed. **"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith.** From this time forward, a crown of righteousness is laid up for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me in that day—and not to me only, but also to all who love His appearing. Be diligent to come to me quickly....Only Luke is with me. Get Mark *and* bring him with you, because he is profitable to me for the ministry....When you come, bring the chest that I left in Troas with Carpus, and the books—especially the parchments" (II Tim. 4:6-13).

When Paul wrote II Timothy he sensed that his time was short. In view of this, it is more likely that Paul wrote II Timothy while in prison in Rome the second time, in 67-68 AD, rather than in Caesarea in 58 AD. Nero unexpectedly committed suicide on June 9, 68 AD, at which time Paul would have been released. If he was released, Paul probably journeyed back to Britain, as tradition holds that Paul spent time there. Other traditions indicate that he also traveled to Scandinavia (Theodoret, *De Civ. Graec.; Epistle of Clement*, 3:12-14; J.B. Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, vol.1; T. Burges, *The Ancient British Church*, pp. 48, 117-118). By 42 AD, Rome had controlled much of the southern British Isles. Therefore, it is possible that Paul was arrested by Roman authorities in Britain and returned to Rome (67-68 AD) to await execution. However, it is more likely that Paul was released when Nero died and was martyred at a later date, perhaps in Britain, instead of Rome.

Although there are some later Catholic traditions that Paul was martyred in Rome, there is no specific historical record that he actually died at Rome. In fact, there is hardly any reason to believe these Catholic traditions. Furthermore, there are no eyewitness records of Paul's martyrdom at Rome. The only reliable record is contained in *The First Epistle of Clement*, a non-canonical epistle. Clement was a fellow minister with Paul in Philippi (Phil. 4:3) and later succeeded Paul as overseer of the church at Rome. In 95 AD just before his death, Clement wrote this epistle to the church at Corinth, in which he also wrote of Paul's martyrdom: "Owing to envy, Paul also obtained the reward of patient endurance, after being seven times thrown into captivity, compelled to flee, and stoned. After preaching in both the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west [Britain], and suffered martyrdom under the prefects" (The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1908, vol. I, *First Epistle of Clement*, Ch. V).

If Paul was actually martyred in Rome, Clement would most surely have made it clear because he was Paul's successor and was writing to the Corinthians from Rome. However, Clement only records that Paul "suffered martyrdom under the prefects," but he definitely does not state that Paul's death occurred at Rome. It is entirely possible that Paul was martyred in Britain by the Roman authorities, as Clement's record seems to indicate.

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I and II Peter

I Peter: Unlike the dating of other epistles of the New Testament, the dating of I Peter has evoked little controversy. Of the dating of I Peter, Hiebert writes: “The date of 1 Peter must be some time in the sixties of the first century. That it was written during the latter part of Peter’s life is obvious. It cannot have been written after A.D. 68, the year of the death of Nero, since tradition asserts Peter’s martyrdom under Nero. The exact date assigned to the epistle will be determined by the interpretation given to the state of affairs portrayed in the epistle. Many scholars, especially impressed with the statement in chapter 4 about the readers being made to ‘suffer as a Christian’ (4:16), hold that it was written after the outbreak of the Neronian persecution in the fall of A.D. 64. Then the date must be given as the very last months of A.D. 64 or later.

“More probable to us seems the view that it was written shortly before the actual outbreak of the Neronian persecution. There is no evidence in the epistle that the persecutions have actually resulted in martyrdoms. The sufferings were rather such as were being experienced by Christians generally (5:9). They were being hated and maligned because of their stand for Christ (4:16). This hatred was fanned by their refusal to participate in the pagan practices of their neighbors (4:3-4). They were being suspected of being enemies of the state, but there was the hope that by their good conduct this charge could be refuted (3:15-16). If Christianity had already been officially charged with being an enemy of the state, this hope could not have been entertained. But the obvious trend of events made it clear that more ominous things were ahead (4:17-18).

“Instead of being due to systematic governmental action, their present sufferings were rather the result of outbursts of fanatical pagan hatred against the Christians....Peter foresaw the possibility of hate-inspired mob actions and even locally inspired official action against the house of God (4:17-18).

“We conclude that the epistle was written on the eve of the outbreak of the Neronian persecution. The date then assigned to it must be in the summer of A.D. 64” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, pp. 120-121).

Robinson calculated a somewhat later date of origin. He writes: “In the last resort I can only say that I find nothing decisive to outweigh the many other considerations to suggest that, whoever actually penned it, the epistle comes from Peter’s lifetime and that he is in the fullest sense ‘behind’ it. I see therefore no reason from the evidence of the authorship to go back on the previous assessment of a date for the dispatch of the letter somewhere around the end of April 65” (Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, p. 169).

Some of the internal evidence in I Peter, as well as in Paul’s prison epistles, helps confirm the time at which Peter wrote this first epistle. Peter was then in Babylon. In his closing remarks he wrote: “The *church* in Babylon, chosen together with *you*, greets you” (5:13). Some scholars hold the view that when Peter wrote “Babylon” he was actually using a pseudonym for the city of Rome. However, there is no reason to believe that Peter was in Rome instead of Babylon when he wrote his first epistle. (Apparently, the only reason why some scholars claim that the reference to “Babylon” meant Rome is because this assumption supports the unfounded tradition that Peter was an apostle in Rome for over twenty years. The New Testament does not support this tradition in any way.) Lastly, the prophetic designation of Rome as “Babylon” was not used until the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation—more than thirty years after Peter wrote his first epistle.

Some information can be gleaned from the epistles of Paul that helps date Peter’s first epistle. It is evident that Paul was in prison in Rome when he wrote his epistle to the Colossians in early spring, 63 AD. In his closing remarks he mentioned that Mark

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was with him and apparently was preparing to leave; and if he came through Colossae, they were to receive him: “Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, salutes you; and **Mark**, the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you received instructions (if he comes to you, receive him)” (Col. 4:10). It is possible that at the time Paul wrote his epistle to the Colossians, Mark was about to go to Babylon to be with Peter, as Mark had worked with Peter in writing the Gospel of Mark, and later he also worked with Paul and Barnabas. It is also possible that on his way to Babylon, Mark passed through Colosse to minister to the brethren on behalf of Paul. Paul must have written to the Colossians in 63 AD, because by the time Peter wrote his first epistle, Mark was with him, as Peter indicated in his closing remarks: “The *church* in Babylon, chosen together with *you*, greets you, *as does Mark*, my son” (I Pet. 5:13).

In addition, another fellow minister and traveling companion of the apostle Paul, Silvanus, is mentioned by Peter as being with him when Peter wrote his epistle (I Pet. 4:12). We first learn of Silvanus, or Silas, in Acts 15, during the Jerusalem Conference in 49 AD. After the conference, Silvanus, or Silas, accompanied Paul on his second evangelistic tour (Acts 16:40). Paul also mentioned Silvanus, along with Timothy, in the opening of his first epistle to the Thessalonians: “Paul and **Silvanus** and Timothy, to the church of *the* Thessalonians *which is* in God *the* Father and *the* Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace *be* to you from God our Father and *the* Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thes. 1:1).

Peter does not give any indication as to why Mark and Silvanus were with him rather than with Paul. However, it is most likely that Paul, having been released from prison, was on his way to Spain and Britain. If that was the case, Mark and Silvanus could have gone to Babylon to assist Peter and on their way back to Ephesus, delivered copies of Peter’s first epistle to the brethren in northern Asia Minor. There was a major highway that went north from Babylon into eastern and northern Asia Minor, and then west and south, terminating at Ephesus on the western coast of Asia Minor.

From the book of Acts, we know that the provinces of northern Asia Minor were never included in Paul’s territory (Acts 16:7). They were more easily accessed by river and road from Babylon than by road from the Mediterranean Sea in southern Asia Minor, which was Paul’s territory. So these areas would more naturally fall to Peter than to Paul.

This would explain why Peter wrote to the brethren who lived in the northern provinces of Asia Minor, instead of Paul. Peter opened his epistle as follows: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to *the* elect strangers scattered in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (I Pet. 1:1). Although Peter was an apostle to the Circumcision, in this epistle he was writing to areas where there were many Gentile converts (1:14, 18; 2:9; 3:5; 4:3).

Based on the geographical evidence and the internal evidence of I Peter, coupled with the internal evidence from Paul’s epistles, it can be concluded that Peter wrote his first epistle in 64-65 AD.

II Peter: Scholars hold divergent opinions about the authorship of II Peter and when it was written. Most opinions are wild denials of Peter’s authorship, placing its writing in the middle of the second century. However, from the internal evidence, this was clearly the second epistle that Peter wrote (II Pet. 3:1).

Many events were transpiring in the Roman Empire, beginning with the Neronian fire in 64 AD, the Jewish revolt against the Romans in 66 AD, and the mass exodus of Christian and non-Christian Jews from Jerusalem and Judea to Asia Minor in 66-67 AD. In his second epistle, Peter vehemently warned against the rising tide of false teachers, apparently from gnosticizing and Hellenistic Judaism, who were seeking to gain control of the churches. They were perverting the teachings of Jesus Christ, blaspheming the

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way of Truth, and siding with the rebellious Jews, hoping to obtain freedom from Roman domination (II Pet. 2). It is within this time frame that Peter wrote his second epistle. Although Peter does not indicate where he was when he wrote this epistle, it is entirely possible that he wrote it from Babylon prior to his martyrdom.

Hiebert writes: “Those who deny the Petrine authorship generally place the epistle in the middle of the second century. But in accepting the Petrine authorship we cannot date it later than A.D. 68, the year of Nero’s death [June 9, 68 AD]. If it was written after 1 Peter, as we believe, it must be placed as near the end of Peter’s life as possible. But the year of Peter’s martyrdom is uncertain. Some would place his death shortly after the outbreak of the Neronian persecution, in the latter part of A.D. 64. Others feel that it may be as late as A.D. 67 or even 68. It would seem, however, that Peter met his fate before Paul. When Paul wrote 2 Timothy, Peter could no longer have been in Rome. Apparently Peter’s execution had already taken place. We may accordingly date 2 Peter in the early part of the year A.D. 65” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 152).

The year 65-66 AD seems the most likely date of origin of II Peter. In II Peter 1, Peter promised to leave a permanent record of the teachings of Jesus Christ. He could not have died before 67 AD, because—as we will see later from the internal evidence of his second epistle—he was canonizing his epistles to be placed alongside Paul’s epistles, which were to become part of the New Testament. In his final exhortation in Chapter Three, Peter equates the epistles of Paul with the Scriptures. Peter’s epistles and Paul’s epistles were to be part of the written remembrance that Peter promised to leave for the brethren (1:15). The written remembrance of the teachings of Jesus Christ and His chosen apostles would become part of the permanent record for the Church, as well as for future generations after the apostles had passed from the scene (II Pet. 3:13-18). Therefore, we can conclude that Peter must have written his second epistle in 65-66 AD, just as the leaders of the Jewish rebellion were beginning to agitate the people in Jerusalem and Judea to support their cause against the Romans.

Was Peter Ever in Rome?: That Peter was ever in Rome is highly doubtful. The scriptural or historical records do not reveal that he was. As an apostle to the circumcision (Gal. 2:8), Peter served the Jews in Palestine and eastward into Babylon (I Pet. 5:13), where the largest population of the Diaspora Jews dwelt. Since Rome was in Paul’s territory, there is no reason to believe that Peter would have gone to Rome to serve the Gentiles—especially after Paul’s rebuke of Peter and the Circumcision Party in 53 AD (Gal. 2:11-21). It is unthinkable that Peter would even dare to attempt to succeed Paul. In Paul’s epistle to the Romans, written in 57 AD, he does not mention anything about Peter. If Peter had been the first bishop of Rome, Paul would undoubtedly have mentioned it, but he didn’t. In his epistle to the Romans Paul wrote: “I do not wish you to be ignorant, brethren, that many times I proposed to come to you (but I was hindered until the present), in order that I might also have some fruit among you, even as I have among the other Gentiles. I am a debtor to both Greeks and barbarians, to both *the* wise and *the* unlearned; so, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who *are* in Rome also” (Rom. 1:13-15).

Paul fully understood that he was not to preach the Gospel in another apostle’s territory. Of his own ministry, he said: “We are not boasting in things beyond *our* measure, *such as* other men’s labors; but we have hope *that when* your faith is increased, *we will* be abundantly enriched by you according to our rule *of faith*, **in order to preach the gospel to the regions beyond you, and not to boast in things made ready in another man’s territory**” (II Cor. 10:15-16). At other times, the Holy Spirit forbade Paul to preach in areas that were not his (Acts 16:6-10; 18:1-11). If Peter had been the bishop of Rome, Paul would not have gone there.

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To further substantiate the fact that Peter was never in Rome, Luke's account of Paul's arrival in Rome as a prisoner shows that the Jews of Rome had not even heard the Gospel preached: "Now it came to pass *that* after three days, Paul called together those who were chief among the Jews. And when they had come together, he said to them, 'Men *and* brethren, although I have done nothing against the people or the customs of our fathers, I was delivered into the hands of the Romans *as* a prisoner from Jerusalem. After examining me, they desired to let *me* go because there was not one cause of death in me. But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—not as though I had anything to charge against my nation. **For this cause then, I have called for you, in order that I might see you and speak to you; because it is for the hope of Israel that I have this chain around me.**' Then they said to him, 'We have neither received letters concerning you from Judea, nor have any of the brethren who have arrived reported anything or spoken evil of you. But we would like to hear from you *and to know* what you think, because we are indeed very aware that this sect is everywhere spoken against' " (Acts 28:17-22). Had Peter been the bishop of Rome, he would have preached the Gospel to them decades before Paul's arrival.

The only accounts of Peter being in Rome come from later and very doubtful traditions promulgated by the Roman Catholic Church that claim Peter was the first bishop of Rome and was martyred there. These later traditions were only attempts to add credence to the myth that Peter was the first pope. In Clement's non-canonical epistle to the Corinthians in 95 AD, he makes no mention of Peter being at Rome. Clement, a successor of Paul in Rome, wrote of Peter's martyrdom, but he never mentioned that Peter died at Rome: "But let us not dwell upon ancient examples, let us come to the most recent spiritual heroes. Let us take the noble examples furnished in our own generation. Through envy and jealousy, the greatest and most righteous pillars [(the apostles) of the Church] have been persecuted and put to death. Let us set before our eyes the illustrious apostles. Peter, through unrighteous envy, endured not one or two, but numerous labours; and when he had at length suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of glory due to him" (The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1908 vol. I, *First Epistle of Clement*, Ch. V). If Peter had actually been the first bishop of Rome for over twenty years—as some traditions claim—it would be very strange, indeed, for Clement not to mention it, as well as not to mention Peter's martyrdom in Rome.

Catholic traditions and claims notwithstanding, the various bones found beneath St. Peter's Basilica have never actually been proven to be those of the apostle Peter. In fact, some bones that were proclaimed to be the authentic bones of the apostle Peter by Popes Pius XII, in 1950, and Paul VI, in 1968, were subsequently determined to have come from various men, animals and even a woman. (See Appendix Q, *Peter's Tomb Recently Discovered in Jerusalem*, page 842).

The discovery of Peter's tomb on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem in 1953 strongly indicates that he was martyred in Jerusalem and not in Rome. It is possible that Peter went to Jerusalem in late 66 AD in order to persuade the remaining Christian Jews not to reject Jesus Christ as Savior and join the forces of the rebels in fighting against the Romans but to leave Jerusalem instead. That could explain why Peter was in Jerusalem at that time and why he was martyred there and buried on the Mount of Olives.

Therefore, in light of this evidence, it can be concluded that Peter was never in Rome. Consequently, he was never the bishop of Rome. He was not martyred in Rome or buried in Rome. Peter was an apostle to the circumcision—the Jews. He was never an apostle to the uncircumcision—the Gentiles.

Chapter Four

The Epistles of I, II and III John, and of Jude

The Epistles of I, II and III John

The dates assigned to I, II and III John by various scholars vary from the early 60s to the 80s-90s AD. There may be good reason for the wide divergence of opinion because the main body of the first epistle was apparently written at an earlier date than were its epilogue and prologue.

Robinson believes that John's epistles were written just before II Peter and Jude. He states: "The epistles were, I believe, written to reassure Jewish Christian congregations in Asia Minor, who were the product of the Johannine mission and in danger of being shaken from their faith and morals by false teachers of a gnosticizing tendency. In other words, the situation is remarkably parallel to that which we postulated for Jude and II Peter. Indeed, we have observed earlier that Jude seems to stand to II Peter much as II John stands to I John. II John is a particular rather than a general pastoral letter, and its purpose may have been to give early warning of the new heresy ('If anyone comes to you', II John 10). In I John the false teachers, who are evidently peripatetic prophets (4.1-6), have clearly done their damage and have already persuaded some to leave (2.19).

"The teaching indeed has much in common with that combated in Jude and II Peter. It evidently involves a denial of Jesus as the Christ and Son of God (2.22f; 4.15; 5.1, 5; cf. Jude 4; II Peter 2.1) and particularly of his coming in the *flesh* (4:2; II John 7). This docetic emphasis is new, and it leads both to doctrinal error—repudiation not only of the incarnation but of Jesus' coming 'with the blood' (5.6), i.e., probably, the reality of his sacrificial death (1.7; cf. 2.2; 4.10)—and to moral error. For if matter is unreal one can soon claim to be beyond morality—beyond sin (1.8-10), beyond law (2.3-5; 3.4) and beyond the material needs of the neighbour (1.9-11; 3.17; 4.20). It is this distortion of the teaching which his charges received, from a moral to a metaphysical dualism (with matter as indifferent or evil), that the writer sees as the root heresy, and this is characteristically gnostic. There is the familiar claim by the false teachers to give esoteric initiation and knowledge, which has to be countered by the Christian claim to the true knowledge and understanding (2.20f., 26f.; 5.20)" (Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, pp. 285-286).

Since the teachings of I John are similar to those of II Peter and Jude (although the intense persecution of the saints had not yet begun), it is probable that I John was written before II Peter and Jude. The year 63-64 AD might be the most probable date at which John wrote all three of his epistles. It was a time when the apostasy was gaining momentum, before the Jewish rebellion against Rome in 66 AD. Robinson also identified the early 60s as the probable time of writing: "There would therefore seem to be much in favour of placing the Johannine epistles provisionally in the same period of the early 60s. II John was perhaps written shortly before I John. III John deals not with heresy but with the conflict over authority in the church's ministry, which also marks Jude and II Peter (and the Pastoral Epistles)" (Ibid., p. 287). It therefore can be concluded that John wrote his epistles about 63-64 AD.

Jude

The internal evidence from the Epistle of Jude does not indicate a specific date of writing. However, it is evident that the apostasy from the original faith given by Jesus Christ had intensified to the point where the churches in Judea were in danger of being engulfed and destroyed. The apostates were not leaving the churches as the apostle John

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had written (I John 2:19); rather, they appeared to be taking over the churches wholly.

After rejecting a suggested date of about 150 AD for this epistle's origin, Hiebert comments: "The dates range all the way from A.D. 64 to 80. There are, however, some indications which may help us arrive at a more definite date. If it is true, as we believe, that 2 Peter was written first, then the date for Jude cannot be earlier than A.D. 65. On the other hand, it seems highly improbable that the epistle should be dated later than the destruction of Jerusalem. If that catastrophe had already taken place it is difficult to see how Jude could have failed to use it among his examples of the destructions which befell the ungodly. Some two or three years may have passed since the writing of 2 Peter, thus allowing sufficient time for the development of the conditions depicted in Jude. We may accordingly date the epistle around A.D. 67 or 68" (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, pp. 174-175).

Jude's epistle might have been written about a year earlier, in 66-67 AD, as the apostasy was intensifying and the Jewish revolt against the Romans beginning. By 67-68 AD, the Jewish rebellion was in full swing, and most of the Christian Jews had already fled to Pella or to Asia Minor near Ephesus. From the external and internal evidence of the book of Jude, it can be concluded that it was written around 66-67 AD.

The Book of Revelation

When was the book of Revelation written? Many scholars—including Robinson—believe that the book of Revelation, also called the *Apocalypse*, was written before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. They have attempted to make strange interpretations appear plausible by twisting events that occurred between the first century of the Roman Empire and 70 AD in order to make them fit the book of Revelation. For example, Robinson dated the book of Revelation to the years between late 68 and 70 AD (Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, p. 252).

By attempting to make the book of Revelation fit the historical environment of the first century, most scholars have missed the whole point of the book of Revelation. If all of Revelation was a historical fulfillment of events up to 70 AD, then it is a book of history, rather than a book of prophecy. Many scholars do view Revelation as a record of past events and not a foretelling of future events.

In spite of the interpretations of these scholars, the book of Revelation is not a record of events of the first century up to 70 AD. Rather, it is a book of future prophecies for the end times. The true meaning of the book of Revelation, like that of many prophecies in the book of Daniel, was not intended to be understood until the end times: "But you, O Daniel, **shut up the words and seal the book, even to the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased....** And I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, "O my lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go your way, Daniel, for the words *are* closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and made white, and refined. But the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand" (Dan. 12:4, 8-10).

Daniel and Revelation go hand in hand, because they contain prophecies that would be fulfilled only in the time of the end. Many of the prophecies of Daniel cannot be understood without the prophecies of Revelation. Likewise, many prophecies of Revelation cannot be understood without the prophecies of Daniel. Only a few parts in the beginning of Revelation had to do with the situation that prevailed when John wrote this book. Furthermore, with the exception of the historical and partial prophetic fulfillment of the letters to the seven churches in chapters Two and Three—in addition to parts of chapters Twelve and Seventeen—virtually all of Revelation has yet to be fulfilled.

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The prophecies in the book of Revelation concern the events that will occur in the end times, which include: the actual return of Jesus Christ; the destruction of Babylon the Great; the coming one-world governmental system; the Beast and false prophet and their fate; the Mark of the Beast; the removal of Satan the devil; the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth under Jesus Christ and the resurrected saints; the final judgment; the new heavens and the new earth; the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven to the earth; and finally, God the Father and Jesus Christ dwelling with Their spiritual family grown great. Because the Word of God is true, all the prophecies in the book of Revelation that have yet to be fulfilled will be fulfilled, perhaps in the lifetimes of many of us.

Robinson reports that other scholars believed that all the writings of John were written between 90-100 AD. He notes: "Indeed one of the facts about the remarkable scholarly consensus which we shall be noting on the dating of the Johannine literature is that it cuts across almost every possible division. Those who believe that all five books—the Revelation, the gospel and the three epistles—are by one man, and that man the apostle John, and those who hold to none of these, or to almost every possible permutation of them, find common ground in dating both the Revelation and the gospel and epistles in the years ± 90-100" (Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, p. 254).

The weight of evidence points to Revelation having been written in the last decade of the first century. Hiebert writes: "It was the testimony of the early Church that the Apocalypse was written during the latter part of the reign of Domitian, who was emperor from A.D. 81 to 96. The earliest known witness is Irenaeus who wrote that John saw his visions 'no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign' " (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 253).

"The evidence for an early dating does not appear weighty enough to require a rejection of the strong external evidence for a date during the latter part of the reign of Domitian. Internal evidence is consistent with this traditional date.

"The Domitian dating is consistent with the condition of the Asian churches, as reflected in the seven letters to the churches. That condition implies that these churches already had a fairly long history behind them. Marked spiritual deterioration has already taken place: Ephesus has left its first love (2:4), Sardis is virtually dead (3:1), and Laodicea is complacent in its repulsive lukewarmness (3:15-18). The Nicolaitan party, of which Paul's epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians, as well as the letters to Timothy, reveal no certain traces, is now widely distributed and firmly rooted (2:6, 15). The Domitian dating allows sufficient time for this development between the founding of these churches during Paul's days and the writing of Revelation.

"John's intimate knowledge of the spiritual needs of the churches and his implied authority over them presuppose a fairly long sojourn in the area and a protracted period of activity among them. Since John apparently did not go to Asia Minor until the outbreak of the Jewish War in A.D. 67, the Domitian dating again is more probable" (Ibid., pp. 255-256).

"Further support for the late date has been noted from the history of two of the seven churches addressed. The message to the church at Laodicea (3:14-22) implies the prosperity of that city. An earthquake destroyed Laodicea in A.D. 62 [actually 60-61], during the reign of Nero. While the city was soon rebuilt, some time must be allowed for a full recovery. In his letter to the Philippians (chap. 11), Polycarp implies that the believers in Smyrna did not yet know the Lord when Paul wrote Philippians. This implies that the church of Smyrna did not come into existence until after A.D. 63. But Revelation 2:8-11 'presupposes a Church poor in wealth but rich in good works, with a development of apparently many years to its credit.' This again does not fit the time of Nero but is fully consistent with a dating under Domitian.

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“Only two periods for the dating of the Revelation seem historically feasible, a Neronian date of about A.D. 68 or 69 and a date during the latter part of Domitian’s reign, A.D. 95 or 96. While the evidence for the latter date is not so conclusive as to exclude consideration for the former, both the external and internal evidence point to the Domitian dating. If the Revelation really was written at the end of Nero’s reign, it is difficult to understand why the early Church developed so strong a tradition relating its composition to the reign of Domitian. We suggest a probable date as A.D. 95 or 96” (Ibid., pp. 256-257).

All the evidence points to 95-96 AD for the dating of the writing of Revelation. When the internal evidence is examined, it shows that John received the revelation by visions from Jesus Christ during his exile on the island of Patmos. The pattern of Revelation shows a series of visions given to John. The first of these visions concerned John’s time, 95-96 AD. Each succeeding vision revealed, step by step, the sequence of key world events in history, from the time of John until Jesus Christ’s return to the earth, with the final visions revealing the completion of God’s plan.

The pattern unfolds as one reads Revelation. In the first chapter, John tells how Jesus instructed him to write down what he saw, apparently as he saw it: “ ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the Beginning and the Ending,*’ says the Lord, ‘Who is, and Who was, and Who *is* to come—the Almighty.’ I, John, who *am* also your brother and joint partaker in the tribulation and in the kingdom and endurance of Jesus Christ, was on the island that *is* called Patmos, because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

“I was in *the Spirit* on the day of the Lord, and I heard a loud voice like a trumpet behind me, saying, ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last’; and, ‘**What you see, write in a book,** and send *it* to the churches that *are* in Asia: to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamos, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea’ ” (Rev. 1:8-11).

After John saw a vision of the glorified Jesus Christ walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, Jesus again instructed John to write: “And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as if dead; but He laid His right hand upon me, saying to me, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last, even the one Who is living; for I was dead, and behold, I am alive into the ages of eternity. Amen. And I have the keys of *the* grave and of death. **Write the things that you saw, and the things that are, and the things that shall take place hereafter**’ ” (verses 17-19).

Because the revelation concerned key events of the future, Jesus instructed John to write down everything that he saw: “The things that you saw [of Jesus walking in the midst of the seven lampstands], and the things that are [the seven churches in Asia], and the things that shall take place hereafter [the rest of the book of Revelation].”

The flow of events prophesied in Revelation is laid out in a step-by-step pattern showing that Jesus Christ gave these visions to John in sequence, and he wrote them in the order in which they were given. There is no indication that any part of Revelation was given at an earlier time or at a different place. Moreover, it is evident that the series of visions were given within a short span of time, and John immediately wrote them down as Jesus Christ had commanded him to do.

It can be concluded with the utmost confidence that the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation while on the island of Patmos, around 95-96 AD. John was released from his exile upon the death of Domitian on September 18, 96 (Langer, *An Encyclopedia of World History*, p. 109). Apparently, he then returned to Ephesus, where he, the other apostles still living and the elders canonized the New Testament in its final form. Today, the verbatim copies of those original autographs of the New Testament still exist. They were written in the *Koiné* Greek language and preserved in the Byzantine Greek text known as the Textus Receptus.

CHAPTER FIVE

BACKGROUND TO THE CANONIZATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The First Key: The Battle Against False Apostles, False Doctrines and the Great Apostasy

Before the apostles even began preaching the gospel, Jesus warned them time and time again that there would be false prophets and ministers, and even false Christs (Matt. 24:4-5, 11, 24). They were confronted with this from the very beginning. They were to beware not only of the teachings of Judaism and Jewish Gnosticism, but also those of the pagan Gnostic religion of Samaria and Egypt, as well as other heathen religions. Since Ezra's day, Samaria had been a stronghold of false worship. The apostate worship of the Samaritans, which might have been the primary reason for canonizing the Old Testament, continued down to New Testament times and beyond.

The first confrontation of the apostles with a false prophet occurred at Samaria. The Gnostic heresy of Samaria reared its ugly head in a new manner to work against the apostles and the burgeoning New Testament Church. Early in the ministry of the apostles, in 31 AD, they were confronted by the influential Gnostic religious leader of Samaria, Simon Magus, who claimed to be the great power of God: "But *there was* a certain man named Simon, who had from earlier times been practicing sorcery in the city and astounding the nation of Samaria, proclaiming himself to be some great one. To him they had all given heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the great power of God.' Now they were giving heed to him because *he* had for a long time bewitched them with sorceries" (Acts 8:9-11).

Newly ordained a deacon, Phillip came to Samaria to preach the Gospel. After Simon saw the miracles that Phillip had performed, he was baptized. Although Phillip baptized Simon, it is evident that God never honored that baptism and Simon never received the Holy Spirit, because he never repented and did not receive the laying on of hands. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard of this, they sent Peter and John to Samaria to oppose Simon Magus, who wanted to buy the power of the Holy Spirit: "Now when Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given by the laying on of the hands of the apostles, he offered them money, saying, 'Give this authority to me also, so that on whomever I lay hands, he may receive *the* Holy Spirit.' But Peter said to him, 'May your money be destroyed with you because you thought that the gift of God might be purchased with money. You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this your wickedness, and beseech God, if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you; for I perceive *that* you are in *the* gall of bitterness and *the* bondage of unrighteousness' " (verses 18-23).

The matter did not end there. Simon Magus continued to be known as "the great power of God" and proceeded to proclaim himself an apostle of God and to preach a false gospel, which was a strange mixture of Gnosticism, Judaism and Christian teachings. He started a counterfeit Christian organization, which had many followers. When he went to Rome in 42 AD, during the reign of Claudius, he was deified and proclaimed

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a god. On an island in the Tiber River a statue of Simon Magus was erected with an inscription proclaiming “Simon, the Holy God.” (see *The Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, vol. 9, p. 755). From that time forward, the apostles were fighting not only against the various sects of Judaism but also against Simon Magus’ apostate Christenized Gnosticism.

The Apostle Paul and False Prophets

In the beginning of his ministry, the apostle Paul was confronted by a powerful false prophet—another sorcerer—named Bar-jesus: “And when they had gone through the island as far as Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-jesus: He was with the proconsul Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man, who called Barnabas and Saul to *him*, desiring to hear the Word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so was his name interpreted) withstood them, seeking to turn away the proconsul from the faith. **But Saul, who was also called Paul, being filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his eyes on him, and said, ‘O full of all guile and all craftiness, you son of the devil and enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to pervert the straight ways of the Lord?’** And now behold, *the* hand of the Lord *is* upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a season.’ And immediately a mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking someone to lead *him* by the hand” (Acts 13:6-11).

In nearly every epistle of the apostle Paul, there is evidence that he was combating many forms of false teachings and a growing number of Christian counterfeits. On every side, there were false prophets and enemies of the gospel. The teachings of the sects of Judaism that had to be overcome were the religions of the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes, Hellenistic Judaism, Alexandrian Judaism, Gnostic Judaism and the Gnostic Samaritan/Jewish religion headed by Simon Magus. In addition, Paul was confronted by various pagan religions and by the emperor worship of Rome. There was hardly a place where Paul preached at which he was not confronted by false teachers, many of whom used the name of Jesus Christ but preached false doctrines combined with various beliefs from these religions.

I Thessalonians: When Paul wrote his first epistle to the Thessalonians in 50 AD, he defended himself and his teachings: “For our exhortation *was* not out of error, nor from uncleanness, nor with guile; but even as we were approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, we speak in this manner: as *those* who please not men, but God, Who proves our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words *with you*, even as you know, nor a cover for covetousness—God *is our* witness; nor were we seeking glory from men, neither from you nor from others, *though* as Christ’s apostles we had *the* power to be burdensome; but we were gentle among you, as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. Yearning over you in the same way, we were willing to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you were beloved to us” (I Thes. 2:3-8).

II Thessalonians: The second epistle that Paul wrote, also to the Thessalonians in 51 AD, was an urgent letter because false teachers were circulating a counterfeit epistle, claiming that it was from Paul and the day of the Lord was present! This was a first glimpse of the coming apostasy that later would sweep through the churches of God. Paul wrote: “Now we beseech you, brethren, concerning **the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ** and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken in mind, nor be troubled—neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by epistle, as if from us, *saying* that the day of Christ is present. **Do not let anyone deceive you by any means, because *that day will not come unless the apostasy shall come first, and the man of sin shall be revealed—the son of perdition,*** the one who opposes and exalts himself above all that is

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called God, or that is an object of worship; so that he comes into the temple of God and sits down as God, proclaiming that he himself is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you, I told you these things? And now you understand what is holding *him* back in order for him to be revealed in his own set time. **For the mystery of lawlessness is already working; only *there is one Who is restraining at the present time until it arises out of the midst***" (II Thes. 2:1-7).

Galatians: As noted in Chapter Four, pages 88-89, in 53 AD, Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia because there were false prophets and teachers who were perverting the gospel by intertwining the teachings of Judaism and circumcision with a strange blend of Jewish/pagan Gnosticism while preaching in the name of Jesus Christ. The brethren in Galatia were being enticed and drawn away. Paul could not let this perverted, false gospel continue to infiltrate the congregations of God, so he wrote his strongly worded epistle to the Galatians, warning them that they were in danger of straying from the true gospel.

Paul fully understood the problems they were facing. Before his conversion, he had previously been trained in Judaism and was one of its foremost advocates. Paul immediately recognized the false doctrines of Judaism because he had been one of the chief enemies of the Church before Jesus Christ called him. During the years 30-33 AD, Saul (as he was then known) had persecuted the Church and caused brethren to be hauled off to prison and sentenced to death. But now, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, he would never allow the true teachings of Jesus Christ or the Gospel to be subverted by anyone. As a servant and an apostle of God the Father and Jesus Christ, Paul stood his ground against man's teachings. He would never be swayed to compromise the Gospel of Jesus Christ in order to please man. When he wrote to the Galatians, he made it abundantly clear that there was only one true gospel and, he was an apostle of Jesus Christ by a special calling (Gal. 1:6-17). On the issue of circumcision, Paul gave no quarter, not even to the apostles James, Cephas [Peter] and John. He knew that the truth of the gospel stood alone and was never to be mixed with the teachings and doctrines of any religion, whether Jewish or Gentile. This is why he was so adamantly against any minister or apostle who deviated from the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Word of God. This issue was so urgent that Paul had a private meeting with the three aforementioned apostles, during the Jerusalem Conference of 49 AD, to settle the dispute (Gal. 2:1-10).

In 53 AD, when the apostle Peter and those of the Circumcision Party from Jerusalem came down to Antioch, they refused to eat with the Gentiles. Instead they reverted to observing traditional, religious laws of Judaism and separated themselves from the Gentiles when eating their festival meals. Paul publicly rebuked Peter for his hypocrisy in front of the entire church in Antioch. God inspired that Paul's public rebuke of Peter and the others be preserved for all time (Gal. 2:11-21).

The different gospel that churches in Galatia were receiving from those false apostles was a perverse blending of Christianity, mandatory circumcision, Jewish/pagan Gnostic mysticism and worship of fallen angels. They also combined this strange gospel with the observing of Gnostic religious holidays, instead of the holy days of God. Paul strongly rebuked them, even doubting their conversion: "Now on the one hand, **when you did not know God, you were in bondage to those who are not gods by nature** [fallen angel worship of Gnosticism]. But on the other hand, after having known God—rather, after having been known by God—**how is it that you are turning again to the weak and impotent elements, to which you again desire to be in bondage? You are of your own selves observing days, and months, and times and years. I am afraid for you, lest somehow I have labored among you in vain**" (Gal. 4:8-11).

The Galatians reverted back to observing days, and months, and times and years of Jewish/pagan Gnostic mysticism—pagan days of worship! Today, many theologians

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teach that Paul's reference to these pagan holiday observances meant that they were reverting back to observing the holy days and festivals that God had commanded in the Old Testament. However, that is not what Paul meant. He was referring to the pagan practices that the Galatians had been observing before their conversion. Observance of these days, months, times and years are strictly forbidden by God: "When the LORD your God shall cut off the nations before you, where you go to possess them, and you take their place and dwell in their land, **Take heed to yourself that you do not become ensnared by following them, after that are destroyed from before you, and that you do not ask about their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods that I may also do likewise?'** You shall not do so to the LORD your God, for every abomination to the LORD, which he hates, they have done to their gods; even their sons and their daughters they have burned in the fire to their gods. Whatsoever thing that I command you, be careful to do it. You shall not add to it, nor take away from it" (Deut. 12:29-32). Again, God commanded: "When you come to the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to do according to the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that **uses divination, or an observer of times, or a fortuneteller, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or one who seeks oracles from the dead.** For all that do these things *are* an abomination to the LORD. And because of these abominations, the LORD your God drives them out from before you. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. **For these nations whom you shall possess hearkened to observers of times and to diviners; but as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do so**" (Deut. 18:9-14). The Galatians were abandoning the observance of the scriptural holy days and feasts and reverting back to their former pagan ways with the addition of circumcision.

There is no question that Paul had to fight for the purity of the faith of Jesus Christ, even against Peter, a fellow apostle, and the Circumcision Party from Jerusalem. Paul made it clear that he was never going to allow the true Gospel to be subverted with the practices of traditional Judaism or the observance of the pagan practices of Jewish Gnostic mysticism.

Corinthians: In 56 AD, Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians. It is devoted almost entirely to various sins, false teachings and false practices within the congregations. However in his second epistle, which he wrote in 57 AD, Paul warned the brethren in Corinth of the influence of false teachers and apostles who were coming into the Church. As a result, Paul had to defend himself to the brethren against those false apostles: "For we are not like the many, who for *their own* profit are corrupting the Word of God; but we speak with sincerity, as from God, *and* before God, *and* in Christ" (II Cor. 2:17).

To make matters worse, the brethren in Corinth were even allowing false apostles to preach to their congregations, failing to discern the evil in their teachings. As a result, Paul wrote to them that these men were not of God. Rather, they were ministers of Satan the devil, and furthermore, they were deceitfully handling the Word of God. In contrast, he was preaching the truth of God: "Therefore, having this ministry, according as we have received mercy, we are not fainthearted. For we have personally renounced the hidden things of dishonest gain, not walking in *cunning* craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth, we are commending ourselves to every man's conscience before God. But if our gospel is hidden, it is hidden to those who are perishing; in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, Who is *the* image of God, should shine unto them. For we do not preach our own selves, but Christ Jesus *the* Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (II Cor. 4:1-5).

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More disastrous yet, the Corinthians were not only tolerating these false apostles but were even accepting their teachings: “I would *that* you might bear with me in a little nonsense; but indeed, do bear with me. For I am jealous over you with *the* jealousy of God, because I have espoused you to one husband, so that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds might be corrupted from *the* simplicity that *is* in Christ. **For indeed, if someone comes preaching another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you did not receive, or a different gospel, which you did not accept, you put up with it as something good. But I consider myself in no way inferior to those highly exalted so-called apostles.** For although *I may be* unpolished in speech, yet *I am* not in knowledge; for in all things I demonstrated this to you” (II Cor. 11:1-6).

Although such false apostles appeared to be ministers of righteousness, they were of Satan and not of God. Regardless of their claims, God did not send them and they did not preach the truth of God, even though they used Jesus’ name and perhaps claimed that they had seen and heard Jesus during His three-and-one-half year ministry. Paul condemned these fraudulent apostles: “**For such are false apostles—deceitful workers who are transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And it is no marvel, for Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his servants also transform themselves as ministers of righteousness—whose end shall be according to their works**” (verses 13-15).

Because the Corinthians were so foolish as to allow false apostles to preach to them, to rule over them, to take tithes from them and to lead them away from Christ, Paul had to bring them to their senses. He did this by mocking the Corinthians’ naivety because they allowed false apostles to teach them false doctrines. Paul was forced to show that he and he alone had the fruits of a true apostle of God, which none of those “highly exalted *so-called* apostles” had: “Since many boast according to *the* flesh, I also will boast. **For since you are so intelligent, you gladly bear with fools. For you bear it if anyone brings you into bondage, if anyone devours you, if anyone takes from you, if anyone exalts himself, if anyone beats you on the face.**

“I speak as though we were under reproach for being weak; but in whatever way anyone else is bold (I speak in foolishness), I also am bold. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they *the* seed of Abraham? So am I. **Are they servants of Christ? (I am speaking as if I were out of my mind.)** So am I, above *measure*—in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in imprisonments more frequent, in deaths often. Five times from *the* Jews I received forty *stripes* less one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I spent in the deep. *I have been* in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from *my own* race, in perils from *the* Gentiles, in perils in *the* city, in perils in *the* desert, in perils on *the* sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides *all* these things from the *world* outside, pressing on me daily *is* the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I do not burn? If it is necessary for me to boast, I will boast *in* the things concerning my weakness. **The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is blessed into the ages of eternity, knows that I do not lie**” (II Cor. 11:18-31).

Without a doubt, Paul made it known that he was a true apostle of Jesus Christ. Yet, because the Corinthian brethren were allowing false apostles into their congregations, Paul was willing to resort to the foolishness of boasting to expose their grave sins: “I have become a fool *in this* boasting. You have forced me *to do so*, when I ought to have been commended by you. **For in no way was I inferior to those highly exalted so-called apostles—even if I am nothing. Indeed, the signs of an apostle were demon-**

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strated *by me in all patience, in signs and wonders and miracles among you*” (II Cor. 12:11-12).

Romans: Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans in the winter of 57 AD from Corinth. It contains mostly doctrinal instructions concerning salvation by faith and justification through the blood of Jesus Christ. There is only one reference to “**those who are causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned ...** the sort who are not serving our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own bellies, and are deceiving the hearts of the innocent by smooth talking and flattery” (Rom. 16:17-18). In the epistle to the Romans, there is no other mention of false prophets.

Acts 20: In the early spring of 58 AD, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul left Greece through Macedonia and was on his way to Jerusalem. Since he did not have time to go to Ephesus, Paul summoned the elders of the Church to meet him in Miletus because he knew that he would not see them again. When they arrived, he gave them a final, solemn and stern, witness and warning against false teachers of apostasy. Moreover, he warned that even some of the elders that he was talking to would rise up and become false teachers and devour the flock of God. Luke wrote of Paul’s stern warning to the elders of Ephesus: “And now behold, I know that you all, among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Wherefore I testify to you on this day that I am pure from the blood of all; for I have not held back from preaching to you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. **For I know this that after my departure grievous wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will rise up speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after themselves.** Watch, therefore, remembering that *for* three years I ceased not to admonish each one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:25-31).

Hebrews: The book of Hebrews, written in 61 AD, is filled with warnings against falling away—committing the unpardonable sin—and contains the full revelation of the heavenly priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians: Paul wrote this epistle in early 63 AD from his first Roman imprisonment. In 4:14, Paul made reference to men who were “systematizing the error.”

Colossians: From prison in Rome in 63 AD, Paul had to warn the brethren in Colossae against the false doctrines of philosophy and the worship of angels (Col. 2).

Philippians: Paul also wrote this epistle from prison in Rome in 63 AD. In Chapter 3, Paul strongly warned the brethren against the Circumcision Party, who trusted in the flesh and did not have the Spirit of God. Rather, they served their own bellies and were the enemies of Christ.

I, II Timothy and Titus: All three epistles are filled with instructions on how to preach the truth and how to fight against false doctrines and false ministers.

Philemon: This short epistle is a personal letter to Philemon and contains no reference to false prophets or false doctrines.

All in Asia Deserted Paul for False Apostles: By 67 AD, when he was once again in a Roman prison, Paul realized that the apostasy had fully engulfed many of the churches in Asia. As a result of the flood of false apostles and teachers, he knew that the majority of brethren had deserted him. In his second epistle, Paul wrote Timothy: “For which cause [the cause of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ] I am also suffering these things; nevertheless, I am not ashamed. For I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He has the power to keep what I have committed *to Him* for that day. Hold *as the standard for doctrine* the sound words that you heard from me, in *the* faith and love that *are* in Christ Jesus. Guard the good thing that was committed *to you* by *the* Holy Spirit that is dwelling in us. **You know this, that all those who *are* in Asia have**

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rejected me, of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes” (II Tim. 1:12-15).

Of the fourteen epistles that the apostle Paul wrote, thirteen contain teachings and warnings against false apostles, false prophets and false teachers, as well as false doctrines and practices—to a greater or lesser degree. This was one of the primary reasons why God inspired Paul to choose these epistles for canonization.

The Apostles John, Peter and Jude and False Teachers

I John: By the time the apostle John wrote his first general epistle, in 63 AD, the antichrists were leaving the congregations and the apostasy was gaining strength by drawing away brethren. The Hellenistic Gnostics who had infiltrated the churches were preaching **three major false doctrines**, which were:

1) A denial of the sinful nature of man and that Christ’s blood and sacrifice were not the only means of forgiveness of sin: “If we proclaim that we have fellowship with Him, but we are walking in the darkness, we are lying to ourselves, and we are not practicing the Truth. However, if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, *then* we have fellowship with one another, and **the blood of Jesus Christ, His own Son, cleanses us from every sin. If we say that we do not have sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.** If we confess our own sins, He is faithful and righteous, to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us.** My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And *yet*, if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father; Jesus Christ *the* Righteous; and He is *the* propitiation for our sins; and not for our sins only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world” (1:6-10; 2:1-2).

False doctrine came from antichrist liars who denied God the Father and Jesus Christ. John wrote: “**Who is the liar if it is not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is the antichrist**—the one who denies the Father and the Son. Anyone who denies the Son does not have the Father either” (2:22-23).

2) That it was not necessary to keep the commandments of God and to walk as Jesus walked. Those who taught this doctrine were liars and did not know Jesus Christ. John made it clear that keeping the commandments of God was a critical sign that one knew Jesus Christ as personal Savior: “And by this *standard* we know that we know Him: if we keep His commandments. **The one who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.** On the other hand, ***if* anyone is keeping His Word, truly in this one the love of God is being perfected.** By this *means* we know that we are in Him. Anyone who claims to dwell in Him is obligating himself also to walk even as He Himself walked” (2:3-6, see also John 14:15; 15:10-17).

John showed that those who practiced sin and lawlessness were children of the devil: “Everyone who practices sin is also practicing lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness [for sin is the transgression of the law—*KJV*]. And you know that He appeared in order that He might take away our sins; and in Him is no sin. **Everyone who dwells in Him does not practice sin; anyone who practices sin has not seen Him, nor has known Him. Little children, do not allow anyone to deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. The one who practices sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from *the beginning*.** For this purpose the Son of God appeared that He might destroy the works of the devil. Everyone who has been begotten by God does not practice sin because His seed *of begettal* is dwelling within him, and he is not able to *practice* sin because he has been begotten by God. **By this *standard* are manifest the children of God and the children of the devil. Every-**

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one who does not practice righteousness is not of God, and neither is the one who does not love his brother” (3:4-10).

3) That **Jesus Christ had not come in the flesh**. Those false teachers of mystic, Hellenistic Gnosticism were leading the rebellion and apostasy. Again John identified them as “antichrists” and wrote that under the influence of wicked spirits these antichrists epitomized “the spirit of deception”: “Beloved, **do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world**. By this *test* you *can* know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come *in the flesh* is from God. **And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not from God. And this is the spirit of antichrist, which you heard was to come, and even now it is already in the world**. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them because greater is He Who *is* in you than the one who *is* in the world. **They are of the world**; because of this, they speak of the world, and the world listens to them. **We are of God**; the one who knows God listens to us; the one who is not of God does not listen to us. **By this means we know the Spirit of the truth and the spirit of the deception**” (4:1-6).

By means of these three major false doctrines, the antichrists were drawing away disciples. Apparently they persuaded many disciples to leave congregations en masse: “Little children, it is *the* last time, and just as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have risen up, by which we know that it is *the* last time. **They went out from among us, but they were not of us; because if they were of us, they would have remained with us; nevertheless, they left that they might be exposed to show that they all were not of us**” (2:18-19).

II John: John’s second epistle, probably written in late 64 AD, is short, because from the time that he wrote his first epistle, the apostasy had apparently gained much more momentum and strength. Because of this, he wrote to the believers telling them that he had more to write, but couldn’t. Rather, he stated that he would come and speak to them in person. To make matters even worse, the antichrists were emboldened and were committing brazen acts of proselytizing the true brethren, attempting to coerce them to join their ranks. And it appears that they were not satisfied with drawing away disciples from the congregations. By the time John wrote his second epistle, they were even going from house to house, seeking to deceive those who had not yet followed them in their error.

John used strong language and commanded the true believers not even to welcome them or let them into their houses: “And this is the love *of God*: that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, exactly as you heard from *the* beginning, that you might walk in it **because many deceivers have entered into the world—those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. This is the spirit of the deceiver and the antichrist**. Watch out for yourselves in order that we may not lose the things we have accomplished, but *that* we may receive a full reward. **Anyone who transgresses and does not continue in the doctrine of Christ does not have God**. But the one who continues in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. **If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house, and do not say to him, ‘Welcome!’** For anyone who says, ‘Welcome!’ to him is partaking in his evil works” (verses 6-11).

III John: A year later, when John wrote his third epistle, in 65 AD, the rebellion within the congregations had turned into open political warfare between the faithful ministers on the one side, and the false ministers, who were seeking their own power and authority, on the other side. In order to gain power and usurp apostolic authority, the false ministers were discrediting the apostle John by spreading lies, malicious gossip and negative innuendoes. Furthermore, in their lust for power, they were excommunicating

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fellow ministers and brethren who would not join them. Undoubtedly, they had established their own competing congregations as they consolidated power. The situation confronting the churches had become so intense that John even named one of the chief leaders in the rebellion: “I wrote to the church, but **Diotrephes, the one who loves to be chief among them, does not accept us.** Because of this very thing, if I come, I will call him to account for the actions that he is practicing with evil words—**maliciously berating us;** and he is not satisfied with these things, *for* he himself neither receives the brethren, *nor does he permit* those who wish *to receive the brethren, but he forbids them and casts them out of the church*” (verses 9-10).

II Peter: When Peter wrote his second epistle, in 66 AD, the Jews were preparing to rise up against Roman rule. He prophesied that the Jewish rebellion would unleash a flood of false teachers and leaders who would reject Jesus Christ as the true Messiah. They would blaspheme the truth of God as they brought in their damnable heresies to lead brethren astray: “But there were also false prophets among the people, as indeed **there will be false teachers among you, who will stealthily introduce destructive heresies, personally denying the Lord who bought them, and bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many people will follow as authoritative their destructive ways; and because of them, the way of the truth will be blasphemed.** Also, through insatiable greed they will with enticing messages exploit you for gain; for whom the judgment of old is in *full* force, and their destruction is *ever* watching” (II Peter 2:1-3).

Jude: In 67 AD, when Jude wrote his short epistle, the Jewish rebellion against the Romans was gaining momentum. The false teachers and prophets were making massive inroads into the churches of God in Jerusalem and Judea. So acute was the situation that Jude had to exhort the brethren to fight for the faith. If they didn’t, they might even lose their salvation: “Beloved, when personally exerting all *my* diligence to write to you concerning the common salvation, I was compelled to write to you, exhorting *you* to **fer- vently fight for the faith,** which once for all *time* has been delivered to the saints. For **certain men have stealthily crept in;** those who long ago have been written about, condemning *them* to this judgment. **They are ungodly men, who are perverting the grace of our God, turning it into licentiousness, and are personally denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ...** Woe to them! **For they have walked in the way of Cain; and for gain, they have wholly given themselves up to Balaam’s delusion, and have perished in the rebellion of Korah.** These are subversive stains in your love feasts, feasting in person together *with you;* fearlessly they are feeding themselves. *They are* clouds without water, being driven by the winds; trees of late autumn, without *any* fruit, uprooted, twice dead; raging wild waves of *the* sea, casting up like foam their own *ignominious* shame; wandering stars, for whom has been reserved the blackest darkness forever” (Jude 3-4, 11-13).

Please read II Peter 2 and the Epistle of Jude in their entirety. It is important to understand the inspired, urgent warnings against, and vehement excoriations of those false teachers and false prophets. There is little doubt that the heightened activities of false prophets and teachers in confronting the apostles and the churches of God was a primary factor in the canonization of the New Testament, just as it was when Ezra and the Great Assembly canonized the Old Testament.

The Jewish-Roman War

Apparently, by 67-68 AD, the rebels and Jewish religious leaders were coercing any remaining Christian Jews, who had not heeded Jesus’ warnings to flee, into rejecting Jesus Christ. As a result, true to the warning that the apostle Paul wrote in the book of Hebrews, many were ensnared into joining the rebellion against Rome. Perhaps they had

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been persuaded that if they joined in the struggle for liberation from Rome, then “the true Messiah” would be compelled to come and fight for them and would bring complete triumph over the Romans. However, that did not happen. Instead, Palestine was about to enter one of the most horrific times in its history, not even to be compared to the modern Jewish-Palestinian conflict (which has continued since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 AD).

In summarizing the Jewish-Roman War, Ernest L. Martin wrote: “The Jewish/Roman War of A.D. 66 to 73 was one of the most horrendous that mankind ever devised, and this was especially the case in the city of Jerusalem. The Jewish Christians who stayed in the capital with the other people of the nation to fight the Romans (those who did not heed the warnings to flee the city) consigned themselves to the most horrible circumstances that mankind could ever endure. And though we can allow for some exaggerations in Josephus [see Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, bk. 2, ch. 17, to bk. 6, ch. 1], what he shows (if only half his descriptions occurred) is that siege of Jerusalem was one of the most terrible and frightening events in the annals of man. What Josephus described should serve as a proper commentary on what Peter and Jude stated in their epistles would occur to those Jewish Christians who failed to heed the warnings that God was abandoning the Temple and the city.

“Peter was well aware that many Jewish Christians would be tempted to join the ‘fighters of liberty’ (as Peter called them), but the people who joined them were actually, according to Peter, the ‘slaves of corruption’ (II Peter 2:19). Josephus would have agreed. Peter was actually making his warning to thousands of people at the time he wrote. Indeed, the New Testament states that there were *many* tens of thousands of believing Jews in Judaea in A.D. 56 (Acts 21:20) and many of these did not migrate out of Palestine with the others from A.D. 62 to A.D. 66 ... The majority of those Jewish Christians who stayed in Jerusalem gave up the type of Christianity that the apostles were teaching. They remained behind in Palestine to war with the Romans—and to disaster!

“There were so many Palestinian Jews who were among the Jews (and Christians) of the Dispersion. It was these people to whom Peter and Jude were writing. They were warning the Jewish Christians in Asia Minor, and elsewhere, not to follow in the rebellious ways of most of the nation because they were going to come to a ‘swift destruction’ (II Peter 2:1) and a ‘judgment of desolation’ (v. 3). Peter said their cities would be turned into ashes just like the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah (II Peter 2:6). And this is exactly what happened....But Peter’s message for the most part fell on deaf ears [as did Paul’s warning in the book of Hebrews in 61 AD]. The majority of Jewish Christians (along with the generality of the nation) went to war with the Romans, and lost” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, pp. 278-279).

The Second Key: The Return of Jesus Christ

The Prophesied Last Generation

The second key to the canonization of the New Testament was when Jesus Christ would return. In the Olivet Prophecy in Matthew 24, just two days before His last Passover, Matthew recorded Jesus’ prophecies of the events that would lead up to the end times and the sign of His return. First, Jesus warned that false prophets would arise and deceive many, there would be wars and rumors of wars, kingdom would rise up against kingdom, nations against nations, famines, pestilences and earthquakes (verses 3-7). Then there would be times of sorrows; the disciples would be persecuted, killed and

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hated of all nations; and many would be offended and betray one another (verses 8-11). After that, many more false prophets would arise and the love of many would grow cold because iniquity would abound; the gospel would be preached in all the world as a witness, and those who endured to the end would be saved (verses 12-14). But just before the end, there would be a time of great tribulation and troubles unlike anything since the beginning of the world (verses 16-26). Finally, the sign of the Son of man would appear in heaven, as a bursting sun, heralding the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the saints (verses 27-31).

Jesus ended his prophecy with a parable and a warning: “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branches have already become tender, and it puts forth its leaves, you know that summer *is* near. In like manner also, when you see all these things, know that it is near, even at *the* doors. **Truly I say to you, this generation shall in no wise pass away until all these things have taken place.** The heaven and the earth shall pass away, but My words shall never pass away. **But concerning that day, and the hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only**” (verses 32-36).

Because the apostles expected Jesus to return in their lifetimes, they assumed that when Jesus said “**This generation shall in no wise pass away** until all these things have taken place,” He meant their generation. From the Scriptures they understood that a generation could mean a period of forty years (Ex. 16:35; Num. 14:34; Deut. 2:7; 8:2, 4; 29:5; and Heb. 3:7-11, 17). The apostles assumed that the last generation would be from 30 AD to 70 AD. This assumption was reflected in their writings. The apostles’ writings on the return of Jesus Christ before 63 AD show that they expected Him to return within their lifetimes. Although the apostles understood Jesus’ statements to be true, they did not realize until thirty-three years later that “this generation” was not their generation. Therefore, their writings after 63 AD showed that He would not return until far into the future.

Jesus Went to Heaven and Would Return: On the night of His last Passover, Jesus revealed to the apostles that He was going back to heaven but would return. John recorded what Jesus told them: “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were otherwise, I would have told you. **I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself;** so that where I am, you may be also....You have heard Me say to you that **I am going away, and that I will come to you again.** If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced that I said, ‘**I am going to the Father,**’ because My Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it happens, so that when it comes to pass, you may believe” (John 14:2-3, 28-29; see also John 16:5, 7, 16, 28; 21:22-23).

It was necessary that Jesus ascend to heaven and sit at the right hand of God the Father so that the power of the Holy Spirit could be sent to the apostles to be within them (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit is the power of God that would lead the apostles and reveal to them things to come. Jesus said to them: “But I am telling you the truth. It is profitable for you that **I go away** because **if I do not go away, the Comforter** [which is the Holy Spirit] **will not come to you.** However, if I go, I will send it to you. And when that one has come, it will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; concerning righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you no longer will see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

“**I have yet many things to tell you, but you are not able to bear them now.** However, when that one has come, *even* **the Spirit of the truth, it will lead you into all truth** because it shall not speak from itself, but whatever it shall hear shall it speak. And **it shall disclose to you the things to come.** That one shall glorify Me because **it shall**

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disclose to you *the things that it receives from Me*” (John 16:7-14).

The day after Jesus was raised from the dead, He appeared to the apostles and opened their minds to understand the Scriptures and commanded them to preach the Word to all nations: “And He said to them, ‘*These are* the words that I spoke to you when I was yet with you, that all *the things* which were written concerning Me in the Law of Moses and *in the Prophets* and *in the Psalms* must be fulfilled.’ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘According as it is written, it was necessary for the Christ to suffer, and to rise from *the* dead the third day. And in His name, repentance and remission of sins should be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. For you are witnesses of these things’ ” (Luke 24:44-48).

The apostles saw Jesus for forty days after His resurrection. Moreover, on one occasion He was seen by more than five hundred disciples at one time (I Cor. 15:6). On the fortieth day, moments before He ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives for the second and final time, He gave the apostles some last-minute instructions. Luke wrote: “The first account I indeed have written, O Theophilus, concerning all things that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after giving command by *the* Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen; to whom also, by many infallible proofs, He presented Himself alive after He had suffered, being seen by them for forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God. And while *they* were assembled with *Him*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem but to ‘await the promise of the Father, which,’ *He said*, ‘you have heard of Me. For John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with *the* Holy Spirit after not many days’ ” (Acts 1:1-5).

At that time the apostles were eager to know whether Jesus would establish the Kingdom of God immediately. They did not realize that in a few minutes Jesus would ascend into heaven and the fulfillment of the prophecies and His return would not occur until centuries later: “So then, when they were assembled together, they asked Him, saying, ‘**Lord, will You restore the kingdom to Israel at this time?**’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know *the* times or *the* seasons, which the Father has placed in His own authority; but you yourselves shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and **you shall be My witnesses, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto *the* ends of the earth.**’ And after saying these things, *as* they were looking at *Him*, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (verses 6-9).

When the apostles heard Jesus speak these words, they did not realize the full magnitude of what He said. At that time they could not possibly have known that Jesus actually meant all nations in the world, including those nations that would arise well beyond their lifetimes, and, that the work of preaching the gospel through their writings would continue for nearly two thousand more years.

However, when reading these statements today and looking back on history, one can see in Jesus’ words the seeds for the future writing and canonizing of what was to become the New Testament. This can be seen in the following two verses: “And in His name, repentance and remission of sins should be **preached to all nations**, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47), and “You shall be My witnesses, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and **unto *the* ends of the earth**” (Acts 1:8).

After Jesus ascended into heaven on May 18, 30 AD, for the second and final time, the apostles expected Him to return in the near future. This is evident from Peter’s second major sermon, which he delivered just a few weeks after Pentecost 30 AD. There is little doubt that he expected Jesus to return very soon: “But what God had before announced by *the* mouth of all His prophets, *that* Christ should suffer, He has accordingly fulfilled. Therefore, repent and be converted in order that your sins may be blotted out,

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so that *the* times of refreshing may come from *the* presence of the Lord; and **that He may send Him Who was before proclaimed to you, Jesus Christ, Whom *the* heaven must indeed receive until *the* times of restoration of all things, of which God has spoken by *the* mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began**” (Acts 3:18-21).

Jesus did not tell the apostles that when He went away, He would not return to earth for nearly two thousand years. They would not have been able to comprehend that. In fact, they had only begun to preach the gospel. Therefore, Christ did not immediately reveal to them that He would not return within their lifetimes. Rather, He revealed it to them thirty-three years later, in 63 AD, when they were able to bear it.

Jesus’ Return in Paul’s Epistles Before 63 AD

I Thessalonians: In 51 AD when Paul wrote his first epistle to the Thessalonians, he made many references that clearly show he believed the Lord was returning soon: “For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every *other* place also your faith toward God has spread abroad, so that there is no need for us to say anything; because they themselves are relating how readily you received us when we *first* visited you, and **how you turned from idols to God, to serve *the* living and true God, and to await His Son from the heavens, Whom He raised from *the* dead—Jesus, Who is delivering us from the coming wrath**” (1:8-10).

“For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and *our* joy” (2:19-20). “Now may the Lord make you to exceed and to abound in love toward one another and toward all, even as we also *abound in love* toward you, **that your hearts may be established blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints**” (3:12-13). “But I do not wish you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, that you be not grieved, even as others, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in exactly the same way also, those who have fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say to you by *the* Word of *the* Lord, that **we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall in no wise precede those who have fallen asleep because the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with *a* shout of command, with *the* voice of an archangel and with *the* trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in *the* clouds for *the* meeting with the Lord in *the* air; and so shall we always be with *the* Lord**” (4:13-17).

“Now then, concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, there is no need that I write to you; for you yourselves understand perfectly that **the day of *the* Lord will come exactly as a thief comes by night**. For when they say, ‘Peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them, as travail *comes* upon a woman who is with child; and they shall by no means escape. **But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day of *the* Lord should overtake you as a thief**. For you are all children of *the* light and children of *the* day; we are not of *the* night, nor of *the* darkness. So then, we should not sleep, as others *do*; but we should watch, and we should be sober; for those who are sleeping sleep in *the* night, and those who are drunken get drunk in *the* night. But we who are of *the* day should be sober, having put on *the* breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet *the* hope of salvation; **because God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ**” (5:1-9).

II Thessalonians: In II Thessalonians, also written in 51 AD, there are two more references to the coming of the Lord and the day of the Lord. These clearly show that

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Paul believed that Jesus would return soon. He wrote: “Since *it is* righteous with God to recompense tribulation to those who are persecuting you; **and to you, who are persecuted, rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with His mighty angels**, dealing out vengeance with flaming fire upon those who do not know God, and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who will suffer *the* penalty of eternal destruction from *the* presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His strength, **when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in that day in all those who believe** (because our testimony was believed by you)” (1:6-10).

The second reference is most profound because it describes in detail the coming abomination of desolation by the man of sin, the son of perdition who was spoken of by Daniel the prophet. Paul wrote: “Now we beseech you, brethren, concerning **the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him**, that you not be quickly shaken in mind, nor be troubled—neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by epistle, as if from us, *saying* that the day of Christ is present. **Do not let anyone deceive you by any means because *that day will not come unless the apostasy shall come first, and the man of sin shall be revealed—the son of perdition, the one who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is an object of worship; so that he comes into the temple of God and sits down as God, proclaiming that he himself is God.*** Do you not remember that when I was still with you, I told you these things? And now you understand what is holding *him* back in order for him to be revealed in his own set time.

“**For the mystery of lawlessness is already working**; only *there is* one Who is restraining at the present *time* until it arises out of *the* midst. And then the lawless one will be revealed (whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth, and will destroy with the brightness of His coming); *even* the one whose coming is **according to the inner workings of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders**, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in those who are perishing because they did not receive the love of the truth, so that they might be saved. **And for this cause, God will send upon them a powerful deception that will cause them to believe the lie**” (2:1-11). There is no doubt, as these scriptures show, that Paul fully expected that Jesus would return soon.

Galatians: This epistle was written in the spring of 53 AD. In his closing comments, Paul encouraged the brethren not to be weary in doing good, indicating that he expected Jesus to return soon and then they would reap their rewards: “Now we should not lose heart *in* doing well because **we who do not faint will reap in due time**. So then, as we have opportunity, we should be doing good to all, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (6:9-10).

I Corinthians: Paul wrote I Corinthians in 56 AD, and the following references show an expectation for Jesus’ early return: “**Now this I say, brethren: the time is drawing close. For the time that remains, let** those who have wives be as if they did not have wives; and those who weep, as if they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as if they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as if they did not possess; and those who use this world, as if they did not use *it* as their own; for this world in its present form is passing away” (7:29-31). “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you *solemnly* proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes” (11:26). “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit *the* kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery: **we shall not all fall asleep, but we shall all be changed, in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet**; for *the* trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (15:50-51).

II Corinthians: We get hints of the soon-expected return of Jesus Christ in Paul’s

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second epistle to the Corinthians, which he wrote in 57 AD: “And having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, ‘I believed, therefore I have spoken,’ we also believe; therefore we also speak, **knowing that He Who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead shall also raise us through Jesus, and shall present us with you**” (4:13-14). “For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with *human* hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we truly are groaning, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven; **if indeed that being clothed, we may not be found naked**. For we who are in *this* tabernacle truly do groan, being burdened; not that we wish to be unclothed, but to be clothed upon **so that the mortal flesh may be swallowed up by life**” (5:1-4).

Romans: Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans in the winter of 57 AD, from Corinth. There are several scriptures that reveal he expected Jesus to return soon: “Now *consider* this, **knowing the time, that it is already the hour that we should be roused out of sleep; because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is almost over, and the day is drawing near; therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light**. Let us walk decently, as in *the* day; not in reveling and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and emulation. But *let us* put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and not make any allowance for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom. 13:11-14). “**But the God of peace will bruise Satan under your feet shortly**. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you” (16:20).

Hebrews: Paul wrote the book of Hebrews from Rome in the spring of 61 AD, before the martyrdom of the apostle James in the spring of 62 AD. There is no doubt that when Paul wrote Hebrews, he fully expected Christ’s imminent return. Notice: “**For it is but a short time until He Who is coming will come, and will not delay**” (Heb. 10:37).

James: This epistle was written in 40-41 AD. In James’ closing remarks, he indicates that the apostles were expecting Christ to return soon: “Therefore, brethren, be patient **until the coming of the Lord**. Consider the husbandman *who* waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient for it, until it has received *the* former and latter rains. You also be patient. Strengthen your hearts, **because the coming of the Lord has drawn near**. Do not complain against one another, brethren, so that you may not be condemned. **Behold, the Judge stands at the door**” (James 5:7-9).

I Peter: It is evident that when the apostle Peter wrote his first epistle in 63 AD, he, like Paul, also was expecting Jesus’ return, perhaps within a short time. Peter wrote: “For this reason, be prepared in your minds, be self-controlled, **and be fully hoping in the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ....Now the end of all things has drawn near**. Therefore, be serious-minded and be watchful in prayers” (I Pet. 1:13; 4:7).

I John: The apostle John wrote his first epistle in 63 AD, perhaps shortly after Peter had written his first epistle. There are two references in I John about the return of Jesus Christ: “Again, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining....And now, little children, dwell in Him, so that **when He is manifested we may have boldness, and not be put to shame before Him at His coming**” (2:8, 28). John mentioned “the last time” twice: “Little children, **it is the last time**; and just as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have risen up, by which we know that **it is the last time**” (2:18).

It is clear from the writings of Paul, Peter and John that until 63 AD they were expecting Jesus Christ to return soon. However, after 63 AD, their teachings dramatically changed. Why did this marked change occur?

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63 AD: Unfulfilled Prophecies Lead to a Sudden Shift in Teachings about Jesus Christ's Return

In his book *Restoring the Original Bible*, Ernest L. Martin laid out seven significant indicators that would have made it apparent to the apostles that Christ would not be returning in their generation or any time soon. This fact was a primary reason for their canonizing the books of the New Testament:

- 1) The martyrdom of James in the spring of 62 AD (pp. 185-186, 240, 265-268).
- 2) The prophetic/chronological factors of Daniel not being fulfilled as they had anticipated (pp. 186-192; 230-231).
- 3) "That generation" from 30 AD to 70 AD not being the last generation for the fulfillment of all prophecies (pp. 192-198, 209).
- 4) Supernatural signs of the temple's destruction between 30 AD and 70 AD (pp. 199-208; 258-259)
 - a. The dirge of Joshua ben Ananias, who daily for seven years cried "Woe to Jerusalem" before the city's destruction in 70 AD.
 - b. The western light of the Temple lampstand going out every night for forty years.
 - c. The crimson thread remaining crimson forty years.
 - d. The lot for the Lord on the day of Atonement always coming up in the high priest's left hand (for forty years).
 - e. The doors of the Temple being shut every night, but found open every morning for forty years.
- 5) On Pentecost 66 AD, God giving a supernatural sign that His presence was taken from the temple, and He had abandoned it.
- 6) Mass exodus of Jews, Christian and non-Christian, from Jerusalem and Judea to Asia Minor in 66-67 AD (pp. 244-248).
- 7) The Jewish-Roman War, 67 AD (pp. 269-280).

In addition, the apostles were watching to see whether the prophecies of Zechariah and Daniel would be fulfilled. Martin wrote: "Since these prophetic events had never occurred to the Jews, the apostles believed that Christ would be the one to place his feet on the Mount of Olives at his second advent. It must have been clear to them that *all the events* mentioned in Zechariah (and in other prophecies) had to take place *before* Christ could come back to earth. And the last possible year for the sequence of events to begin and have their fulfillment by the end of the single generation of 40 years starting from Christ's resurrection from the dead was the year A.D. 63. This was the year to begin the last 7 years of Daniel's sabbatical period in his Seventy Weeks prophecy.

"While all of this scenario was generally believed, a great problem arose. The year A.D. 63 came and went without any clue that the Romans would invade the Parthians as well as the Jews, and in consequence the Romans would lose the war and an independent nation of Judah would arise on the political scene. In fact, just the reverse happened. The off and on wars of the Romans and Parthians which lasted through the first nine years of Nero's reign came to an end in the spring of A.D. 63 with Parthian envoys appearing in Rome with a proposal that offered terms of capitulation to the Romans (*Cambridge Ancient History*, X, pp. 770-773)."

Martin continued: "Instead of a world war starting between the East and the West in A.D. 63, followed by a revolt of the various kingdoms within the Roman dominion, to fulfill what Christians thought to be Christ's prophecies (Matthew 24:6, 7), just the opposite occurred. Rome had actually become stronger than ever in the spring of A.D. 63. With the passing of A.D. 63 (the last possible year for the start of Daniel's final sabbatical period of 7 years occurring within the generation of 40 years from Christ's resurrec-

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tion), Paul came to the conclusion that the ‘iron legs’ of Rome were going to remain in power for a much longer time. Paul surmised that the prophesied ten kings and the ‘little horn’ were not then going to appear in the first century.

“The apostle Paul was not the only one to accept this truth. The apostle Peter not long after A.D. 63 also became convinced that a great deal of time was still left in world history before the second advent. That’s when he wrote his second epistle and said that a day with the Lord is as a thousand years. This was Peter’s acknowledgment that Christ had not really delayed his coming. It simply meant that the final ‘generation’ of 40 years before the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth would happen many years (even centuries) in the future. The apostles came to realize that there was nothing wrong with Christ’s prophecies, but that Christ had been teaching that the actual end-time would arrive *upon a particular generation* which would ‘see’ the events of Matthew 24 and Zechariah 12 to 14. But with the year A.D. 63 over, it became obvious that the generation that succeeded Christ’s resurrection was not the prophesied one of the end-time. This was the signal to Paul (and shortly afterwards to Peter and John) that it had become necessary to formulate a standard body of Christian documents which would last the Christian believers until those end-time events would actually occur” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, pp. 230-232).

The Abomination of Desolation: Because the expected fulfillment of the beginning of Daniel’s 70-week prophecy failed to materialize in 63 AD, that meant the rest of his prophecy would not be fulfilled either. Daniel’s seventieth-week prophecy reads: “And he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week. And **in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease, and upon the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate** even until the consummation. And the fully determined end which is decreed shall be poured out upon the desolator.” (Dan 9:27). “In the midst of the week” in literal fulfillment means that in the middle of seven years, or at the end of the first three and one-half years, the abomination would stand in the holy place.

If this interpretation had been applied to an expected prophetic fulfillment beginning in 63 AD, it would have meant that midway through the year 66 AD—perhaps around Passover in the spring—the abomination of desolation would be set up as Daniel and Jesus had prophesied: “Therefore, **when you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place** [in the holy of holies in the temple]...Then let those who are in Judea flee into the mountains....For then shall there be great tribulation, such as has not been from *the* beginning of *the* world until this time, nor ever shall be *again*” (Matt. 24:15-16, 21).

The apostle Paul described the abomination of desolation as “the man of sin, the son of perdition” who enters into the temple of God to proclaim himself as God: “The apostasy shall come first, and **the man of sin shall be revealed—the son of perdition**, the one who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is an object of worship; so that **he comes into the temple of God and sits down as God, proclaiming that he himself is God**” (II Thes. 2:3-4). Just as the prophetic events of 63 AD failed to materialize, so also the “abomination of desolation” failed to materialize in 66 ½ AD.

Because the “abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet” did not come to pass when those in Jerusalem and Judea fled, they did not leave everything behind and go to the mountains of Judea. However, another supernatural event took place in 66 AD that was a final warning for the believers to flee Jerusalem and Judea. At that time, the majority of Christian Jews, as well as many non-Christian Jews, fled to Pella in Jordan and to Asia Minor. This supernatural event took place on Pentecost 66 AD. Martin wrote: “This occurred about 50 days later on the Day of Pentecost and it clearly confirmed that the Deity was abandoning the Temple. The sign was not given in a corner

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(where no witnesses could see it) but it was shown to the combined body of 24 priests who represented the 24 orders of the Aaronic priesthood who ministered together in the festival periods in the Temple. There could have been no higher authorities in Judaism to receive such a manifestation of the divine intentions to abandon the Temple. It was often thought by Jews and Christians that when momentous changes in religious or political systems were taking place, it required some clear sign from God (Amos 3:7). So, the witness to all 24 chief priests was powerful evidence to people of the first century that the supernatural event was God ordained and did in fact occur” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, p. 259).

Josephus also described this phenomenon: “Moreover, at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of the] temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, ‘Let us remove hence’ ” (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, VI, 5:3).

Martin continued: “This was interpreted by many Jews at the time that the Deity himself was then leaving the Temple....(The fact that the supernatural voice said, ‘We’ rather than the singular ‘I’ was no problem to first century Jews. They were well aware that the Deity went by the name *Elohim*, which was a unified plural designation. See Genesis 1:26 and 3:22.)

“This departure of the Deity from the Temple at Pentecost of A.D. 66 was exactly 36 years (to the very day) after the Holy Spirit was first given in power to the apostles and the others at the first Christian Pentecost recorded in Acts 2. And now, on the same Pentecost day, the supernatural witness was given that God himself was abandoning the Temple at Jerusalem” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, pp. 259-260).

The removal of the Deity from the temple on the day of Pentecost in 66 AD was a powerful sign from God, because it was the opposite of what occurred when the tabernacle was dedicated by Moses in the wilderness. At that time, Moses first anointed Aaron and his sons into the priesthood. Then he set up the altar and the tabernacle with all its implements as God had instructed, as recorded in the book of Exodus: “...And Moses finished the work. **And the cloud covered the tabernacle of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.** And Moses was not able to enter into the tabernacle of the congregation because the cloud stayed on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Ex. 40:33-35). This cloud showed that the presence of God was in the tabernacle.

Over 400 years later, when Solomon dedicated the first temple in Jerusalem, God again demonstrated His presence in the temple with a similar display of glory: “And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy *place* (for all the priests present were sanctified, and did not wait by course), And the Levitical singers—all of them of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, *being* clothed in white linen, and having cymbals and with harps and lyres—stood at the east end of the altar, and with them an hundred and twenty priests sounding with silver trumpets,

“It came to pass, as the trumpeters and the singers *were* as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up *their* voice with the silver trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the LORD, *saying*, ‘For He is good, for His steadfast love *endures* for ever,’ that **the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD**, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God!” (II Chron. 5:11-14).

God demonstrated by a powerful sign to the 24 high priests as He was removing His presence from the temple in the same manner that He had placed His presence there.

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Martin wrote: “This meant that the Temple was no longer reckoned by God to be a holy sanctuary and that the building was no more sacred than any other secular building. Remarkably, even Jewish records show that the Jews retained historical records that the Shekinah glory of God left the Temple at this time and remained over the Mount of Olives for 3 ½ years. During this period a voice was heard to come from the region of the Mount of Olives asking the Jews to repent of their doings (*Midrash Lamentations* 2:11, p. 51 Soncino edition). This has an interesting bearing on the history of Christianity because we now know that Jesus Christ was crucified and resurrected from the dead on the Mount of Olives, the exact region where the Jewish records say the Shekinah glory of God remained for 3 ½ years after its departure from the Temple on Pentecost A.D. 66....The Jewish reference states that the Jews failed to heed this warning from the Shekinah glory (which they called a *Bat Kol*—the voice of God), and that it left the earth and retreated back to heaven just before the final siege of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, p. 260).

There is no doubt that God had removed His presence from the temple and had deserted the sanctuary. Josephus confessed that not only had God forsaken his temple but He had sided with the Romans to destroy the Jews and Jerusalem because of their wickedness. Josephus wrote: “**Wherefore I cannot but suppose that God is fled out of his sanctuary, and stands on the side of those against whom you fight.** Now even a man, if he be but a good man, will fly from an impure house, and will hate those that are in it; and do you persuade yourselves that God will abide with you in your iniquities, who sees all secret things, and hears what is kept most private?” (Josephus, *Wars*, bk. 5, ch. 9:4)

In 66 ½ AD the anticipated abomination of desolation—“the man of sin, the son of perdition”—did not come and stand in the holy place and proclaim himself as God. Therefore, the apostles fully understood that the return of Jesus Christ would not happen until far in the future, as God had revealed to them beginning in 63 AD.

The Third Key: God’s Special Revelation to the Apostles

In addition to the lack of fulfillment of prophecy, God made it known through a special revelation to the apostle Paul that Jesus Christ would not return in that single 40-year generation from 30 AD—the year Jesus was crucified—to 70 AD—the year that would end with the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. Not only did Paul receive this special revelation, but “the holy apostles and prophets” also received it. Perhaps this special revelation that God gave to Paul was similar to the one he received in Jerusalem, where Christ appeared to him and spoke with him just before he was taken to Caesarea (Acts 23:11).

Two Parts of the Special Revelation Called “The Mystery of Christ”

Jesus had promised the apostles that through the power of the Holy Spirit, He would make known to them things that they were not previously able to bear. He fulfilled part of that promise when He gave a special revelation to Paul, Peter and John. Apparently, Paul received this special revelation prior to his release from Roman imprisonment in 63 AD. From Paul’s epistles we know that there were two parts to this special revelation: 1) God the Father, through Jesus Christ, was creating an eternal spiritual family through the process of salvation, called “the sonship of God.” 2) Jesus Christ was not

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going to return any time soon. From the time of this special God-given revelation in 63 AD, Paul's writings changed.

The Sonship of God: Paul first wrote about the “sonship of God” when he wrote to the Galatians in 53 AD: “But when the time for the fulfillment came, God sent forth His own Son, born of a woman, born under law, in order that He might redeem those who are under law, so **that we might receive the gift of sonship from God.** And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, ‘Abba, Father’ ” (Gal. 4:4-6). (Note: In the King James Version, the “sonship of God” is translated as the “adoption of sons,” or “children,” in Rom. 8:15, 23; Gal. 4:5; and Eph. 1:5).

It becomes apparent when one studies these scriptures in the sequence in which they were written, that the knowledge of the “sonship of God” was a progressive revelation. By 56 AD, when Paul wrote I Corinthians, he spoke of “*the* wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom* that God foreordained before the ages unto our glory....But according as it is written, ‘The eye has not seen, nor *the* ear heard, neither have entered into *the* heart of man, *the* things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ **But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit;** for the Spirit searches all things—even the deep things of God” (I Cor. 2:7, 9-10).

When he wrote to the Romans in the winter of 57 AD, Paul had an even deeper understanding of “the sonship of God”: “Now you have not received a spirit of bondage again unto fear, but you have received **the Spirit of sonship**, whereby we call out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit itself bears witness conjointly with our own spirit, *testifying* that **we are the children of God.** Now if *we are* children, *we are* also heirs—truly, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer together with Him, so that we may also be glorified together with Him” (Rom. 8:15-17).

As Paul related in his epistle to the Ephesians, he had some knowledge of this mystery prior to the special revelation that he received in the Roman prison in 63 AD, and he had written to them about it before (Eph. 3:3-4). But after he received the fullness of the revelation, he called it “the Mystery of Christ” that revealed the “sonship of God” for those whom God the Father saves. He wrote: “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *things* with Christ; according as He has personally chosen us for Himself before *the* foundation of *the* world in order that we might be holy and blameless before Him in love; **having predestinated us for sonship to Himself through Jesus Christ**, according to the good pleasure of His own will, which He has made to abound toward us in all wisdom and intelligence; **having made known to us the mystery of His own will, according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself;** that in *the divine plan for the fulfilling of the times*, He might bring all things together in Christ, both the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth” (Eph. 1:3-5, 8-10).

While still in prison in Rome, Paul explained to the Ephesians: “For this cause I, Paul, *am* the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles, if indeed you have heard of the ministry of the grace of God that was given to me for you; **how He made known to me by revelation the mystery** (even as I wrote briefly before, so that when you read *this*, you will be able to comprehend **my understanding in the mystery of Christ**), which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as **it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;** that the Gentiles might be joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a servant according to the gift of the grace of God, *which was* given to me through the inner working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, was this grace given, **that I might preach the gospel among the Gentiles—even the unsearchable riches of Christ; and that I might enlighten all as to what is the**

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fellowship of the mystery that has been hidden from the ages in God, Who created all things by Jesus Christ” (Eph. 3:1-9).

Paul was inspired to write that the “sonship of God” meant that those in the first resurrection would be “filled with all the fullness of God” and therefore, they would have an eternal existence, as God is eternal. However, this revealed knowledge could come about only through deep conversion and a profound love of God. Christ had to be dwelling in the individual through the power of the Holy Spirit—this was “the mystery of God.” What Paul wrote next is, perhaps, the most inspiring passage in the New Testament: God “**according to His eternal purpose**, which He has wrought in Christ Jesus our Lord, in Whom we have boldness and *direct* access with confidence through His *very* own faith. So then, I beseech *you* not to faint at my tribulations for you, which are *working for* your glory. For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **of Whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named**, that He may grant you, according to the riches of His glory, **to be strengthened with power by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; and** that being rooted and grounded in love, you may be fully able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the breadth and length and depth and height, **and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses human knowledge; so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.** Now to Him Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that is working in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all generations, *even* into the ages of eternity. Amen” (Eph. 3:11-21).

Paul prayed that the brethren would come to the fullness of this understanding that is the hope of the Christian calling. Paul wrote: “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you *the* spirit of wisdom and revelation in *the* knowledge of Him. *And* may **the eyes of your mind be enlightened in order that you may comprehend what is the hope of His calling, and what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the inner working of His mighty power”** (Eph. 1:17-19).

In 63 AD, when Paul wrote to the Colossians, he also wrote about the revelation of the mystery of God: “**Even the mystery that has been hidden from ages and from generations, but has now been revealed to His saints; to whom God did will to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory;** Whom we preach, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, so that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Col. 1:26-28).

After his release from prison in 63 AD, Paul again mentioned the “mystery of godliness” in his first epistle to Timothy: “And undeniably, **great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, was justified in the Spirit, was seen by angels, was proclaimed among the Gentiles, was believed on in the world, was received up in glory”** (I Tim. 3:16). There is no question that this revelation from God the Father and Jesus Christ had a profound effect on the apostle Paul. Without a doubt, it was the most compelling factor in Paul’s mind for finalizing his epistles.

Peter and John’s Understanding of the Mystery and Sonship of God

This revelation was given to the other apostles as well. In the same way that this revelation affected Paul’s writings, it also changed the tenor of Peter’s second epistle.

II Peter 1: When Peter wrote his second epistle, it is apparent that he had also received the same revelation of God. He taught that the sonship of God for the believers

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meant that they would receive the divine nature of God. What a profound new teaching! He proceeded to write a detailed plan for developing the love of God which would lead to the believer's receiving the full divine nature at the resurrection: "According as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him Who called us by *His own* glory and virtue; **through which He has given to us the greatest and most precious promises, that through these you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.**

"And for this very reason also, having applied all diligence besides, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, endurance; and to endurance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly love; and to brotherly love, the love of God. For *if* these things exist and abound in you, they *will* cause *you to be* neither lacking effort nor lacking fruit in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But the one in whom these things are not present is *spiritually* blind—so short-sighted *that* he has forgotten that he was purified from his old sins. For this reason, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure; because *if* you are doing these things, you will never fall at any time. For in this way, you will be richly granted an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 1:3-11).

God inspired Peter, just as he had inspired Paul, to understand the fullness of the special revelation and the "sonship of God," which was "Christ in you, the hope of glory." This is why Peter pledged his later years to help create a permanent written record of remembrance—the canonized writings that we know as the New Testament.

I John 3: The apostle John wrote that the true believers were now the children of God because they had the seed of begetting from God the Father. He also understood that those in the first resurrection would be glorified and would have the same existence as Jesus Christ and God the Father: "Behold! **What glorious love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God!** For this very reason, the world does not know us because it did not know Him. Beloved, **now we are the children of God,** and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be; but **we know that when He is manifested, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him exactly as He is.** And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, even as He is pure ... **Everyone who has been begotten by God does not practice sin because His seed of begetting is dwelling within him,** and he is not able to *practice* sin because he has been begotten by God" (I John 3:1-3, 9).

Later, when John was given the visions he described in the book of Revelation, God gave him more understanding of the fullness of God the Father and Jesus Christ's plan for all of mankind, which He revealed through the visions of Revelation. By that time, John fully understood that Christ's return would not be for centuries and centuries into the distant future. God's plan and purpose for mankind was exceedingly greater than the apostles had first comprehended.

Paul's Writings after 63 AD

God revealed to Paul that because Christ would not return soon, the Church would be responsible for revealing to the world the purpose of God, just as Christ had revealed it to Paul and later to Peter and John: "**That the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church** to the principalities and the powers in the heavenly *places*, according to *His* eternal purpose, which He has wrought in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:10-11).

How was God going to make the "mystery of God" known to the world through

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the church? Apparently, by that time, Paul had begun to understand that God would do this through the canonized writings of the apostles—the God-breathed, official, authorized New Testament Scriptures, which God would preserve throughout all generations until the return of Jesus Christ. Instead of focusing on Christ’s imminent coming, in his later epistles Paul began to emphasize the long-term stability of the churches and the individual Christian’s growth in character and fruits of the Spirit.

Ephesians: In writing to the Ephesians, Paul said nothing of the imminent return of Jesus Christ, which had been an important theme in the epistles that he wrote before 63 AD. Rather, the contents of Ephesians show that Christ was not going to return soon. Paul instructed the Ephesian Christians on how to live their lives well into the future (1:9-10, 18-23; 2:20-22; 3:16-21; 4:11-16, 21-32; 5:1-33; 6:1-20).

Colossians: Likewise, Paul’s teachings in his epistle to the Colossians clearly emphasized how Christians were to live their lives over a protracted period of time because Jesus Christ would not be returning soon. In fact, Paul did not even mention the return of Christ. However, he did write about the mystery of God which God was making known to the saints (Col. 1:26-28).

Paul wrote that the Colossian brethren were complete in Christ Jesus and that they were to reject philosophy and the traditions of men (2:2-23). Instead, as true believers, they were to keep the Sabbath and holy days of God, as well as the laws of clean and unclean meats (2:16-17).

The third chapter was devoted to long-term Christian growth and how each person was to develop godly character (verses 1-8) and reflect that character in relationships (verses 9-17); to instructions in family relations (verses 18-21); and to instructions for servants (verses 22-25). These detailed instructions reflect Paul’s shift in emphasis from expecting the imminent return of Jesus Christ to teaching the brethren how to live and to await the resurrection of the dead, when Christ would finally return. Moreover, because he realized that there was ample time, Paul asked the brethren to pray for an open door so that he could preach the gospel and the mystery of Christ after his release (4:3-4). In closing, he gave personal instructions on how to live in the world (4:5-6).

I Timothy: This epistle was written in the late fall of 63 AD, shortly after Paul was released from his first imprisonment in Rome. I Timothy is one of the most important epistles showing that Paul now understood Christ’s return would be far in the future. At this time, Paul wrote of the need to establish a permanent method for administering the churches—the work of the elders—and for teaching and pastoring the churches and fellowship groups.

Paul instructed Timothy to remain in Ephesus to oversee the church. Timothy was not to allow the circulation of false doctrines, myths and genealogies. He was to edify the church in faith with sound doctrine (1:1-10). Paul gave Timothy a solemn charge to hold the faith, maintain a clear conscience and wage a good spiritual fight (1:18-19). Since it was evident that Christ would not return soon, Paul instructed Christians to pray for kings and those in authority in order that Christians could live quiet, peaceful, godly lives and so obtain the salvation of Christ Jesus. He also gave special instructions for women (2:1-14).

Paul devoted all of Chapter 3 to detailed requirements for the qualifications of overseers and deacons and their wives. More than anything, Paul’s instructions in this chapter reflect the apostles’ new teachings on how to live a Christian life; how the ministry was to function far into the future; and how church leaders were to conduct themselves in the assembly of God, which was the pillar and ground of truth (3:1-15).

In Chapter 4, Paul instructed Timothy to be on guard against spirits of deceit and doctrines of demons and those who would apostatize from the faith (4:1-5). He encouraged Timothy to teach the words of faith and good doctrine; to exercise godliness; to de-

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vote himself to reading, encouragement and doctrine; not to neglect the spiritual gifts; and to be diligent and endeavor to grow as an overseer (4:6-16).

Continuing his instructions in Chapter 5, Paul directed Timothy in detail on how to administer the church and serve the brethren on a long-term basis, how to treat older men and women, and younger men and women (5:1-2), and how to determine a widow's qualifications for church assistance (5:3-10, 16).

Paul's instructions to the Corinthians in 56 AD for the younger widows and unmarried women were completely opposite the instructions that he gave Timothy seven years later in 63 AD. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 56 AD, he thought that the time was short and Jesus would return soon: "**Now this I say, brethren: the time is drawing close. For the time that remains, let those who have wives be as if they did not have wives**" (I Cor. 7:26-29).

However, by 63 AD, when Paul wrote to Timothy, he advised the exact opposite because he knew that Christ was not returning any time soon. Paul wrote: "**Therefore, I wish the younger women to marry, to bear children, to manage the household**" (I Tim. 5:14).

Paul continued to advise Timothy about the need to compensate elders who labored in the word. He counseled Timothy on how to correct elders who sinned, and he advised him not to be hasty in ordaining elders (5:21-25). He gave instructions on slaves and masters (6:1-2). Finally, Paul concluded his epistle to Timothy by instructing him to adhere to the sound words of Jesus Christ and not to allow others in the church to teach any other doctrine. Timothy was to be content with what he had and not to seek riches, but rather to fight the good fight of faith and guard the doctrine with which he had been entrusted as a sacred duty (6:3-20).

Paul's Sacred Charges to Timothy: Paul gave five specific sacred charges to Timothy in his first epistle and one in his second epistle. These were strong, specific commands, clearly showing the long-term nature of Paul's instructions and how Timothy was to use his authority as an overseer.

1) "When I was going to Macedonia, I exhorted you to remain in Ephesus in order that **you might solemnly charge some not to teach other doctrines**, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which lead to empty speculations rather than to edification from God, which *is* in faith" (I Tim 1:3-4).

2) "**This charge** [Timothy's responsibilities as an overseer] I am personally committing to you, *my son Timothy*, in accordance with the prophecies that were made long ago concerning you, in order that by them you yourselves might wage a good war, holding to *the faith and a good conscience*" (verse 18).

3) "**I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels**, that you observe these things without prejudice, *and let* nothing be done by partiality" (I Tim. 5:21).

4) "**I charge you in the sight of God**, Who gives life to every *living* thing, and Jesus Christ, Who *in* testifying before Pontius Pilate *gave* the exemplary profession of *faith*, that **you keep this commandment without fault and without rebuke until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ; which in His own times the blessed and only Sovereign will make known, the King of kings and Lord of lords**, Who alone has immortality, dwelling in light which no man can approach; Whom no man has seen, nor has *the ability to see; to Whom belong eternal honor and power*" (I Tim 6:13-16).

5) "**Charge those who are rich** in this present age not to be high minded, nor to put *their hope in the uncertainty of riches; but to put their hope in the living God*, Who abundantly gives us all things for *our enjoyment; to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous in giving, to be ready to share; treasuring up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may lay hold on eternal life*. O Timothy, guard the

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doctrine which has been entrusted *to you*, avoiding profane, empty babblings, and contradictions of false knowledge *that is* called science; *through* which some, who are personally professing *these false views*, have missed the mark concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen” (I Tim. 6:17-21).

6) **“I charge you, therefore, in the sight of God, even the Lord Jesus Christ,** Who is ready to judge *the* living and *the* dead at His appearing and His kingdom; preach the Word! Be urgent in season and out of season; convict, rebuke, encourage, with all patience and doctrine. For there shall come a time when they will not tolerate sound doctrine; but according to their own lusts they shall accumulate to themselves *a great number of* teachers, having ears itching *to hear what satisfies their cravings*; and they shall turn away their own ears from the truth; and they shall be turned aside unto myths. But *as for* you, be vigilant in all things, endure hardships, do *the* work of an evangelist; fully carry out your ministry” (II Tim. 4:1-5).

All six of Paul’s charges to Timothy reveal that in 63 AD, and later, in 67 AD, Paul fully understood that Christ would not return for a long time—maybe centuries. Thus, it is evident that the church was to become a long-term establishment and await the return of Jesus Christ at an unknown time in the future.

Titus: Paul’s epistle to Titus is very similar to I Timothy. He gave Titus instructions for selecting elders (1:5-8). Titus and the elders were to stop rebellious deceivers from subverting Christian households (1:9-16). As Paul had written to Timothy, he instructed Titus on the duties of older men and women, younger men and women, children and slaves and masters (2:1-10). They still were to be looking for the return of Jesus Christ, but at a future time (2:12-15). In Chapter 3, Paul gave instructions for Christian living and commanded Titus to reject those who taught heresy.

The Fourth Key: A New Understanding—The Last Days and the Return of Christ Were in the Distant Future

Along with the special revelation that God gave to Paul, Peter and John, came a new understanding about the timing of Christ’s return and the day of the Lord. Peter was the first to write that the last days and the return of Jesus Christ lay in the distant future. Because of the lack of fulfillment of prophecy by 65-66 AD, many were accusing God of delaying Christ’s coming. In addition to issuing warnings about false teachers and the coming Jewish Roman war, Peter was inspired to rethink the timing of the last days and the day of the Lord. He now believed that the day of the Lord might be a thousand years in the future, perhaps more. Peter wrote: “Now, beloved, I am writing this second epistle to you; in *both*, I am stirring up your pure minds by causing *you* to remember, *in order* for you to be mindful of the words that were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of the Lord and Savior, *spoken* by us, the apostles; knowing this first, that **in the last days *there will come mockers***, walking according to their own personal lusts, and asking, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fore-fathers died, everything has remained the same as from *the* beginning of creation.’ But this *fact* is hidden from them—they *themselves* choosing *to ignore it*—that by the Word of God *the* heavens existed of old, and *the* earth came forth out of water and amid water, by which the world at that time, having been deluged with water, had itself been destroyed.

“But the present heavens and earth are being held in store by His Word, and are being reserved for fire in *the* day of judgment and destruction of *the* ungodly. Now, beloved, do not let this one fact be hidden from you; that with *the* Lord, one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not delay-

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ing the promise of *His coming*, as some in their own minds reckon delay; rather, He is long-suffering toward us, not desiring that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

“However, the day of *the Lord* shall come as a thief in *the* night in which the heaven itself shall disappear with a mighty roar, and *the* elements shall pass away, burning with intense heat, and *the* earth and the works in it shall be burned up. Since all these things are going to be destroyed, what kind of *persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, **looking forward to and striving for the coming of the day of God**, during which *the* heavens, being on fire, shall be destroyed, and *the* elements, burning with intense heat, shall melt? But according to His promise, **we look forward** to a new heaven and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. For this reason, beloved, since you are anticipating these things, be diligent, so that you may be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless” (II Peter 3:1-14).

In 65-66 AD, for Peter to write “a thousand years is as one day and one day as a thousand years” reveals that although he fully understood that the day of the Lord and the return of Jesus Christ would be in the future—perhaps a thousand years or more—he did not have any specific understanding as to how far in the future it would be. From the tenor of what he wrote, it is clear that Peter fully understood that no man could know when Jesus would return. Jesus had forewarned the apostles, “But concerning that day, and the hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Matt. 24:36).

Four key developments that motivated the canonization of the New Testament have been examined in this chapter. The New Testament evidence of how God the Father and Jesus Christ led the apostles Paul, Peter and John to canonize the New Testament as the Word of God will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

WHEN AND BY WHOM WAS THE NEW TESTAMENT CANONIZED?

One of the most profound questions regarding the Old and New Testament Scriptures is this: when and by whom were the Scriptures canonized?

The canonization of the Scriptures was the process by which certain books officially became recognized as the God-breathed, authentic books of the Holy Scriptures. These books and these alone—to the exclusion of all others—were to be accepted, and used with full faith and confidence as the God-breathed, authoritative Word of God. Once these books had been canonized by the true servants of God, all other books and writings were officially excluded. While other writings, books and epistles may elaborate on certain points of Scripture or history, they may never be considered Scripture. They do not have the authority of Scripture, nor are they equal to Scripture, because they were never included in the official and final canonization. In fact, God even inspired that some books, which are referenced in the Old and New Testament, be excluded from canonization.

As such then, the officially canonized Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the inspired Word of God. Thus, the Bible bears the authority of God as His revealed Word to the exclusion of all other writings. It is the “Truth of God” from the “God of Truth” to the apex of His creation—mankind. Every person can have full faith and confidence that the Holy Bible is the Word of God. It reveals how one is to live and how one can worship God in Spirit and in truth. When the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, he elaborated on the divine authority and use of the Holy Scriptures: “And that from a child you have known the holy writings [the canonized Old Testament], which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith, which *is* in Christ Jesus. All Scripture [including the New Testament books] *is* God-breathed, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work” (II Tim. 3:15-17).

Because the Scriptures are God-breathed, not humanly contrived myths and folklore, Jesus Christ made it clear that everyone is to live by them. When He was tempted by Satan the devil, Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of man, emphatically exclaimed that He Himself lived by every word of God: “And when the tempter came to Him, he said, ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’ But He answered *and* said, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of *the* mouth of God.” ’ ” (Matt. 4:3-4). Jesus was quoting Deuteronomy 8:3; however, when verses 2-6 of Deuteronomy 8 are also included, Scripture further informs us that regardless of one’s personal circumstance, he or she is always to live by the Word of God as God has commanded: “And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God led you these forty years in the wilderness in order to humble you, to prove you, to know what is in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. And he humbled you and allowed you to hunger, and then He fed you with manna which you did not know, neither did your fathers know *it*, so that He might make you know that **man does not live by bread alone; but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD does man live.** Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell

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these forty years. And you shall consider in your heart that as a man chastens his son, *so* the LORD your God chastens you. And you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God to walk in His ways and to fear Him ” (Deut. 8:2-6).

Today, most professing Christians believe that Jesus came to do away with or abolish the law. This is absolutely not true! Jesus Christ emphatically declared that He did not come for that purpose. Jesus’ own words as recorded by Matthew clearly state: “**Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until the heaven and the earth shall pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the Law until everything has been fulfilled.** Therefore, whoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever shall practice and teach *them*, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:17-19).

These words of Jesus Christ are the New Testament teaching concerning the Law and the Prophets. As long as heaven and earth exist, the Law and the Prophets are binding on mankind. Since the books of the Old Testament are the inspired words of God—literally God-breathed—a short summary of how the Old Testament books were canonized is necessary before one can understand how, when and by whom the New Testament was canonized.

Review of Canonization of the Old Testament

Before his death in January 2002, Dr. Ernest L. Martin was recognized as one of the leading scholars and authorities of the canonical study of the Bible. In his books *The Original Bible Restored*, second edition, 1991 and *Restoring the Original Bible*, third edition, 1994, Martin gives insight into history and biblical revelation concerning how, when and by whom the Old and New Testament Scriptures were canonized. While he differs in some of his biblical interpretations and historical conjectures, his book is highly esteemed in the study of biblical canonization.

Martin outlined five periods of canonization for the Old Testament: 1) the time of Moses, 2) the time of Samuel, David and Solomon, 3) the time of King Hezekiah, 4) the time of King Josiah and 5) the final canonization by Ezra. This chapter will focus on the fifth period and final canonization of the Old Testament.

History shows that the primary reason for the final canonization by Ezra was the need to establish the true, official, authoritative Word of God in order to combat an insidious Judaic counterfeit worship system that was led by the high priest Manassah and established by renegade priests in the fifth century BC. Manassah had married the daughter of Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, who built a Jerusalem-like temple for Manassah and his apostate priests in Samaria. After refusing to put away their foreign wives, as Ezra had commanded, a defiant Manassah and his rebel priests defected to Samaria and established a false worship system complete with all the rituals described in the five books of Moses. These five books were the main portion of Scripture that they accepted because the other writings that Ezra had incorporated into his final canonization of the Old Testament clearly declared that only in Jerusalem and its temple had God placed His name for true worship under the Old Covenant.

Ezra and the Great Assembly of one hundred twenty priests and the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea were confronted with a counterfeit temple worship that professed to uphold the laws of Moses. The counterfeit temple stood on Mount Gerizim, the Mount of Blessing, near Jacob’s Well. Something drastic had to be done to protect the true worship of God from being corrupted by this new Samaritan-Jewish apostasy.

To accomplish this task, Ezra and the Great Assembly began to exercise firm au-

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thority over every aspect of worship at the true temple of God in Jerusalem and in all the synagogues of the Jews scattered throughout the Persian empire. The Great Assembly supervised and regulated the temple rites and sacrifices, priestly laws, synagogue rituals and everything associated with the worship of God under the Old Covenant. Each practice had to be approved by Ezra and the Great Assembly and had to be centered at the temple in Jerusalem. Every act of worship had to be thoroughly and completely scriptural—AND ADAMANTLY ANTI-SAMARITAN!

In order to preserve the true worship of God, it was essential to differentiate between the Scriptures of the Jerusalem Jews and the Scriptures of the Samaritan Jews. The first step was to set the Scriptures in order and canonize each book. When this work was completed, accurate copies of the entire text were made and distributed to Jewish synagogues throughout the Persian empire. Once canonized, the Word of God would be preserved for all time. Here is a summary of Ezra's work, which was a monumental step in the development and preservation of the Old Testament for the Jewish people and eventually for the world:

“According to Jewish tradition, five great works are ascribed to him [Ezra]: (1) the foundation of the ‘Great Synagogue’ [the Great Assembly], (2) the settlement of the canon of Scripture, with the threefold division into Law, Prophets, and Hagiographa [the Psalms and other Writings], (3) **the substitution of the square Chaldee characters for the old Hebrew and Samaritan**, (4) the compilation of Chronicles, possibly of Esther, with the addition of Nehemiah's history to his own, and (5) the establishment of synagogues” (Angus, *The Bible Handbook*, p. 542).

An especially important task Ezra undertook was to change all the Hebrew letters in the Scriptures of the Old Testament from the ancient cursive script to the square, block style Chaldee script. The block style lettering was commonly used in the sixth century BC in Babylon and elsewhere in the Persian Empire. Martin explained that the use of the block style script was not done “... simply to facilitate the reading of the Bible but, more importantly, Ezra was able to establish at one fell swoop an official canon of the scriptures which was now (by the use of the new letter configurations) able to be distinguished from heretical Samaritan manuscripts which were written in the old Hebrew script” (Martin, *The Original Bible Restored*, p. 63).

As part of the canonization of the Scriptures, Ezra also edited the books that became the Old Testament. This editing included the substitution of current terminology for ancient names that were no longer in use. When the older names were retained, explanatory phrases were sometimes added to identify them. These minor changes helped to update the text and make it more understandable to the people of Ezra's day. As Martin notes, there were no major alterations to the text: “... Ezra felt that the Old Testament needed editing to allow the Jewish nation of his time to have the *complete* and *full* revelation of God in the Hebrew language. **Ezra's additions were not vast changes in the text of the Old Testament**” (Ibid., p.102, emphasis added).

Ernst Würthwein, one of the most well-known experts in the text of the Old Testament, verified the legitimacy of the alterations that were made before the text was canonized: “Before the text of the Old Testament was officially established, it was not regarded as unalterable. Accordingly, we should expect to find that those who were concerned with the transmission of the text would occasionally make deliberate, fully intentional alterations in the text. In evaluating these alterations, we must avoid thinking of them as ‘corruptions.’ **They were made in good faith**, with no intention of introducing a foreign element into the text, but rather **with the aim of restoring the true text** and (from the copyist's view) preventing misunderstandings. They must have originated **in a period when the letter of the text could still be changed in order to express its message more effectively** for its readership and audience.

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“It is quite natural that a text which was not simply the object of scholarly study but intended to be read constantly by the whole of the Jewish community would be adapted to the linguistic needs of the community....Since the wording of the text was subject to variation **before it was officially established, it was also possible to substitute acceptable expressions** for ones which were morally or religiously offensive” (*The Text of The Old Testament*, pp. 108-110, emphasis added).

Concerning the editing that was done by Ezra and those before him Würthwein added: “**The editorial activity** which we glimpse in these deliberate alterations **was in respects official**, and may be traced to an early period. This is a wide field which unfortunately has not yet been examined as systematically as it deserves” (Ibid., p. 110).

Although a few alterations, such as genealogical updatings, were made in the text of the Old Testament after its canonization, there is no question that Ezra was the one who compiled, edited and canonized the books. A number of books had been canonized earlier by righteous kings of Israel and Judah, but it was Ezra who established the final official text of the Old Testament. Martin wrote, “Furthermore, though various suggestions as to which books David, Solomon, Hezekiah, etc. saw fit to canonize have been made ... this was mainly possible because of hints given in Ezra’s book of Chronicles. It was Ezra (the Second Moses) who gave to the Jewish world the official (and final) Old Testament to be read in the Temple and synagogues. This makes the canonization by Ezra the most important of all” (*The Original Bible Restored*, p. 102).

Just as Ezra and the Great Assembly were moved by God to canonize the Old Testament Scriptures in the face of a developing apostasy, so the apostles Paul, Peter and John were moved to canonize the New Testament while confronting a developing false Christianity and a multitude of false teachers. This ultimate task was not left to other men to do hundreds of years after the apostles had died, as some have presumed.

A Generally Accepted Theory of the New Testament Canon

The New Testament canon refers to the group or collection of books that have been accepted as the authentic writings of the apostles and thus officially designated as authoritative for teaching in the churches of God. One generally accepted theory is that the canonization, or final authoritative compilation of the twenty-seven books now called the New Testament, was not completed until late in the fourth century. *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* informs us that scholars have arbitrarily divided the writing of the New Testament into five periods. The first period is from 30 AD to 70 AD. The second period is from 70 AD to 120 AD and is called the “Apostolic Fathers.” The third period, from 120 AD to 170 AD, is termed the “Apologists.” “The age of the apologists carries the history of the formation of canon one step further. The facts of the life of Christ acquired a fresh importance in controversy with Jew and Gentile. The oral tradition, which still remained in the former age, was dying away, and a variety of written documents claimed to occupy its place. Then it was that the canonical gospels were definitely separated from the mass of similar narratives in virtue of their outward claims, which had remained, as it were, in abeyance during the period of tradition” (Canon of Scripture, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, pp. 177-178).

The fourth period was from 170 AD to 350 AD, and the fifth period was from 303 AD to 397 AD. Finally, it is claimed that the canon was fully set in 397 AD. “The canon of the New Testament, as commonly received at present, was ratified by the third Council of Carthage (A. D. 397), and from that time was accepted throughout the Latin Church ...” (Ibid., p. 178).

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The extended timetable of this theory of canonization—70 AD to 397 AD—is untrue. God did not commit the canonization of the books of the New Testament to men of dubious character and questionable faith—three hundred years after the apostle John had died. This theory of canonization distorts the real truth of how, when and by whom the books of the New Testament were canonized.

Martin also rejected this theoretical extended chronology of the canonization of the New Testament. In fact, he strongly condemned such theories as merely the guesswork of scholars: “It is normally assumed by scholars (and they are simply *guessing*) that the canon of the New Testament came into existence sometime in the early or middle second century, and was finalized in the fourth century. **This guessing is patently not true. Early Christian scholars did not believe such teaching.** Augustine, one of the most ardent supporters of the organized church of the fourth and fifth centuries, believed that the New Testament canon came into existence in the time of the apostles themselves. He stated: ‘Distinguished from the books of later authors is the excellence of the canonical authority of the Old and New Testaments; which, *having been established in the time of the apostles*, hath through the succession of overseers and propagators of the churches been set as it were in a lofty tribunal, demanding the obedience of every faithful and pious understanding’ (*Contra Faustum Man.* 11.5).

“How different from what is generally accepted today! In our present age, it is common to hear that the second, third, or fourth century church canonized the New Testament in some unknown and mysterious fashion. **This is in no way true.** ‘The striking fact that the early councils had nothing whatever to do with forming the Canon of the New Testament has been so emphasized by a number of writers that one is astonished that it is not more widely known’ (Urquhart, *The Bible*, p. 37). **The Christian community of the second, third or fourth centuries had nothing to do with the canonization of the New Testament”** (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, pp. 300-301, bold emphasis added).

In the nineteenth century, German scholar Theodor Zahn in his two-volume work, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons* (1888-1892) and *Grundriss der Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons* (1904), also concluded that the canonization of the New Testament was set by the end of the first century. Harry Y. Gamble wrote this summary of Zahn’s works: “Zahn’s massive study of the history of the canon, the most thorough ever undertaken, and his summary of conclusions, argued that there was already a canon of Christian scriptures by about the end of the first century (80-110), not in the sense, of course, that all twenty-seven books of the historic canon were already known and shaped into an authoritative collection, but to the extent that there had arisen a body of Christian documents read in public worship and broadly recognized and cited as normative. They consisted of the fourfold Gospel and a corpus of thirteen Pauline letters, as well as some other writings. Zahn believed that this was adequately documented by the fact that the church fathers, especially the early second-century Apostolic Fathers, were fully aware of these texts, which they clearly took to be fundamental resources of the church at large” (McDonald and Sanders, *The Canon Debate: on the Origins and Formation of the Bible*, pp. 267-268).

Conversely, acceptance of the theory of an extended period of canonization opened the door for the Roman Catholic Church to claim that other writings should be included as canonized scripture. These included the Apocryphal books of the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament and other spurious writing of the “early church fathers,” as well as later traditions of the Roman clergy. All of these were accepted as having equal or greater status and authority for teaching doctrine and establishing religious practices. Roman Catholic Cardinal James Gibbons justified the inclusion of these writings and religious traditions, placing them on an equal status with the Scriptures as

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authoritative for teaching, when he stated: “The most perfect Christians lived and died and went to heaven before the most important parts of the Scriptures were written. And what would have become of them if the Bible alone had been their guide?” (Gibbons, *The Faith of Our Fathers*, p. 69). Gibbons wrongly concluded that the Bible alone does not contain all the truth necessary for salvation. As a result, the writings of the early Church Fathers, as well as the traditions promulgated by the “Church,” are accepted by the Roman Catholic Church with equal or greater authority than the Bible.

When all the uncanonical, spurious Apocryphal books, the writings of the early Church Fathers and the traditions of men are rejected as being authoritative for doctrine and worship, it becomes evident that nearly all the doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church—and of those churches that follow the same—have no scriptural foundation. In fact, when closely examined, they are absolutely contrary to the teachings of both the Old and New Testaments (See *The Two Babylons—Or The Papal Worship, Proved to be The Worship of Nimrod and His Wife* by Alexander Hislop, Loizeaux Brothers, Neptune, New Jersey; and also see *The Golden Bough* by Sir James George Frazer, The Macmillan Company, New York, New York.) Therefore, those desiring to justify these unscriptural, humanly contrived practices and beliefs must continue to accept the myth of a late chronology for the final New Testament canonization by the Council of Carthage in 397 AD.

Martin further substantiated that the Roman Catholic Church never had a part in the canonization of the New Testament: “Some historians would have people believe that the church of the early second century (or even the third or fourth century) probably formulated the final New Testament. There has always been a problem with this appraisal because there is not a sliver of evidence that such a thing took place. The truth is, when the early church fathers began to talk about the canon of the New Testament near the end of the second century, it is assumed that it was already in their midst. The first recorded discussion among the Catholic scholars about the books of the New Testament only concerned whether certain books in the canon were of lesser rank, not which books were needed to form the official canon (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.*, III.25). ‘What is particularly important to notice is that the New Testament canon was not demarcated by the arbitrary [decision] of any church Council. When at last a Council—the Synod of Carthage in A.D. 397—listed the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, it did not confer upon them any authority which they did not already possess, but simply recorded their previously established canonicity. As Dr. Foakes-Jackson puts it: “The [Catholic] Church assuredly did not make the New Testament” ’ (Bruce, *The Bible and the Parchments*, p. 111)” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, p. 295).

From the evidence, it is clear that the most commonly accepted theory of the canonization of the New Testament is false. However, what is the true scriptural and historical record? By whom and when was the New Testament canonized?

The New Testament Itself Reveals by Whom and When It Was Canonized

God did not want people to be in doubt as to who canonized the twenty-seven books of the New Testament; consequently, this information has been preserved in the New Testament itself. Martin states that, “The important thing that must be realized is the fact that what we call the New Testament today records information about the formation of the Holy Scriptures for the Christian community of believers. And, indeed, the New Testament itself speaks about its own canonization. True, hardly anyone today pays attention to what the apostles said about their own canonization of the New Testament, but I feel it is time to put the matter into proper perspective. It was the apostles

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themselves who put together the New Testament books, not some unknown church group or groups of the second and/or third or fourth centuries” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, p. 281). The task of writing and canonizing the prophetic New Testament Scriptures was so profound that Jesus Christ used only His selected apostles to write it and only Paul, Peter and John—His special eyewitnesses—to canonize those writings.

The New Testament is the Word of God

Jesus Christ was the Son of God. He spoke and taught the words of God; moreover, Jesus Christ is called “the Word of God” (John 1:1-3). Jesus said, “The words that I speak to you, *they* are spirit and *they* are life” (John 6:63). God the Father inspired Jesus Christ to speak what He spoke and to do what He did. Concerning this Jesus was clear: “The words that I speak to you, I do not speak from My own self; but the Father Himself, Who dwells in Me, does the works. Believe Me, that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; but if not, believe Me because of the works themselves....If you love Me, keep the commandments—namely, My commandments....The one who has My commandments and is keeping them, that is the one who loves Me; and the one who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him....**If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. The one who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word that you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s, Who sent Me**” (John 14:10-11, 15, 21, 23-34).

When the apostles began to preach the gospel as recorded in the book of Acts, they knew that their preaching was the Word of God. They knew that they were commissioned and sent by Jesus Christ, the Son of God—God manifested in the flesh—to be witnesses to the world of His resurrection from the dead and to proclaim that the gift of salvation is available through His name. They were filled with the Holy Spirit of God, which empowered them to preach the Word of God (Acts 2) and to perform astounding miracles (Acts 3-5). Mark ended his Gospel with this summary, showing that as the apostles preached the Word of God everywhere, God backed it up with power: “And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with *them* and confirming the Word by the signs that followed” (Mark 16:20).

The apostles not only preached the Word, as Jesus had commanded them, but they also began to write at a very early date. In 30-31 AD, perhaps less than one year after Jesus’ death and resurrection, the apostles began writing and compiling the teachings of Jesus Christ in order to teach the gospel to the multitude of new believers (Acts 6:4; see also Acts 2:37-41, 47; 4:4, 32; 5:12-16, 28; 6:1). The apostles continued to write, and by 35 AD Matthew had finished his Gospel. James wrote his Epistle to the Jews and Israelites in the Diaspora in 40-41 AD. Peter and Mark finished the Gospel of Mark by at least 42 AD. The main body of the Gospel of John was finished by 42 AD. James’ letter to the Gentile believers was written in 49 AD (Acts 15).

Thirteen of Paul’s fourteen epistles were written between 50 AD and 63 AD, with II Timothy being added in 67 AD. Luke finished his Gospel in 59-60 AD, and the book of Acts in late spring 63. The three epistles of John were written in 63-64 AD. Peter wrote his First Epistle late in 63 AD to early 64 AD, and his Second Epistle in 66-67 AD. Jude was written about 66-67 AD. Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, and of the Bible, was written by the apostle John in 95-96 AD.

With the exception of Revelation, all the books of the New Testament were written well before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. In addition to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, these books and epistles written by the apostles were widely circulated in the churches and were used for reading, for teaching and for doctrinal under-

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standing (Col. 4:16; I Thes. 4:1-3; 5:27; II Thes. 3:14; I Tim. 4:9-16; 6:1-6; II Tim. 2:15; 3:15-16; 4:1-4; Heb. 13:20-22; James 2:8-10; II Pet. 1:15; 3:15-16).

When the apostles wrote their gospels and epistles, they knew that God the Father and Jesus Christ had inspired their writings as the true Word of God for teaching the believers of the New Covenant. However, they may not have realized when they first began to write their gospels and epistles that they were actually being inspired to write them for a future New Testament. It was not until 63 AD that God finally revealed to Paul, Peter and John that they needed to canonize their writings in order to preserve the New Testament Scriptures for coming generations until the return of Jesus Christ.

Subsequently, the canonizing of these books into the official, authorized New Testament, along with the writing of the book of Revelation, was adding the finishing touches to the writings that were already being used by the churches. It was the apostles Paul, Peter and John who canonized the writings of the apostles that became the books of the New Testament. They understood that they were to fulfill the Word of God, to bring it to completion. The New Testament canonization completed what God had begun with the book of Genesis in the Old Testament.

Three Special Eyewitnesses Canonized the New Testament Books

As stated previously, Jesus Christ had chosen the apostles Peter, James and John to be special eyewitnesses of the vision of His transfiguration. This occurred during Jesus' ministry in the fall of 29 AD, about six months before His crucifixion (Matt. 17:1-9; Mark 9:1-10; Luke 9:27-36). However, in 44 AD, James was beheaded by Herod (Acts 12:1-2), leaving Peter and John as the two remaining special eyewitnesses of the transfiguration. A third special eyewitness to replace the apostle James, brother of John, was the apostle Paul.

The Change of Names: God sometimes changes the names of those whom He calls for a special purpose. Abram was renamed "Abraham" because God made him "a father of many nations" (Gen. 17:5). Sarai, his wife, was renamed "Sarah" because God made her "a mother of nations and kings of people shall be of her" (Gen. 17:15-16). God changed Jacob's name to "Israel" because "as a prince you have power with God and with men, and have prevailed" (Gen. 32:28).

The New Testament shows that, of the original twelve apostles, Jesus renamed only three; the other nine were not renamed. The three were the leading apostles: Peter, James and John. When Jesus first saw Simon Peter, He renamed him "Cephas," which means "stone" (John 1:42). Martin notes: "Peter [as a stone] was to be associated with Christ (the Rock *Himself*) in the creation of the Christian *ekklesia* [church]. This was accomplished in its initiation phases with Peter on the Day of Pentecost some 50 days after the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2). Peter was also given the 'keys of the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 16:19). These 'keys' were to allow him the power to open 'the doors of the kingdom' to those who would hear the Gospel. It even entailed an authority to bind or loose people regarding their entrance into that kingdom. (This power was later extended to all the apostles, John 20:23.) And it appears certain that one of the main methods by which Peter would be able to exercise the power of the 'keys' was to be [partially] in charge of the canonization of the New Testament. The information in the canon would 'open the doors' to all people who would read and heed the written messages therein" (Ibid., p. 311).

Jesus renamed James and John "the sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). Martin explains the special reason why He renamed them: "The other two apostles who received

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specific titles were the sons of Zebedee—James and John. They were reckoned by Christ as being *the Sons of Thunder*. This title has proved a little mysterious to many interpreters of the Bible because it gives one the impression that the two brothers were headstrong, impetuous, intolerant and authoritarian. And, this is true. But when it comes to analyzing the letters of John, he appears to sanction a conciliation among peoples (especially those who claim the common Christian faith) and that love and harmony ought to exist in Christian relationships (I John 2:9-11). John was also the one that Christ had a natural fondness for more than the other apostles (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). And when one looks at the biblical account about the actions of these two brothers, they do appear to be stern and uncompromising in their attitudes toward evil. They were the ones who asked Christ if fire should come down on the heads of the Samaritans (Luke 9:54), and (with their mother [Jesus' aunt]) their ambitions were so high that they asked Christ for positions of supreme leadership alongside him (Matthew 20:20-24). They were certainly *not* mild-tempered. They were to be men of 'Thunder.' In Hebrew 'thunder' (*kol*) meant the *Voice of God* (Exodus 9:23; Psalm 29:3; Jeremiah 10:13; etc.). The title could signify that they were to speak like God Himself—as personal spokesmen for God" (Ibid., pp. 311-312).

James, the brother of John, was the first apostle to be martyred. Undoubtedly, as one of the sons of thunder, James had preached repentance and salvation through Jesus Christ to the Jews in such a powerful way—thundering the truth of God—that they could not stand to hear it. Therefore, they persuaded Herod to kill him (Acts 12:1-2).

The fourth apostle to be renamed was Paul. When Paul is first mentioned in Scripture, he is called "Saul." Before Jesus Christ called Saul, he was a destroyer of the brethren, one of the most feared enemies of the Church. Saul, with the full authority of the high priest of Jerusalem, ravaged the Church, causing imprisonment and death to the disciples of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2). However, in 33 AD, Jesus personally called and converted Saul (Acts 9:3-30). Later in 44 AD, after Saul was ordained an apostle, his name was changed to "Paul" (Acts 13:3, 9). He was no longer Saul, the destroyer; rather, he was Paul, meaning "little one." And true to his new name, Paul reckoned himself as "the least of the apostles" (I Cor. 15:9) and also counted himself "less than the least of all the saints" (Eph. 3:8).

The apostle Paul had a unique calling (Acts 9:3-18; 26:12-20). When in a vision the Lord sent Ananias to baptize Paul, Jesus said of Paul's calling: "**For this man is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel**" (Acts 9:15). Shortly after Paul was baptized in 33 AD, he went into the Arabian desert where he saw the resurrected Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:8), and received personal instruction from Him for three years (Gal 1:18-19). As the apostle Paul recounts, he was not taught by men but by the Lord: "But I certify to you, brethren, that the gospel that was preached by me is not according to man; because **neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it by man; rather, it was by the revelation of Jesus Christ**" (Gal. 1:11-12).

During his three years' training in Arabia, Jesus gave Paul multiple visions and revelations. Paul wrote that in some of these visions and revelations he seemed to have been caught up into the third heaven: "Indeed, it is not expedient for me to boast. But I will come to visions and revelations of *the* Lord. I know a man in Christ *who*, fourteen years ago, was caught up to *the* third heaven. (Whether *this man was* in *the* body, I do not know; or out of the body, I do not know—God knows.) Now I know such a man (whether *taken up* in *the* body, or out of the body, I do not know—God knows), *and* that he was caught up to Paradise, and heard unutterable sayings, which a man is not permitted to speak. I will boast of such a one as this, but of myself, I personally will not boast, except concerning my weaknesses" (II Cor. 12:1-5).

Apparently, Jesus instructed Paul in considerably greater detail than He had in-

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structed the original twelve apostles. This was necessary because Paul's special mission was to be an apostle to the Gentiles, who did not have any acquaintance with the covenants and laws of God. Thus, Jesus personally trained Paul and gave him the special understanding that was necessary in order to preach the gospel to the nations of the world through His preaching and writings. Without a doubt, the visions and revelations given to Paul were even greater than the vision of the transfiguration that Peter, James and John had seen on the holy mount, because he was caught up to the third heaven and saw the throne of God. **Paul was a specially chosen vessel to be the third eyewitness to replace James the brother of John** and thus uniquely qualified to write and canonize his fourteen epistles, as well as the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts—well over one-half of the New Testament!

Martin noted the stages of the apostles' canonization: "The canonization (as we will come to see) was accomplished in two [actually three] stages, and it was fully brought to fruition in the last decade of the first century. Christ had made it clear that the disciples would receive 'all *the* truth' back in the first century. Some of this truth was to be a knowledge 'of things to come'—prophecies of the future. These truths of the Gospel were written down and canonized first by [Paul and then] Peter and John about A.D. 66/67, and then finally by John himself about A.D. 96" (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, p. 301).

Paul Canonized His Own Epistles and Forwarded Them to Peter

How Did the Apostle Paul View His Apostleship? Paul knew without a doubt that he was a called apostle of Jesus Christ and directly and personally represented God the Father and Jesus Christ. Paul made that fact known because in every epistle that he wrote, he greeted the brethren with the salutation: "Grace and peace *be* to you from God our Father and *the* Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 1:3; see also Rom. 1:7; II Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; I Thes. 1:1; II Thes. 1:2; I Tim. 1:2; II Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philem. 1:3).

In writing his epistles, Paul made it known that his apostolic service to the brethren was by the grace of God through the power of the Holy Spirit and not of himself. He wrote to the Ephesians, "If indeed you have heard of the ministry of the grace of God that was given to me for you; how He made known to me by revelation the mystery (even as I wrote briefly before, so that when you read *this*, you will be able to comprehend my understanding in the mystery of Christ), which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as **it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by *the* Spirit**; that the Gentiles might be joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, **of which I became a servant according to the gift of the grace of God, which was given to me through the inner working of His power; to me, who am less than the least of all the saints, was this grace given, that I might preach the gospel among the Gentiles—even the unsearchable riches of Christ**" (Eph. 3:2-8).

Paul understood that his preaching and writings were a holy service. He had been given the authority to act on behalf of God the Father and Jesus Christ, as he wrote in his Epistle to the Romans: "So then, I have more boldly written to you, brethren, in part *as a way of* reminding you, because of the grace that was given to me by God, in order that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ unto the Gentiles, **to perform the holy service of teaching the gospel of God; so that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by *the* Holy Spirit**. Therefore, I have *cause for* boasting in Christ Jesus *as to* the things pertaining to God. **For I will not presume to speak about any-**

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thing that Christ has not worked out by me for the obedience of the Gentiles, through word and work, through the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit of God” (Rom. 15:15-19).

Paul always emphasized that it was God the Father and Jesus Christ Who had called him and put him into the ministry. Paul had not done so by his own initiative or because of his personal abilities and education. He preached the sound doctrine of Jesus Christ, “... according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, with which I was entrusted. And I thank Jesus Christ our Lord, Who has empowered me, that He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, who was previously a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent person; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. But the grace of our Lord abounded exceedingly with *the* faith and love that *is* in Christ Jesus” (I Tim. 1:11-14).

Paul faithfully preached the gospel as a steward of God, and he was entrusted with a special mission from God. He made this clear in his First Epistle to the Corinthians: “So then, let every man regard us [Paul and Apollos] as ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Beyond that, it is required of stewards that one be found faithful....For though I preach the gospel, there is no *reason* for me to boast; because an obligation has been laid upon me. And woe to me, if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if *I do this* against my will, I have been entrusted with a ministry” (I Cor. 4:1-2; 9:16-17).

Furthermore, in addition to being a minister and a steward of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul knew that he was God the Father and Jesus Christ’s personal representative, or ambassador, to the Gentiles. Paul spoke and wrote God’s own inspired words, speaking of this trust when he penned, “And all things *are* from God, Who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation; which *is*, that God was in Christ, reconciling *the* world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them; and He has entrusted to us *this* message of reconciliation. **Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ; and God, as it were, is exhorting you through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, ‘Be reconciled to God.’** For He made Him Who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, so that we might become *the* righteousness of God in Him” (II Cor. 5:18-21).

Paul wrote by the authority and command of Jesus Christ and affirmed this in every letter: “Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, a called apostle, set apart to preach the gospel of God” (Rom 1:1). “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, called by *the* will of God” (I Cor. 1:1). “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by *the* will of God” (II Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; II Tim. 1:1). “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ according to *the* commandment of God our Savior, and of *the* Lord Jesus Christ, *Who is* our hope” (I Tim. 1:1).

How Did Paul View His Epistles? Paul fully understood that his epistles were the commandments of God—the very words of God. They were not his own personal opinions or the religious ideas of a man. They were the God-breathed words of God the Father and Jesus Christ to the Gentiles for the knowledge of salvation. Paul made it clear to the Corinthians that the Word of God was not given indiscriminately: “WHAT? Did the Word of God originate with you? Or did it come only to you *and no one else*? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, **let him acknowledge that the things I write to you are commandments of the Lord**” (I Cor. 14:36-37). Again, Paul affirmed that what he taught was the Word of God when he wrote to the Thessalonians in his first epistle: “And [we are] *earnestly* testifying, that you may walk worthily of God, Who is calling you to His own kingdom and glory. Because of this, we give thanks to God without ceasing: that **when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you did not accept it as the word of men, but even as it is in truth—the Word of God, which is also working in you who believe**” (I Thes. 2:12-13).

There is no question that Paul knew, without any equivocation, what he preached

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and wrote were the commandments of God, the very Word of God to reveal the way of salvation and eternal life to the world. Therefore, after Paul had received the special revelation from God the Father and Jesus Christ in 63 AD that Jesus' return was not imminent, he realized that he had to finalize, or canonize, certain of his epistles for future generations. It is likely that Paul began this process some time before he was released from his first Roman imprisonment in the fall of 63 AD. Paul and his assistants—Luke, Timothy, Mark and Silvanus—must have begun this task in a deliberate and thoughtful manner, trusting in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to guide them in the selection of which epistles to preserve, and in the final editing needed to complete his epistles.

However, in his book, *Restoring the Original Bible*, (pp. 306-307), Martin surmises that the process of canonization of the epistles of Paul was an urgent matter done in the last days just before Paul was executed and Peter was crucified. He theorizes that Peter had visited Paul when he was in prison for the second time in Rome in 67 AD. At that time, Paul and Peter hastily selected some of Paul's epistles that were to be canonized. Martin based his speculation on the supposition that Peter's reference to "Babylon" in his first epistle was a pseudonym for the city of Rome. However, there is no historical evidence that Peter and Paul were ever together in Rome at any time; therefore, this supposition is based on unsubstantiated tradition that supports the false notion that Peter was the first pope of the Roman Catholic Church. It is possible that Martin presents this theory, because he believes, as some scholars do, that Peter's reference to Babylon meant Rome.

It is apparent from the epistles that Paul wrote after 63 AD, that he knew it would be necessary to finalize and formalize some of his epistles. He also understood that they would be placed into a book, or codex, in order to teach the future generations of disciples whom God the Father and Jesus Christ would call. Rather than a last minute, hasty selection of Paul's epistles during a visit from Peter, as Martin suggests, it is more probable that Paul understood, he had to canonize his own epistles right after he received the special revelation from Jesus while he was in prison in 63 AD. It was then that Paul also understood that Jesus' return would occur in the distant future.

Consequently, it is more likely that the apostle Paul first canonized eleven of his fourteen epistles prior to his release from prison in 63 AD while he had Luke, Timothy, Mark and Silvanus with him to assist in this undertaking (Phil. 2:19; 4:21-22; Col 4:10, 14). It is understood that Mark was guided by Peter in writing the Gospel of Mark while Peter was in Jerusalem from 38 to 44 AD. In 44 AD, Peter departed from Jerusalem and went to Babylon (Acts 12:17). Subsequently, Mark also left Jerusalem with Paul and Barnabas to travel with them on their first evangelistic tour (Acts 12:25). Mark returned to Jerusalem in the midst of the tour (Acts 13:13). Later, after the Jerusalem Conference in 49 AD, Mark again went with Barnabas while Paul selected Silas, also called Silvanus, to travel him (Acts 15:36-41).

Apparently, during the time that Paul was imprisoned in Rome the first time in 61-63 AD, Mark had returned to assist him. In addition, it appears that after God had given the special revelation to Paul in 63 AD, Mark had also become a special liaison between Peter and Paul. It was after this special revelation that Paul must have canonized eleven of his fourteen epistles as well as the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. Subsequently, just before his release from prison, Paul would have sent his canonized epistles to the apostle Peter in Babylon. At the time Paul wrote his epistle to the Colossians (Col. 4:10), Mark was with him. Paul must have dispatched Mark to deliver these epistles to Peter. When Peter wrote his own First Epistle in 63-64 AD after having received Paul's canonized writings, he mentioned that Mark and Silvanus, who had previously been with Paul in Rome, were with him in Babylon.

Upon being released from his first Roman imprisonment in 63 AD, Paul visited

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Titus in Crete and Timothy in Ephesus. Next, he went to Nicopolis in Macedonia to spend the winter (Titus 3:12), where he penned the epistles of I Timothy and Titus. Perhaps Titus visited Paul in Nicopolis (Titus 3:12), delivered Paul's First Epistle to Timothy and then left Timothy a copy of the epistle that Paul had written to him. (These two pastoral epistles of I Timothy and Titus were written in late 63 AD, but were canonized by Paul during his final canonization in 67 AD.) After wintering in Nicopolis, Paul probably left to preach the gospel in Spain and the British Isles; some traditions suggest that he also went to Scandinavia.

Such a scenario must have been the case, because, only two years later when Peter wrote his Second Epistle in 66 AD, he clearly declared that Paul's epistles, which he had in his possession, were considered to be a part of Scripture: "**And bear in mind that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation, exactly as our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has also written to you; as he has also in all his epistles, speaking in them concerning these things; in which are some things that are difficult to understand, which the ignorant and unstable are twisting and distorting, as they also twist and distort the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction**" (II Peter 3:15-16).

Peter's words "the rest of the Scriptures," must have meant the other New Testament writings such as the gospels, his First Epistle and the First Epistle of John as well as the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Since Peter was probably in Jerusalem in 64-65 AD, the apostle John must have been there with him. Undoubtedly, John also had copies of Paul's epistles because Peter included John when he wrote "we were eyewitnesses," and he and Peter were the only two living eyewitnesses of the vision of Jesus' transfiguration.

The New Testament Writings Are Called the Prophetic Scriptures

The first phase of canonization of Paul's epistles was done by the apostle Paul himself, beginning in 63 AD, and these first eleven epistles were then forwarded to Peter and John. They fully accepted the epistles that Paul had canonized as Scriptures sanctioned by God. These Scriptures were called by Peter and John "the confirmed prophetic Word," and Paul wrote that his epistles were "the prophetic Scriptures," meaning that these writings were composed under the direct "inspiration" of God.

Peter's Authority and Role in Canonizing the Books of the New Testament: When Peter wrote his Second Epistle, he made it clear that he and the apostle John were forming an official text of New Testament teachings so that the believers would have a written remembrance of the apostles' teachings. Peter referred to this written remembrance as "the confirmed prophetic Word," saying, "Therefore, I will not neglect to make you always mindful of these things, although you *already* know them and have been established in the present truth. For I consider it my duty, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by causing you to remember *these things*; knowing that shortly the putting off of my tabernacle *will come*, even as our Lord Jesus Christ has signified to me. **But, I will make every effort that after my departure, you may always have a written remembrance of these things, in order to practice them for yourselves.**

"**For we did not follow cleverly concocted myths as our authority**, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but **we** [Peter and John, the two living eyewitnesses of the vision of Jesus Christ's transfiguration] **were eyewitnesses of His magnificent glory**. Because He received glory and honor from God *the Father* when *the voice* came to Him from the Majestic Glory, 'This is My Son, the Beloved, in Whom I am well pleased.' And this *is the voice* from heaven that we heard

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when we were with Him on the holy mountain. **We also possess the confirmed prophetic Word** to which you do well to pay attention, as to a light shining in a dark place [the present evil world], until the day dawns [the return of Jesus Christ] and *the* morning star arises in your hearts [the resurrection from the dead to eternal life]; **knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture** [the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament that they were canonizing] **originated as anyone's own private interpretation; because prophecy was not brought at any time by human will, but the holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit**" (II Pet 1:12-21).

After receiving the canonized writings of the apostle Paul, Peter wrote that he and John had authority to finalize the canonization of the writings that would become the New Testament. Peter boldly stated that their authority was not based on cleverly concocted myths, but rather, as special eyewitnesses of the vision of the transfiguration of Jesus, they were given the confirmed prophetic Word. Moreover, Peter made it absolutely clear that what the apostles had preached and written in the books and epistles they were canonizing was the "inspired" Word of God. He emphatically declared "**that any prophecy of Scripture did not originate as one's own private interpretation.**" These writings were not the concocted, mystic imaginations of carnal men; rather, these Scriptures were the "inspired" words of God—literally God-breathed.

It should be understood that when Peter wrote, "any prophecy of Scripture," he did not mean a foretelling of future events. Instead, his use of the word "prophecy" meant the telling forth of God's Word as "inspired" by God through the power of the Holy Spirit. This was the "confirmed prophetic Word" based on the authority that Jesus Christ had conferred upon the apostles.

Martin gives us insight with his explanations: "All Jews of the first century understood the word 'prophecy' in a much broader sense. There were three different ways of looking at the word. It certainly signified the classical meaning of being able to tell the future, and the person able to do this was customarily called 'a prophet.' But the apostle Paul also used the word as meaning one who *spoke forth* the word of God no matter if the message was about the future, the present, or the past (I Corinthians 14:5, 24, 25). This latter usage simply signified one who teaches the Gospel. Yet there was a third meaning, and this is what Peter had in mind when he said that he and John had 'the word of prophecy more confirmed.' This usage meant that the people who could be called 'prophets' were those under the prophetic spirit and able to write inspired scripture. Josephus, the Jewish historian, was well acquainted with this type of usage for the word 'prophet' or 'prophecy.' He said that no succession of prophets had come on the scene within Judaism from the time of the Persian king Artaxerxes (the fifth century B.C.)—at the close of the Old Testament canon—until and including the period of the first century (*Contra Apion*, I.8). In a word, Josephus thought that the 'spirit of prophecy' had ceased with Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Great Assembly who canonized the Old Testament.

"The apostle Peter, however, said the 'word of prophecy' had returned, and that he and John [as well as Paul] were in that category of authority. They were on the same level of authority as all the earlier writers of the Old Testament scriptures. All the writers of the Holy Scriptures were called *prophets*, even if they did not possess the prophetic office as did Elijah, Isaiah, Malachi, etc. For example, David and Solomon and Asaph the psalmist were called *prophets* though their writings were not in the Prophets' Division of the Old Testament (Matthew 27:35; Acts 2:30; 7:48; Matthew 13:35). Indeed, the use of *prophecy* by holy men of God reached back into the very beginning of history. Abel, the son of Adam, was called a *prophet* (Luke 11:50). And in Acts 3:21 and Hebrews 1:1 we are told that the practice of *prophecy* extended back to all past time, to the very beginning of the world.

"The Jewish people in Christ's time simply believed that *all holy men of God*

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were *prophets* and that all their writings were *prophecies*. This, of course did not mean that they all foretold future events (*cf.* John 4:19; Acts 11:27; 13:1; 15:23; I Corinthians 12:28, 29, 37; Ephesians 2:20; 4:11; Titus 1:12). And, most significantly to our present study, *any holy man of God* who wrote any part of the Holy Scriptures was called a *prophet*....This indication of authority was recognized throughout the New Testament. When Christ said: Abraham saith unto him, they have Moses and the Prophets (Luke 6:29), he was not referring to the Prophets (i.e. the Second) Division of the Old Testament. He meant *all* the writers of Scripture who followed Moses. Luke noted this: 'Having begun from Moses and *all the prophets*, he [Christ] expounded unto them *in all the Scriptures* the things concerning himself' (Luke 24:27). When Paul reasoned with the Jews out of the Law and the Prophets (Acts 28:23), he was teaching from the *whole* Old Testament. Indeed, as Josephus said, these *prophets* of the Old Testament ceased their activities when the Old Testament canon was completed. The Jewish people in the first century were well aware that 'prophecy ceased,' in their estimation, when the canon of the Old Testament was finally established (*cf.* Ecclesiasticus 36:15; I Maccabees 4:44-46; 9:27). But Peter said *the prophetic word* was restored with him and John [and, without a doubt, Paul's writings, as were the other apostles' writings included as part of "the prophetic word"]. This clearly shows that he and John were informing their readers that they were going to present the Christian community with a new batch of inspired scriptures to accompany the books of the Old Testament....One of the main reasons that the apostle Peter wrote Second Peter was to tell Christians of this fact. Their writings (and the other documents which they sanctioned) were not going to be like the fables of others because Peter and John had 'the word of prophecy more confirmed'....**The books they were selecting were God-ordained and were as inspired as the Old Testament ... They were nothing less than the direct teachings of God**" (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, pp. 301-304, bold emphasis added).

There is no question that Peter and John fully understood that what the apostles had written, and were compiling and canonizing for future generations was the literal inspired Word of God. "The confirmed prophetic Word" that they were canonizing became the New Testament Scriptures—the Word of God for eternal life through Jesus Christ the Savior of the world.

The Apostle Paul Also Wrote the Prophetic Scriptures: As previously stated, Paul had seen the resurrected Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:8). Moreover, he had received his teachings directly and personally from Jesus (Gal. 1:11-12) as well as through an abundance of dreams and revelations (II Cor. 12:1-5).

Martin further informs us: "Peter and John were not the only ones who had 'the word of prophecy more confirmed.' The apostle Paul also had the authority to write 'prophetic scriptures.' At the end of the Book of Romans is an interesting section of scripture, which relates to the matter of canonization. Paul said that his writings concerning the message of Christ were to be acknowledged as 'the Prophetic Scriptures.' This meant that Paul thought he was writing *sacred* Scriptures" (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, p. 305).

It is clear that Paul fully understood, he was writing the New Testament Scriptures. Paul declared in his letter to the Romans: "Now to Him who has the power to establish you, according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, **according to the revelation of the mystery** that in past ages had been kept secret; but **now is made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures, according to the commandment of the eternal God**, has been made known to all the nations unto *the* obedience of faith" (Rom 16:25-26).

Concerning the above scripture Martin explains that the knowledge of the mystery [of God] was not to be found in the earlier prophets of the Old Testament, as sug-

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gested by the King James Version. Instead, Paul expressly stated that the teaching given to him, which had remained hidden from the world [in previous ages], was now being disclosed through the apostles. “This fullness of the teaching of Christ was what Paul called ‘my gospel’ ” (Ibid., p. 305).

When analyzing Paul’s statements, it becomes apparent that Paul completed the canonization of his epistles when he wrote this section of Romans. Moreover, he stressed that this was by the command of God. He said that what he wrote was literally “... **the prophetic Scriptures, according to the commandment of the eternal God.**” There was apparently no doubt in Paul’s mind that he had a part in completing the Word of God through his writings as Martin related: “Paul stated that his apostolic commission was to present those new *prophetic scriptures* concerning ‘the Mystery’ to [the believers and to] the people of the world. Paul even realized that he was the one responsible for teaching the full, final and mature teachings of ‘the Mystery’ ” (Ibid., p. 306).

Paul’s letter to the Romans, along with Peter’s statements, gives us irrefutable evidence that God had commanded the apostles Paul, Peter and John to canonize the books of the New Testament. Peter confirmed this with his statement: “**I will make every effort that after my departure, you may always have a written remembrance of these things in order to practice them for yourselves**” (II Pet. 1:15).

The three apostles were to complete this most profound task before they died. Therefore, there is no question that God did not leave the writing and canonizing of the New Testament to other men to do hundreds of years after the apostles’ deaths. **Only the apostles of Jesus Christ, whom God had specifically chosen for this task, wrote and canonized the New Testament.**

Commenting further, Martin writes, “Peter was indicating that the prophetic scriptures which he and John were leaving with Christians were not their own private ideas and words. They were nothing less than **the direct teachings of God.** This dogmatism of Peter is reflected also in his evaluation of the apostle Paul’s epistles, which he mentioned as being on an equal par with ‘the other Scriptures’ of the Old Testament (II Peter 3:15,16). Certainly, if Paul’s letters were in A.D. 66 being reckoned as Scripture, the letters of James, Jude, Peter and John were as well (especially if they were selected by Peter and John to be in the New Testament canon [also including the Gospel of Matthew]). The apostles were assured by A.D. 66 [more likely beginning in 63 AD] that ‘the prophetic spirit’ had returned to earth in the persons of Peter and John (along with Paul). This was a signal that more Holy Scriptures were being given to Christians in an official manner to present the final messages of God to the world” (Ibid., p. 304, bold emphasis added).

In order to understand how the writings of Paul, Peter and John completed the Word of God, it is necessary to know what Jesus Christ taught about the Law and the Prophets. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that He had come not only to declare salvation to the world but to fulfill the Law and the Prophets: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17).

Jesus Fulfilled the Law and the Prophets in Two Ways

How did Jesus Christ fulfill the Law and the Prophets? In order to recognize how He fulfilled the law, we must understand the meaning of the word “fulfill.” The English word “fulfill” is translated from the Greek verb *πληροω pleeroo*, which means: “to make full, to fill full, to fulfill ... in Mt. 5:17, depending on how one prefers to interpret the context, *πληροω pleeroo* is understood either as *fulfill* = do, carry out, or *bring to*

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full expression = show forth in its true spiritual meaning, or as fill up = complete” (Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).

First, Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets through His personal teachings during His ministry. This is recorded in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These accounts show that the Lawgiver, Jesus Christ, filled the Law of God to its fullest measure by revealing its complete spiritual intent and meaning. He “filled the law to the full” by teaching obedience in the spirit of the law. To fulfill the Law of God by amplifying its meaning and application is the exact opposite of abolishing the law. If Jesus had come to abolish the laws of God, He would not have magnified and expanded their meaning, making them even more binding. Furthermore, **if the laws of God were not binding today, there could be no sin**, because “sin is the transgression of the law” (I John 3:4, *KJV*). And if there were no sinners, there would be no need of a Savior. However, the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments testify that Jesus Christ came to save mankind from sin. Instead of abolishing or “doing away with the law,” Jesus came to take upon Himself the penalty for our sins and transgressions of the laws of God and to show us the way to eternal life through spiritual obedience from the heart. That is how He magnified the laws and commandments of God and made them honorable (Isa. 42:21).

Second, Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets by inspiring His apostles to write the New Testament. To complete this process, Jesus Christ inspired the apostles Paul, Peter and John to canonize these writings as the prophetic Scriptures. Therefore, these canonized New Testament writings, when added to the canonized Scriptures of the Old Testament, literally “fulfilled,” “brought to the fullest measure,” or “completed” the Word of God.

Just as the apostles knew that what they preached, taught and wrote was the Word of God, Paul fully understood that his writings would be part of completing the Word of God. Paul wrote to the Colossians before he was released from his first imprisonment in Rome in 63 AD: “Now, I am rejoicing in my sufferings for you, and I am filling up [Greek *ανταναπληρω* *antanapleero*, “to fill up, to fill the measure”] in my flesh that which is behind of the tribulations of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church; of which I became a servant, **according to the administration of God that was given to me for you, in order to complete** [*πληρωσαι*, *pleerosai* “to bring to the full, to complete”] **the Word of God; even the mystery** that has been hidden from ages and from generations, but has now been revealed to His saints; to whom **God did will to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles;** which is Christ in you, the hope of glory; Whom we preach, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, so that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Col. 1:24-27).

Martin comments on these verses: “This is an important statement relative to the canonization of the New Testament. It tells us in no uncertain terms that Paul knew he had been given a special commission to help fulfill (that is, to ‘fill to the top’) the Word of God. This is why Paul had little reluctance in telling people about the high calling that he had. Paul considered that the teachings he recorded represented the very commandments of God. ‘If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write unto you **are the commandments of God [Lord]**’ (I Corinthians 14:37). These are strong and authoritative words. No man could make such assertions unless he was convinced in his own mind [by the power of the Holy Spirit] that he had the prophetic office to write inspired scripture” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, pp. 306-307).

Peter also fully understood the magnitude of what he and the apostle John taught and wrote, declaring: “For **we did not follow cleverly concocted myths as our authority**, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ [whether in the spo-

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ken or written word], **but we were eyewitnesses of His magnificent glory**” (II Pet. 1:16).

Paul again confirmed his prophetic inspiration when he wrote: “For who among men understands the things of man except *by* the spirit of man which *is* in him? In the same way also, **the things of God no one understands except *by* the Spirit of God.** Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that *is* of God, so that we might know the things graciously given to us by God; which things we also speak, **not in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Holy Spirit in order to communicate spiritual things by spiritual means.** But *the* natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand [the impossibility of understanding] *them* because they are spiritually discerned. However, the one who is spiritual discerns all things, but he himself is discerned by no one. For who has known *the* mind of *the* Lord? Who shall instruct Him? But **we** [the apostles] **have *the* mind of Christ**” (I Cor. 2:11-16).

Martin notes that: “When one comprehends that Paul himself was aware of his role in completing the full message of God to this world, then the statements of Peter in his Second Epistle can begin to make sense. **Peter readily acknowledged that the apostle Paul was given an equal commission along with himself and John, to write ‘prophetic scriptures.’** This is exactly what Paul called his own writings in Romans 16:25, 26, and the apostle Peter boldly ranked those writings of the apostle Paul alongside the writings of the prophets in the Old Testament (II Peter 3:15, 16)” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, p. 307, bold emphasis added).

The Apostle Paul’s Last Epistle and Final Canonization of His Epistles

As previously noted, after Paul had received the special revelation from Jesus Christ in 63 AD, during his first Roman imprisonment, he canonized eleven of his fourteen epistles and had Mark and Silvanus deliver them to the apostle Peter in Babylon (I Pet. 5:12-13). (There is every reason to believe that Mark and Silvanus left copies in Ephesus as well, because Ephesus became a center for copying and distributing the New Testament as it was canonized.) Upon his release, Paul went to Nicopolis, where he spent the winter of 63 AD writing I Timothy and Titus. In the spring of 64 AD, Paul likely departed from Nicopolis and journeyed to Spain, the British Isles and perhaps even to Scandinavia to preach the gospel. However, by late fall of 67 AD, Paul was again arrested and put in prison at Rome. From there Paul wrote his Second Epistle to Timothy.

Because Paul knew that the apostasy was gaining strength, he had great concern for Timothy and the brethren Timothy served (II Tim. 1:15; 2:17-18; 3:5-10, 13; 4:4, 14-15). In the face of this spiritual warfare, Paul instructed them to hold fast to sound doctrine and the truths he had taught them. Throughout his Second Epistle to Timothy, with a sense of urgency and the tone of finality, Paul strongly admonished him concerning doctrine and the Word of God (II Tim. 1:6-7, 13-15; 2:14-19; 3:14-17). Paul’s final admonition to Timothy was an exhortation to preach the Word because soon people would be swept away by the apostasy and believe lies and myths: “I charge you, therefore, in the sight of God, even the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is ready to judge *the* living and *the* dead at His appearing and His kingdom: **preach the Word!** Be urgent in season and out of season; convict, rebuke, encourage, with all patience and doctrine.

“For there shall come a time when **they will not tolerate sound doctrine;** but according to their own lusts they shall accumulate to themselves *a great number of* teachers, having ears itching *to hear what satisfies their cravings;* and **they shall turn away their own ears from the truth; and they shall be turned aside unto myths.** But *as for* you, be vigilant in all things, endure hardships, do *the* work of an evangelist; fully

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carry out your ministry” (II Tim. 4:1-5).

Paul’s Final Canonization: While Paul was in prison in Rome the second time in 67 AD (II Tim. 2:9), he knew that his death was imminent: “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith. From this time forward, a crown of righteousness is laid up for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me in that day—and not to me only, but also to all who love His appearing” (II Tim. 4:6-8).

Knowing he would soon be departing, Paul urgently began to complete the canonization of his epistles. At this time, Luke was with Paul and could assist him in this all-important task. However, in order for Paul to complete this work, he needed Timothy. He summoned Timothy, asking him to come to him quickly and to bring Mark with him so that Mark could help Paul edit his epistles and complete his canonization before his death: “Be diligent to **come to me quickly....Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is profitable to me for the ministry of the Word**” (II Tim 4:9-11).

It is important that Paul specifically requested Timothy to bring Mark with him, because Mark had assisted both Paul and Peter previously. In this epistle, Paul wrote that Mark “is profitable to me **for the ministry of the Word.**” The same phrase, “the ministry of the Word” was used in Acts 6:4 when the apostles were first beginning to write and compile the teachings of Jesus Christ in 31 AD. Therefore, Paul’s comment must have been in reference to the time in 63 AD when Luke, Mark and Silvanus had helped Paul canonize some of his epistles, which Mark had subsequently delivered to Peter. Concerning Mark, Peter and Paul, Martin writes: “John Mark was a type of liaison between Peter and Paul—one time he was with Peter and the other with Paul. And just before his death, Paul makes his urgent request for Timothy to bring John Mark with him to Rome. He also wanted Timothy to bring along some important items ...” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, p. 384, bold emphasis added).

What were these important items? Apparently, they were the things Paul needed to complete the finishing touches to the epistles he was canonizing. Paul’s instructions were specific: “When you come, bring the chest that I left in Troas with Carpus, and **the books—especially the parchments**” (II Tim 4:13). (Note: In the *KJV* the Greek word, *φαιλονην*, *plelonen*, was incorrectly translated “cloak.” It should be rendered as “chest” because Paul was not talking about a “cloak” as a garment; rather, he was asking for a chest, or book case, that had been wrapped with a covering.) Paul was requesting the things that he had previously left with Carpus in Troas. Martin comments: “It appears that Paul wanted his important book case (his receptacle for carrying books) to be brought at once to Rome—and the request was one of pressing necessity” (Ibid., p. 387, bold emphasis added).

Undoubtedly, this chest held the books that Paul had written, and it also contained sheets of parchment—vellum or animal skins that had been made into blank pages for writing. Paul needed these items to finish his canonization. Of these three items, Martin wrote: “But it was of utmost priority that he obtain ‘*the* book case [chest], *the* papyrus scrolls, and especially *the* animal skin volumes [parchments, or parchment codices—books].’ Note the definite articles in front of each of the three items. Since Paul gave no further description about them, it appears that Timothy and John Mark knew exactly the specific things Paul meant, and they realized that it was important that they be brought immediately to Rome. There is no doubt in my mind that some particular scrolls and parchment documents were being kept safely by Paul in a specially constructed carrying case or book cover. It also makes sense that they were *his own writings* which he had brought together and left in Asia Minor with Carpus. Paul now needed them dispatched to Rome immediately. This must be the reason why Paul requested John Mark to accompany Timothy....John Mark was Peter’s assistant, Peter’s right hand man. He was also his secretary—the one who wrote literary documents for Peter. The service that

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Paul wanted John Mark to perform may have concerned the retention (or a collection) of some of Paul's writings. This is as good a reason as any why Paul wanted John Mark in Rome" (Ibid., pp. 388-389).

Paul Adds Some Finishing Touches to His Epistles: Once Timothy and Mark had come with these items, Paul could add the finishing touches to all his epistles, though he had first canonized eleven of his epistles in 63 AD. In Paul's final canonization of his epistles, there was probably not much that needed to be edited. Moreover, most edits would be extremely hard to detect by future scholars; however, in the book of Romans, there appear to be several places where it is possible to detect edits by Paul. Various manuscripts suggest three major edits: 1) One version contains the whole epistle as it reads in its final canonized form in most English Bibles today, 2) A second contains only chapters 1-14, along with the ending of 16:25-27 at the end, and 3) The third contains chapters 1-15 with the ending of 16:25-27 at the end (Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, p. 227).

The final edit appears as an addition of a few verses at the end of Chapter 16, which Paul might have made in 67 AD just before his death. The original ending probably concluded with verse 24. Paul wrote: "Gaius, my host, and *that* of the whole church, salutes you. Erastus, the steward of the city, and Quartus, a brother, salute you. **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you. Amen**" (verses 23-24). This closing appears to be a natural ending. Perhaps, Paul finished the first writing of the Epistle to the Romans in 57 AD at this point.

If that was the case, then possibly in 67 AD Paul added this final ending to his Epistle to the Romans: "Now to Him who has the power to establish you, according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to *the* revelation of *the* mystery that in past ages has been kept secret; but now *is* made manifest, and by *the* prophetic scriptures, according to *the* commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations unto *the* obedience of faith; **To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory into the ages of eternity. Amen**" (verses 25-27). Especially indicative of a later edit is the mention of "*the* revelation of *the* mystery." Perhaps, this second ending reveals Paul's final edit to Romans.

This last addition to the Epistle to the Romans indicates that before his death Paul made some final edits to his epistles. Even if it did not occur exactly in this manner, we know without a doubt that God inspired Paul to canonize his Epistle to the Romans in the form that we now have. All of the internal evidence found in Paul's epistles indicates that he canonized them and sent them by the hands of Mark and Silvanus to the apostle Peter. Peter, in turn, must have sent copies to John. There is no question that exact copies were made and distributed to all the churches to be used by the elders and brethren for doctrine, inspiration, and instruction in righteousness, as Paul had written to Timothy: "And that from a child you have known the holy writings, [the Old Testament] which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith, which *is* in Christ Jesus. All Scripture [New Testament] *is* God-breathed and *is* profitable for doctrine, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; so that the man of God [as well as every individual believer] may be complete, fully equipped for every good work" (II Tim. 3:15-17).

When the relevant information contained in the writings of the New Testament is brought to light, there is little doubt that the apostles Paul and Peter canonized their epistles before the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 AD. In the following chapter, we will see that the New Testament was not completed until God gave the apostle John the task of finishing his Gospel and epistles, writing the book of Revelation and canonizing the entire New Testament before he died.

CHAPTER SEVEN

JOHN'S FINAL CANONIZATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Historical Background—70 AD to 100 AD

In Palestine, by the spring of 70 AD, the stage was set for the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. The noted Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote that during the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, April 13-20, 70 AD, a record number of Jewish pilgrims, who were pious followers of Judaism, came from all parts of the Roman Empire to keep the Passover and the Feast. The Romans allowed the Jews free passage into the city. He recorded that there were “two million seven hundred thousand and two hundred persons who were pure and holy” (besides those who were not ritually pure) in and around the city of Jerusalem (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, bk. 6:9:3). Since they did not believe that Jesus Christ was the prophesied Messiah, perhaps they were anticipating that if enough Jews observed the Passover at the temple in Jerusalem, its prophesied destruction could be turned back and the Messiah would come, defeat the Roman army, and they would be saved. However, that was not to be. After the multitudes were in the city, the Roman army under Titus surrounded Jerusalem, and its doom was sealed.

Soon, Jerusalem would be utterly destroyed. Within the city and its temple, the internal fighting between various Jewish factions killed many thousands. In addition, because of the tremendous number of people trapped in the city, the food supply was soon exhausted. Coupled with the assaults by the Roman army, tens of thousands died of famine—with many resorting to cannibalism. In the streets, rotting bodies were heaped high and stacked in the upper rooms of the houses. So appalling was the scene that when the Romans entered the city, they could hardly believe that what they witnessed was true. Josephus described the horrifying carnage they encountered: “So the Romans being now become the masters of the walls, they both placed their ensigns upon the towers, and made joyful acclamations for the victory they had gained, as having found the end of this war much lighter than its beginning; for when they had gotten upon the last wall, without any bloodshed, they could hardly believe what they found to be true; but seeing nobody to oppose them, they stood in doubt what such an unusual solitude could mean.

“But when they went in numbers into the lanes of the city with their swords drawn, they slew those whom they overtook without mercy, and set fire to the houses whither the Jews were fled, and burnt every soul in them, and laid waste a great many of the rest; and when they were come to the houses to plunder them, they found in them entire families of dead men, and the upper rooms full of dead corpses, that is, of such as died by the famine; they then stood in a horror at this sight, and went out without touching any thing. But although they had this commiseration for such as were destroyed in that manner, yet had they not the same for those that were still alive, but they ran every one through whom they met with, and obstructed the very lanes with their dead bodies, and made the whole city run down with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many of the houses was quenched with these men’s blood. And truly so it happened, that though the slayers left off at the evening, yet did the fire greatly prevail in the night; and all was burning” (Ibid., bk. 6:8:5).

Hundreds of thousands perished by pestilence, sword and crucifixion. Josephus

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summarized this awesome carnage: “Now this vast multitude is indeed collected out of remote places, but the entire nation was now shut up by fate as in prison, and the Roman army encompassed the city when it was crowded with inhabitants. Accordingly, the multitude of those that therein perished exceeded all the destructions that either man or God ever brought upon the world” (Ibid., bk. 6:9:4).

Josephus related the final number of casualties and the number of those who were made slaves: “Now the number of those that were carried captive during this whole war was collected to be ninety-seven thousand; as was the number of those that perished during the whole siege eleven hundred thousand (1,100,000), the greater part of whom were indeed of the same nation [with the citizens of Jerusalem], but not belonging to the city itself; for they were come up from all the country to the feast of unleavened bread, and were on a sudden shut up by an army” (Ibid., bk. 6:9:3).

After the Romans had gained full control of Jerusalem, Josephus further reported what the Romans did to those who had survived the siege. All who were still alive were herded into the women’s court of the temple and Titus put Fronto in charge of their fate: “So this Fronto slew all those that had been seditious and robbers, who were impeached by one another; but of the young men he chose out the tallest and most beautiful, and reserved them for the triumph [the victory march in Rome]; and as for the rest of the multitude that were above seventeen years old, he put them into bonds, and sent them to the Egyptian mines. Titus also sent a great number into the provinces, as a present to them, that they might be destroyed upon their theatres, by the sword and by the wild beasts; but those that were under seventeen years of age were sold for slaves. Now during the days wherein Fronto was distinguishing these men, there perished, for want of food, eleven thousand; some of whom did not taste any food, through the hatred their guards bore to them; and others would not take in any when it was given them. The multitude also was so very great, that they were in want even of corn for their sustenance” (Ibid., bk. 6:9:2).

When the end finally came, the city was razed to the ground: “And now [at the end] the Romans set fire to the extreme parts of the city, and burnt them down, and entirely demolished its walls” (Ibid., bk. 6:9:4). “Now as soon as the army had no more people to slay or to plunder, because there remained none to be the objects of their fury, (for they would not have spared any, had there remained any other work to be done,) Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and temple” (Ibid., bk. 7:1:1).

There is no question that such an awesome destruction of the city and the temple, which bore the name of God, was the execution of His judgment against a rebellious and sinful people. Even Titus realized that God had delivered the city into his hands and had given him the victory over the Jews. Josephus wrote: “Now when Titus was come into this [upper] city, he admired not only some other places of strength in it, but particularly those strong towers which the tyrants in their mad conduct had relinquished; for when he saw their solid altitude, and the largeness of their several stones, and the exactness of their joints, as also how great was their breadth, and how extensive their length, he expressed himself after the manner following: ‘We have certainly had God for our assistant in this war, and it was no[ne] other than God who ejected the Jews out of these fortifications; for what could the hands of men or any machines do towards overthrowing these towers?’ ” (Ibid., bk. 6:9:1).

Thus, Jerusalem and the second temple were destroyed on Ab 9-10, August 4-5, 70 AD, exactly 655 years to the day after the Babylonians destroyed the first temple in 586 BC. True to the prophecies of Jesus Christ, not one stone was left upon another that was not thrown down (Matt. 24:2, Mark 13:2, Luke 21:6). However, Fort Antonia, named after the Roman general Marcus Antonius, was not destroyed by the Romans, for it was Roman property. After Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed, Fort Antonia again became the garrison for the Roman soldiers of occupation. To this day, its mam-

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moth foundational stones remain and are visible, while the stones of the temple and its foundation have disappeared. In fact, the stones of the Western Wailing Wall are not the stones of the temple but are the foundational stones of Fort Antonia. Thus, the Mosque of Omar—known as the Dome of the Rock—is not situated where the temple of God stood. Rather, the Mosque of Omar was built on the foundational stones of Fort Antonia. (See Appendix P, *Temple Mount at Jerusalem*, page 838.)

Although, Josephus wrote a detailed history of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, unfortunately, there is no scriptural record of the Church during this era, 70-100 AD. Paul and Peter were dead by 68 AD, and there were no more apostolic writings until John finalized his Gospel and epistles and wrote the book of Revelation in 95-96 AD. Therefore, in order to understand the conditions of the eastern Roman Empire and the Christians during this time frame, it is necessary to review the Roman emperors' reigns.

The Emperors of Rome

Titus Flavius Vespasianus, 69-79 AD: In 66 AD Vespasian was appointed by Nero to conduct the war in Judea. After Nero's suicide, the armies in the east proclaimed Vespasian as emperor in July 69 AD, and Vespasian left the war in Judea to his son Titus. When Vespasian arrived in Rome in 70 AD, he was made emperor. In that same year he suppressed an uprising in Gaul and made the German frontier secure. In Palestine, "The Jewish War was brought to a close by Titus's capture of Jerusalem, and in the following year, after the joint triumph [march] of Vespasian and Titus [in Rome], memorable as the first occasion on which a father and his son were thus associated together ... the Roman world had rest for the remaining nine years of Vespasian's reign. The peace of Vespasian passed into a proverb" (*The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, vol. 27, p. 1052).

In 76 AD, Vespasian's son, Titus, was made co-regent, assuming the duties of emperor. During times of peace in the eastern Empire during Vespasian's reign, persecution against the Christians was intermittent. The Romans were unable or unwilling to distinguish the difference between the Christians and the Jews, because true Christians also kept the seventh-day weekly Sabbath and annual holy days of God. (*Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, vol. 10, p. 765).

Flavius Sabinus Vespasianus Titus, 76-81 AD: Titus was the eldest son of Vespasian and reigned as co-regent with his father 76-79 AD. He reigned as sole emperor for only two years, 79-81 AD. "Italy and the Roman world were peaceful during his reign. The only fighting was in Britain ... Titus died on the 13th of September 81" (*The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, vol. 26, p. 1032). However, during his reign as co-regent and emperor, Judea was nearly depopulated. All those who attempted to take up arms against Rome in Palestine and in cis- or trans-Jordanic Judea were destroyed or put into slavery. Those taken into slavery were banished to the mines of Spain or forced to construct roads and canals throughout the Empire. There was no exception made for women and children; they met the same fate as all rebels (Graetz, Heinrich, *History of the Jews*, vol. 2, pp. 321-322).

Titus Flavius Domitianus, 81-96 AD: Domitian was the second son of Vespasian, the twelfth of the Caesars and the third of the Flavian dynasty. He succeeded his brother, Titus, on September 13, 81 AD. "Domitian was the first emperor who arrogated divine honours in his lifetime and caused himself to be styled *Our Lord and God* in public documents. Doubtless in the poems of writers like Martial, this deification was nothing but fulsome flattery, but in the case of the provincials it was a sincere tribute to the impersonation of the Roman Empire, as the administrator of good government and the peacemaker of the world. Even when Rome and Italy smarted beneath his proscrip-

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tions and extortions, the provinces were undisturbed" (*The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, vol. 8, p. 405).

During Domitian's reign there was sporadic persecution against the Christians and continued harsh treatment of the Jews. "During the last three years of his life his behaviour was that of a madman....A conspiracy among his own freedmen—set on foot, it is said, by his wife Domitia Longina, who knew her own life to be threatened—cut short his career. He was stabbed in his bedroom by a freedman of Clemens named Stephanus on the 18th of September 96" (*Ibid.*, p. 405).

Domitian ruled as a "madman" during the last three years of his reign, 94-96 AD. Eusebius wrote of his extreme cruelties: "Many were the victims of Domitian's appalling cruelty. At Rome great numbers of men distinguished by birth and attainments were for no reason at all banished from the country and their property confiscated. Finally, he showed himself the successor of Nero in enmity and hostility to God. He was, in fact, the second to organize persecution against us, though his father Vespasian had had no mischievous designs against us" (Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, bk. 3:17).

During this three-year period, the persecution against the Christians intensified, and the apostle John was exiled to the island of Patmos, perhaps in 95 AD. Eusebius stated there was "ample evidence that at that time the apostle and evangelist John was still alive, and because of his testimony to the word of God was sentenced to confinement on the island of Patmos" (*Ibid.*, bk. 3:18).

Eusebius also recorded how Domitian's persecutions against the Christians were brought to an end: "The same emperor ordered the execution of all who were of David's line, and there is an old and firm tradition that a group of heretics accused the descendants of Jude—the brother, humanly speaking, of the Saviour—on the ground that they were of David's line and related to Christ Himself. This is stated by Hegesippus in so many words: 'And there still survived of the Lord's family the grandsons of Jude, who was said to be His brother, humanly speaking. These were informed against as being of David's line, and brought by the *evocatus* before Domitian Caesar, who was as afraid of the advent of Christ as Herod had been. Domitian asked them whether they were descended from David, and they admitted it. Then he asked them what property they owned and what funds they had at their disposal. They replied that they had only 9,000 denarii between them, half belonging to each; this, they said, was not available in cash, but was the estimated value of only thirty-nine *plethra* of land, from which they raised the money to pay their taxes and the wherewithal to support themselves by their own toil.'

"Then, the writer continues, they showed him their hands, putting forward as proof of their toil the hardness of their bodies and the calluses impressed on their hands by incessant labour. When asked about Christ and His Kingdom—what it was like, and where and when it would appear—they explained that it was not of this world or anywhere on earth but angelic and in heaven, and would be established at the end of the world, when He would come in glory to judge the quick and the dead and give every man payment according to his conduct. On hearing this, Domitian found no fault with them, but despising them as beneath his notice let them go free and issued orders terminating the persecution of the Church. On their release they became leaders of the churches, both because they had borne testimony and because they were of the Lord's family; and thanks to the establishment of peace they lived on into Trajan's time" (Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, bk. 3:19-20).

Marcus Cocceius Nerva, 96-98 AD: Nerva succeeded Domitian through the influence of Petronius and Secundus, commanders of the Praetorian guards, and of Parthenius, the chamberlain of the Palace. He reigned from September 18, 96 AD to January 25, 98 AD. As emperor, he established an equitable administration and was

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much more aware of the need for peace and compassion for the peoples he ruled. He recalled all exiles who were banished under Domitian's rule and gave relief from oppressive taxation. He promoted tolerance toward the Christian community and acquitted all those who had been condemned to death by Domitian because they had converted to Christianity. He died after reigning only sixteen months (*Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, vol. 6, pp. 957-958; *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, vol. 19, pp. 393-394).

Along with the release of all the others who were exiled, the apostle John was released from his exile on the island of Patmos. Eusebius wrote: "In Asia, moreover, there still remained alive the one whom Jesus loved, apostle and evangelist alike, John, who had directed the churches there since his return from exile on the island, following Domitian's death" (Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, bk. 3:23). While John was on the island of Patmos, he received and wrote the revelation from Jesus Christ that became the book of Revelation. Undoubtedly, John brought this book with him when he returned to the city of Ephesus in Asia.

Because of the threat to Nerva's life by those who resented the murder of Domitian, Nerva sought to leave the Empire in stronger hands. Accordingly, "In October 97, in the temple Jupiter on the Capitol, Trajan was formally adopted as his son [by Nerva] and declared his colleague in the government of the empire (Pliny, *Paneg.* 8). For three months Nerva ruled jointly with Trajan (Aur. Vict. *Ep.* 24); but on the 25th (according to others, the 27th) of January 98 he died somewhat suddenly" (*The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, vol. 19, p. 394).

Eusebius confirmed that the apostle John lived into the reign of Trajan. Of this he wrote: "That he [the apostle John] survived so long is proved by the evidence of two witnesses who could hardly be doubted, ambassadors as they were of the orthodoxy of the Church—Irenaeus and Celement of Alexandria. In book II of his *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus writes: 'All the clergy who in Asia came in contact with John, the Lord's disciple, testify that John taught the truth to them; for he remained with them till Trajan's time.'

"In book III of the same work he says the same thing: 'The church at Ephesus was founded by Paul, and John remained there till Trajan's time; so she [the church at Ephesus] is a true witness of what the apostles taught' " (Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, bk. 3:23). Thus, the apostle John lived into the reign of Emperor Trajan, but there is no record as to how long he lived after Trajan was made emperor. Trajan reigned from January 98 AD to August 117 AD. Apparently, his reign was peaceful, and the Church had rest from Roman persecution. It must have been a time when many copies of the final canonized New Testament were made and distributed to all the churches in Asia Minor and undoubtedly to other parts of the world.

John's Final Canonization

By the middle of 66 AD, the Jewish revolt against Rome was beginning to gain momentum. To escape the coming war, many Jews, Christian and non-Christian had heeded God's warnings that Jerusalem was to be destroyed and had fled the city. Nearly all the faithful Jewish Christians had left Jerusalem and Judea, a good number of them going to the city of Pella, 60 miles northeast of Jerusalem, on the other side of the Jordan River. However, it appears that the majority of the Christian Jews fled to Asia Minor with many settling around the city of Ephesus. Eusebius recorded that "the holy apostles and disciples of our Saviour were scattered over the whole world. Thomas, tradition tells us, was chosen for Parthia, Andrew for Sythia, John for Asia, where he remained till his

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death at Ephesus” (Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, bk. 3:1). There is very little doubt that it was in Ephesus that John completed the final canonization of the New Testament after his release from exile.

As stated previously, the three apostles who canonized the New Testament—Paul, Peter and John—were all renamed to signify their authority to perform the special work that Christ had called them to. These three finalized and canonized the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as the Word of God for the world. Before his death, John finished writing his gospel and epistles and wrote the book of Revelation and canonized the New Testament. On this Martin wrote: “James and John were to have the distinction of being ‘the Sons of Thunder’—to *thunder* forth his words to the people *as did Moses*. And though James died early without being able to show his own authority in a lasting way, his brother John was responsible for writing every word of the Book of Revelation. This was Jesus Christ using John to be his spokesman, to be the Voice of God to the people of the world. He was ‘the Thunderer’ to the world of God’s message of judgment....The apostle John was specifically commissioned to write what the Voice of God (like the Thunder) would relate to him. This is why he wrote his Gospel and the Book of Revelation to be included in the canon of the New Testament. Such a task shows that John was more specially selected to produce a canon of scriptures which would proclaim the official Voice of God than even Peter and Paul” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, pp. 312-313).

Although Paul and Peter had canonized their writings before they died, the official final canonization, together with the final arrangement of the books of the entire New Testament, was accomplished by the apostle John in 96-99 AD, thirty to thirty-two years later. As one of the last living apostles and the last living eyewitness of the vision of Jesus Christ’s transfiguration, the apostle John was uniquely qualified and chosen by Jesus Christ to canonize the entire New Testament in its final form.

The Qualifications of John to Finalize the Canonization of the New Testament

In order to fully understand the apostle John’s qualifications as the one whom Jesus had chosen to canonize the New Testament, one must go back to the time before John the Baptist, the son of a priest, was born. The scriptural records reveal that the apostle John was also of the priestly line of Aaron. In addition, there was an important family relationship between Jesus Christ and the apostle John.

The Family Connection and the Daughters of Aaron: The important family connection between Jesus and the apostle John has a profound bearing on the canonization of the New Testament. Martin noted the significance of this unique family connection: “It is usually not understood, but the mother of James and John was none other than Salome (Matthew 27:56 with Mark 15:40) who was the sister of Mary, the mother of Christ (Hastings, *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol. I. p. 846). This means that Christ and John were *first cousins* as far as legal matters were concerned among the Jewish people. James, the head of the Christians at Jerusalem, and Jude (the writer of the short epistle) were His half-brothers. Unlike Peter or Paul, the apostle John would have been acquainted with Christ from childhood. No wonder he had been close to Christ. It seems that a ‘family tie’ to Christ was important in an authority sense. The first cousin status of John to Christ may account, in one way, why he and his brother were afforded such a high position of rank” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, p. 313).

There are several clues about Jesus’ relationship to the apostle John, beginning with Luke’s account of the conception and birth of John the Baptist. John the Baptist’s father, Zacharias, was a priest of the line of Aaron. Likewise, his mother, Elizabeth,

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“was of **the daughters of Aaron**” (Luke 1:5). Luke tells us that Elizabeth was also a “kinswoman” of Mary the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:36). The KJV renders the Greek word **συγγενής**, *syggenees*, or **συγγενίς**, *syggenis*, as “cousin.” This is not an accurate translation because the word means “kinswoman” or “relative,” not necessarily a cousin.

What exactly was the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth? From Luke’s account it is known that Elizabeth and her husband were “*well advanced in years [KJV—well stricken]*” (Luke 1:7, 18). Luke did not give their exact ages; however, from other scriptures, it is possible to estimate with reasonable accuracy the ages of Elizabeth and Zacharias. In the Old Testament, the age of King David at his death gives a sound basis for estimating the ages of Elizabeth and Zacharias. This record of King David is found in II Samuel 5:4: He “... was thirty years old when he began to reign, *and* he reigned for forty years.” Therefore, David died at age seventy, and he was “stricken in years” (I Kings 1:1). Furthermore, “threescore and ten” or seventy years was considered the average length of a man’s life, but with strength it might be “fourscore” or eighty years (Psa. 90:10). From these scriptures, it can be concluded that Elizabeth and Zacharias were in their seventies when John the Baptist was conceived and born.

On the other hand, Mary, the “kinswoman” of Elizabeth, was a young woman—a virgin. Scripture does not specify how old Mary was. But perhaps, it is not unreasonable to estimate that she was about twenty years old when Jesus was conceived. Therefore, there must have been a difference of fifty years or more between the ages of Elizabeth and Mary, making it more likely that Elizabeth was Mary’s aunt, rather than a cousin. This means that Mary’s mother and Elizabeth were sisters. From this, it can be concluded that Mary’s father was from the line of Judah, of the house of David; and, her mother was a daughter of Aaron. Moreover, Mary’s lineage was officially reckoned from her father’s side as a descendant of Judah. Therefore, Christ was from the tribe of Judah, of the house of David. (Mary’s physical genealogy from the house of David of the tribe of Judah is recorded in Luke 3:31 and 33.) Yet, at the same time, Mary could have been considered of the line of Aaron because her mother, the sister of Elizabeth, was also a daughter of Aaron.

Martin wrote of this family connection between the apostle John and Jesus: “Not only were his [John’s] mother and Christ’s mother both sisters (and this gave John some preeminence), but we find that Mary (and obviously her sister, Salome) [as daughters of Aaron] were in some way connected with the priestly ancestry. Polycrates in the late second century said that ‘John, who leaned back on the Lord’s breast, became a sacrificing priest, wearing the mitre, a martyr and a teacher, he too sleeps in Ephesus’ (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist. III.31; V.24*). If John was indeed of priestly ancestry, then it follows that his father Zebedee was a priest. As for his mother (Salome, who was sister to Mary), both Salome and Mary could have had Aaronic (priestly) ancestry as well. One should recall that Mary was a kinswoman to Elizabeth (the wife of Zacharias who was an Aaronic priest and the father of John the Baptist), and Elizabeth herself was recognized as ‘a daughter of Aaron’ (Luke 1:6). This means that both Mary and Salome could be reckoned as being of priestly descent” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, pp. 314-315).

Martin’s analysis that the apostle John’s mother and father, Salome and Zebedee, were both of Aaronic priestly ancestry is quite correct. However, it appears that Zebedee was not a practicing priest at the time of Jesus’ ministry. Mark, Matthew and Luke record that Zebedee was a fisherman. Mark recounts: “He [Jesus] saw James, the *son* of Zebedee, and his brother John; and they *were* in the ship, mending the nets. And He called them at once; and leaving their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, they followed Him” (Mark 1:19-20).

The gospel accounts do not give any indication as to why Zebedee was not a

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practicing priest at the time that Jesus called James and John. However, several reasons can be surmised: 1) When the priests were not serving at the temple, they were probably free to pursue a secondary occupation as did Josephus who was a soldier. This might be the reason why Zebedee was a fisherman when he was not performing his priestly duties in Jerusalem. The priests served at the temple in courses, or shifts, at certain set times during the year (Luke 1:5). They would serve for eight days during the first six months of the year and for eight days in the last six months of the year. Josephus, the noted Jewish historian, was a priest of the first course or shift. He confirmed that the priestly courses established by King David were still functioning in New Testament times. Josephus recorded, "He [King David] divided them also into courses ... and he found [or established] these priests, twenty-four courses ... and he ordained that one course should minister to God eight days, from sabbath to sabbath ... and this partition hath remained to this day" (*Ant.*, 7:14:7). Only at the three festival seasons did all the priests serve at the temple. 2) Zebedee might have retired from the priesthood and become a fisherman. 3) Possibly Zebedee chose to be a fisherman, instead of a practicing priest, because of the corruption of the priesthood in Jerusalem. King Herod had taken upon himself to appoint the high priest, rather than allowing the proper succession of the high priest to take place as appointed by the Law (Josephus, *Antiquities*, book 20:1:3). Thus, as Herod's appointee, the office of high priest was more of a political position rather than an office of service to the people for God.

Regardless of the reasons why Zebedee was not a practicing priest, from the evidence there is little doubt that John was of the priestly lineage of Aaron. Although Polycrates wrote that the apostle John "became a sacrificing priest, wearing the mitre," it is highly doubtful that John was a practicing priest. However, before Jesus called John, he might have had training in the priestly duties. This could account for the high priest knowing John (John 18:16), and for Polycrates' comments. Furthermore, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, John would have fully understood that the animal sacrifices and rituals performed at the temple were of no spiritual value. Therefore, it can be concluded that when Jesus called John, he was not a practicing priest, but a fisherman. **The fact that John was of Aaronic priestly descent was a primary reason that Jesus chose him to make the final canonization of the New Testament.**

John Was an Eyewitness of the Vision of Transfiguration: Jesus informed all the apostles that some would "not taste of death until they had seen the Son of man coming in His Kingdom" (Matt. 16:28). Then six days later, Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him up on a high mountain, and they saw the vision of the transfiguration. John was the only apostle still alive who had seen the vision of the transfiguration and had heard the voice of God the Father, and this gave him special authority from Jesus Christ to canonize the New Testament.

As the last remaining apostle to see the vision of the transfiguration, John would see the coming of Jesus Christ in the visions that he received and recorded in the Book of Revelation. These special visions are prophecies of the events leading up to the Day of the Lord and the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. So, in final analysis, John was the only apostle to see the coming of Christ twice—once in the vision of the transfiguration and the second time in the visions recorded in the book of Revelation.

Jesus Prophesied that John Would Write the Book of Revelation: The apostle John recorded that Jesus prophesied he would remain alive until "the coming" of the Lord. This occurred some time during the forty days that the apostles saw Jesus after His resurrection, but before He ascended to heaven. On one of those occasions, Jesus came to some of the apostles and ate with them by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-14). When they had finished eating, Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him. After Peter answered Jesus that he did, indeed, love Him, Jesus commanded Peter three times to feed

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His sheep and lambs (verses 15-17). Next, Jesus revealed to Peter how he would die—apparently signifying his future martyrdom by crucifixion (verse 18).

Upon hearing this, Peter was not satisfied that Jesus had prophesied how he would die; he also wanted to know what John's fate would be: "Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, what *shall happen* to this one?' Jesus said to him, 'If I desire that he remain alive until I come, what *is it* to you? You follow Me.' Then this saying went out among the brethren, that that disciple would not die. However, Jesus did not say to him that he would not die; but, 'If I desire that he remain alive until I come, what *is it* to you?' " (John 21:21-23).

While John did not remain alive until the literal return of Jesus Christ, which is yet to occur in the future, he did live an extremely long life. He may have died about 100 years old, between 99-100 AD. However, from the time of the deaths of Paul and Peter (67-68 AD), because of this saying by Jesus, many believers thought that Christ would return before John died. Jesus' prophecy actually found fulfillment when John saw His return in the visions while he was in exile on the island of Patmos. In these visions, Jesus spoke directly to John, instructing him to write what he had seen (Rev. 1:11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12; 3:1, 7, 14; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5). What John wrote became the book of Revelation—the capstone—the crowning glory of the Bible.

As such, the apostle John of the lineage of Aaron was uniquely qualified by God the Father and Jesus Christ to complete the official final canonization of the books of the New Testament—the most magnificent book in the world. When this task was finished, the New Testament could then be added to the Old Testament; thus, the full revelation of God to mankind was completed by the disciple whom Jesus loved—the apostle John.

Parallels Between Canonization of the Old and New Testaments

There are parallels between Ezra's canonization of the Old Testament and John's canonization of the New Testament: God used the same pattern of canonization for the New Testament that He had used for the canonization of the Old Testament. This pattern reveals the inspiration of God the Father and Jesus Christ, thus, demonstrating that the New Testament was the work of God and not man.

The Priestly Line: As stated previously, God used Ezra to canonize the Old Testament. Ezra was a priest of God of the house of Aaron, the great grandson of Hilkiah, who was high priest during the reign of Josiah (624-593 BC) before the Babylonian captivity (Ezra 7:1; II Chron. 34:14-15). After the seventy-years captivity in Babylon, Ezra lead several hundred priests and Levites and people to Jerusalem: "This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a **ready scribe in the law of Moses**, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him....**For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.** Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto **Ezra the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel**" (Ezra 7:6, 10-11).

History records that God used Ezra, the priest, to finish writing and canonizing the Old Testament. In the same way, He used the apostle John, a descendant of the priestly line, to finish writing and canonizing the New Testament.

The Helpers of Ezra and the Helpers of John: When Ezra canonized the Old Testament, he had the "Great Assembly" of 120 priests and Levites to assist him in finalizing and editing the books. In like manner, the apostle John also had helpers who as-

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sisted him in editing and finalizing his Gospel and epistles for canonization and in setting the final order of the New Testament books.

Martin commented on those assistants as follows: “John did not create the New Testament on his own. He had helpers. If one will read the writings of John carefully, these assistants can be recognized, and they played a very important part in the overall canonization. References to them are found from time to time cropping up within the contexts of John’s compositions. The elders who helped John were very important....Many of them were eyewitnesses to the teachings of Jesus in Judaea and they also saw Him alive after His resurrection from the dead. They were part of those 500 people still alive in A.D. 55 whom Paul said were witnesses to Christ’s resurrected body (I Corinthians 15:6). This means that they were certainly *Jewish Christians*” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, p. 398).

Martin is quite correct in his analysis of the apostle John’s helpers. However, it is more probable that the eyewitnesses who helped John were of the original 120 disciples (Acts 1:15), rather than from the 500 of whom Paul wrote. Also, there is very little doubt that within this group of 120, there were several other apostles who were still living, and they helped John. Some traditions mention that the apostles Phillip and Andrew were included among the “elders” that were with John. Martin commented, “It can be almost certain that they *were all Jews*, and that they later lived near John [close to the city of Ephesus] when he was performing his job of canonizing the New Testament. These men were those that could be called *Elders* that helped John in the canonization.

“Papias (around A.D. 110) makes an interesting comment about the *Elders* who were the disciples of John and who succeeded him. Since Papias [Irenaeus wrote that Papias had personally heard John and was a disciple of Polycarp] was in contact with these *Elders* and was interested in their testimonies concerning the early truths taught by Christ and the apostles, his comments are valuable. Note what he said. ‘But I shall not hesitate also to put down for you along with my interpretations whatsoever things I have at any time *learned from the Elders* and carefully remembered, guaranteeing their truth. For I did not, like the multitude, take pleasure in those that speak much, but in those that speak the truth; not in those that relate strange commandments, but in those that deliver the commandments given by the Lord to faith and springing from the truth itself. If, then, anyone came who had been a follower *of the Elders*, he questioned him in regard to the words *of the Elders*, what Andrew or what Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the disciples of the Lord, and what things Ariston and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord say. For I did not think that what was to be gotten *from the books* would profit me as much as what came from the living and abiding voice’ [Eusebius, *History of the Church*, bk. 3.39:2]. This account makes it clear that the apostles were dead by the time Papias made this remark about A.D. 110. But, there was still a body of *Elders* who had firsthand knowledge of what many of the apostles had taught” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, pp. 404-405).

Internal Evidence of John’s Helpers—the “We” Sections: The evidence of John’s helpers is found in the “we” passages or sections in John’s Gospel and epistles. Undoubtedly, these were some of the final edits that were added to complete these books. An obvious edit is found in John 21:24, where there is a sudden injection of a “we” passage: “This is the disciple [John] who testifies concerning these things and *who* wrote these things; and **WE know that his testimony is true.**” (John 21:24). It is obvious that John was writing of himself, “this is the disciple,” but, suddenly, the next phrase shifts to the third person plural “we.” Apparently, the elders, the helpers of John, added their testimony to verify that what John had written was true. Because of their added stamp of

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approval, the final expanded Gospel of John would be fully accepted by the churches of God.

Additional “we” passages become very obvious when the Epistle of First John is further examined. The opening verses of the first chapter convey that the remaining original apostles were alive and assisting John when he finished writing his epistle. This supports the tradition that Phillip and Andrew were with John at this time. John wrote: “That which was from *the* beginning, that which **WE have heard, that which WE have seen with OUR own eyes, that which WE observed for OURselves and OUR own hands handled**, [the apostles handled Jesus Christ after He had been resurrected and showed Himself alive (Luke 24:36-43)] **concerning the Word of life**; (And the life was manifested, and **WE have seen, and are bearing witness, and are reporting to you the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us**;) That which **WE have seen** and have heard **WE are reporting to you**, in order that you also may have **fellowship with us** [the apostles]; and truly the fellowship—indeed, our fellowship—is with the Father and with His own Son, Jesus Christ. **These things WE are also writing to you**, so that your joy may be completely full. And this is the message that **WE have heard from Him** and are declaring to you: that God is light, and there is no darkness at all in Him” (I John 1:1-5). The remaining verses in Chapter One that have a collective “we” appear to shift from John and his helpers to their readers.

When Chapter Two is examined, additional evidence of an earlier writing of the first epistle of John can be found. In this chapter, the apostle John writes in the first person singular. Perhaps this section is John’s original version of this epistle before the elders were with him. The contrast between the first chapter and the second chapter is most striking: 1. My little children, **I am writing** these things to you ... 7. Brethren, **I am not writing** a new commandment to you ... 8. On the other hand, **I am writing** a new commandment to you ... 12. **I am writing to you** ... 13. **I am writing** to you, fathers ... **I am writing** to you, young men ... **I am writing** to you, little children ... 14. **I wrote to you**, fathers, because you have known Him Who *is* from *the* beginning ... **I wrote** to you, young men ...” When John writes “we” in the rest of the epistle, it is apparent that he is including himself with those he is writing to. A final “we” passage is found in I John 4:14.

Martin wrote extensively of the “we” passages found in John’s writing, commenting on the short epistle of III John: “John began to speak to a man called Gaius in the first person singular: ‘**I pray** that in all things you may be prospering and having good health’ (verse 2). Then we find a long string of ‘**I rejoiced**’ (verse 3), ‘**I am thankful**’ (verse 4), ‘**I wrote**’ (verse 9), and ‘**I will call to remembrance**’ (verse 10). But then, and out of the blue, John introduces a plural intrusion into the text. In this book it says: ‘in fact, **WE are also bearing witness**, and *you know* that the witness **WE give is true** (verse 12). Then immediately the context of Third John returns to: ‘**I had** many things to write you, yet **I do not wish to go on writing you** with ink and pen. But **I am hoping to see you directly** (verses 13, 14)’ ” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, p. 399, bold emphasis added). It is clear that the words in verse 12 show the same pattern of multiple testimony that is found at the end of the Gospel of John (21:24).

Additional Internal Evidence of John’s Final Edits: As previously noted, the initial writing of the Gospel of John was probably completed by 42 AD. However, from the internal evidence, it is obvious that John added many details later. An example of John’s editing in his Gospel is evident in John 20, where the ending of this chapter appears to be the natural finish to the original version. This chapter ends: “Now then, Jesus did many other miracles in *the* presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book. But these have been written, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, you may have life through His name” (John 20:30-31).

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If an "Amen" were put after verse 31, it would have indeed ended the book. Perhaps, that is where John finished his gospel when he first wrote it. John must have added chapter 21 when his helpers were with him and they added their testimony: "And we know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24). This affirmation of truth must have included all the other edits in John's writings as well.

Evidence of later editing can again be seen in the prologue of the Gospel of John. These edits reflect the later revelation of the "mystery of godliness" (I Tim 3:16) that Jesus Christ had given to the apostles in 63 AD. It was not until this time that they fully understood Jesus Christ was indeed "God manifested in the flesh," and He was none other than the Creator God, the LORD God of the Old Testament. John wrote in Chapter Four of his first epistle that Jesus Christ had indeed come in the flesh: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this *test* you *can* know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in *the* flesh is from God. And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not from God. And this is the *spirit* of antichrist, which you heard *was* to come, and even now it is already in the world" (I John 4:1-3).

In his Gospel, John expanded on what he had written in Chapter Four of his first epistle: "**In *the* beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** He was in *the* beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and not even one *thing* that was created came into being without Him. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men ... **And the Word became flesh,** and tabernacled among us (and **we ourselves beheld His glory,** *the* glory as of *the* only begotten with *the* Father), full of grace and truth ... The true light was that which enlightens everyone who comes into the world. He was in the world, and **the world came into being through Him,** but the world did not know Him ... And of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; *but* the grace and the truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; **the only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father,** He has declared *Him*" (John 1:1-4, 9-10, 14, 16-18).

These verses reveal that Jesus Christ was the Word, and the Word was God. The Word was none other than the one Who had created all things. The Word, Who was God, was with God the Father before He was made flesh and came to the earth. Verse 18 states, "the only begotten Son, **Who is in the bosom of the Father.**" This statement informs us that John knew at the time he wrote his Gospel that Jesus was in the bosom of the Father in heaven.

John's original opening to his Gospel probably began with the account of John the Baptist, as did the Gospel of Mark. In the verses that pertain to John the Baptist, one can detect what must have been the apostle John's original opening to his Gospel: "There was a man sent by God, whose name *was* John. He came for a witness, that he might testify concerning the light, so that through him all might believe. He was not the light, but *came* that he might testify concerning the light ... John testified concerning Him, and proclaimed, saying, 'This was He of Whom I said, "He Who comes after me has precedence over me, because He was before me." ' ... And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' Then he *freely* admitted, and did not deny, but declared, 'I am not the Christ.' And they asked him, 'Then who *are* you? Are you Elijah?' And he said, 'I am not.' *Then they asked,* 'Are you the Prophet?' And he answered, 'No.' Therefore, they said to him, 'Who are you? What do you say about yourself so that we may give an answer to those who sent us?' He said, 'I *am* a voice crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of *the* Lord," as Isaiah the prophet said.' Now those who had been sent belonged to *the*

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sect of the Pharisees” (John 1:6-8, 15, 19-24). When the differences between what might have been John’s original opening and his completed version are compared, the later additions made by John become quite apparent and give a completeness and finality to his gospel.

There are other edits in the Gospel of John that are quite detectable. In the beginning of the Gospel of John, there is an insertion of a “we” passage. The KJV translators apparently realized that this “we” comment was a later addition to the text and set it off in parentheses: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and **WE beheld His glory**, *the glory as of the only begotten with the Father*), full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, KJV). The insertion of this “we” passage set off by parentheses is clearly what John’s helpers, the elders, added as their testimony. It is similar to the “we” insertions of I John 1:1-4 previously noted.

Martin commented about the elders who were assisting John and the apparent insertions that bear their added testimony in his final canonization: “The fact is, there appear to be a number of editorial remarks in John’s Gospel, either in relation to the “WE sections” or distinct from them. The King James Version shows some of them by placing their occurrences within parentheses. For example, John 3:13 states: ‘And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven (*even the Son of man which is in heaven*).’ Obviously, the italicized words represent a later editorial remark because Christ was certainly on earth when he uttered the first part of the verse, but only after his resurrection was he actually *in heaven*. There is John 4:23. Christ said to the Samaritan woman: ‘But the hour cometh, *and now is*, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.’ Christ was telling her that the Temple in Jerusalem was no longer important, but at the time Christ mentioned his teaching to the Samaritan woman the Temple *was still* the proper site for assembly. But the editors (at the time the Gospel was canonized) put in the reference ‘*and now is*’ to show that what Christ had predicted had now come true. Another is John 5:25. ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming (*and now is*) when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.’ The italicized words are a later insertion which could only have been stating the truth after the resurrection of Lazarus and those who were made alive after Christ’s resurrection (John 11:1-46); Matthew 27:52, 53)...There is also John 17:3. Jesus was talking and said: ‘And this is life eternal, that they may know thee the only true God (*and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent*).’ And lastly, let us note John 19:35: ‘And he that saw it bare record (*and his record is true and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe*)’ ” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, pp. 402-403).

Two Additional Important Edits by John and His Helpers: As noted, the edits that John and his helpers made to his books are vital. These edits reveal that John and the elders finalized and sealed the New Testament in a detailed and systematic manner. Such edits and additions also reveal that during their final canonization process they must have scrutinized every book of the New Testament word for word. There are two additional edits that are generally overlooked but again show the hand of John and his helpers, who actually heard Jesus speak these words. These edits were probably added to the texts in 96-99 AD and were intended to give the reader a warning that Jesus’ prophecy concerning “the abomination of desolation” had not yet occurred. The insertion of these parenthetical statements to the words of Jesus’ prophecies occur in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be proclaimed in all the world for a witness to all the nations; and then shall the end come. Therefore, when you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (**the one who reads, let him understand**), then let those who are in Judea flee into the mountains” (Matt. 24:14-16). The parallel account in Mark reads: “And you shall be hated by all *men* for My name’s sake; but the one who

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endures to *the* end, that one shall be saved. Now when you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it should not *stand* (**let the one who reads understand**), then let those *who are* in Judea flee into the mountains” (Mark 13:13-14).

It is quite apparent that the parenthetical statements in Matthew, “(the one who reads, let him understand)”; and likewise in Mark, “(let the one who reads understand),” were not spoken by Jesus at the time He was speaking to his disciples. Clearly, these are later editorial comments added by John and his helpers when they were finalizing the New Testament. The reason these statements were edited into the text was because John and his helpers fully understood that when the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple occurred in 70 AD, “the abomination of desolation” had not occurred.

In addition, in the book of Revelation John records a vision God gave him concerning the city of Jerusalem and the temple. John wrote: “Then *the angel* gave me a measuring rod like a staff, saying, ‘**Arise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those who worship in it. But leave out the court that is within the temple area**, and do not measure it because it has been given *up* to the Gentiles; and they shall trample upon the holy city *for* forty-two months’ ” (Rev. 11:1-2). Since the temple was still lying in ruins at the time the apostles were finalizing the text, they knew there had to be a time in the future when the city and temple would be rebuilt, fulfilling this prophecy. Moreover, when they were canonizing the New Testament in 96-99 AD, there was no sign that the temple was going to be rebuilt.

When John and his helpers were in the process of canonizing the books of the New Testament, they undoubtedly realized that the apostle Paul’s prophecy in II Thessalonians Two gave a detailed description of the abomination of desolation: “Now we beseech you, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken in mind, nor be troubled—neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by epistle, as if from us, *saying* that the day of Christ is present. Do not let anyone deceive you by any means because *that day will not* come unless the apostasy shall come first, and **the man of sin shall be revealed—the son of perdition, the one who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is an object of worship; so that he comes into the temple of God and sits down as God, proclaiming that he himself is God**” (II Thes. 2:1-4).

When they read what Paul had written, they also fully understood that this prophecy of the abomination of desolation had not been fulfilled in 70 AD. Although the city and temple were destroyed as Jesus had prophesied, “no man of sin, the son of perdition” had gone “into the temple of God proclaiming himself to be God.” Therefore, Jesus and Paul’s prophecies would have to occur in the distant future. While they understood that the abomination of desolation was to be a future event, they had no idea as to when it would be fulfilled. However, later in Jesus’ prophecy, He emphatically declared, “The heaven and the earth shall pass away, but My words shall never pass away” (Matt. 24:35). Not only did John and his helpers have the Gospels of Matthew and Mark before them as they edited the books of the New Testament, but they had personally heard Jesus speak these words. Therefore, they knew that this prophecy would be fulfilled exactly as Jesus had predicted. Since there was no evidence that it would happen in the near future, they added the statements “(the one who reads, let him understand)” and “(let the one who reads understand).” This way future generations would know that the return of Jesus Christ would not take place until the temple would be rebuilt. Only then could the prophecy of the abomination of desolation be fulfilled.

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The Book of Revelation Proves That John Canonized the New Testament

The book of Revelation is, perhaps, the most unique book in the entire Bible—Old Testament and New Testament. It is the capstone and crowning glory of the Word of God. Not only is it the last book in the New Testament, but also it is the last book in the entire Bible. The opening verses of the book of Revelation reveal that the apostle John was the one to whom Jesus Christ had given the visions of Revelation. John was commanded by Jesus to write everything that he saw, for a witness both to the Church and to the world. John wrote: “*The* revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him, to show to His servants the things that *are* ordained to come to pass shortly; and **He made it known, having sent it by His angel to His servant John; who gave witness to the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, and all the things he saw.** Blessed *is* the one who reads, and those who hear the words of this prophecy and who keep the things *that are* written therein; for the time *is* at hand” (Rev. 1:1-3).

The book of Revelation bears witness: 1) “to the Word of God,” meaning that the Revelation of Jesus Christ substantiates the entire Word of God—Old Testament and New Testament. 2) “to the testimony of Jesus Christ,” which is contained in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The testimony of Jesus Christ reveals that Jesus Christ is the Son of God—God manifested in the flesh; and that He was the lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world for the sins of the world. 3) and “all the things he saw,” which means all the recorded visions of the entire book of Revelation.

This final witness that Jesus gave to the apostle John, the book of Revelation, is actually a fulfillment of the command that Jesus gave to the apostles when they began their ministry. At the end of the Gospel of Luke and the beginning of the book of Acts it is recorded, Jesus said, “According as it is written, it was necessary for the Christ to suffer, and to rise from *the* dead the third day. **And in His name, repentance and remission of sins should be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. For you are witnesses of these things**” (Luke 24:44-48). Jesus again repeated this command as Luke recorded: “You shall be My witnesses, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto *the* ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

To this day, the true believers and ministers of Jesus Christ, who preach and proclaim the Word of God, continuously proclaim the witness of Jesus Christ through the writings of the apostles.

The completeness of the Word of God becomes very evident when one studies the book of Revelation. It is fitting that it is the last book in the New Testament and Bible. The book of Revelation ties together the beginning in Genesis with the ending in Revelation. Jesus Christ made this clear when He began giving His visions to John: “**‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the Ending,’** says the Lord, ‘Who is, and Who was, and Who *is* to come—the Almighty.’ I, John, who *am* also your brother and joint partaker in the tribulation and in the kingdom and endurance of Jesus Christ, was on the island that *is* called Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in *the* Spirit on the day of the Lord; and I heard a loud voice like a trumpet behind me, saying, **‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last’**” (Rev. 1:8-9).

Since the book of Revelation is the capstone and crowning glory of the Word of God, it is fitting that nearly every verse in this profound book should have direct or indirect reference to every other book in the Bible. One has only to look at the multitude of cross references to the book of Revelation in margins of virtually any Bible to understand that this is true. Toward the end of Revelation, the theme of “the beginning and ending”

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is repeated: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea. And I, John, saw the holy city, *the* new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice from heaven say, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men [those men and women made perfect according to the plan of God]; and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people; and God Himself shall be with them *and be* their God. And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and *there* shall not be any more death, or sorrow, or crying; neither shall *there* be any more pain, because the former things have passed away.' And He Who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' And He said to me, '**Write, for these words are true and faithful.**' And He said to me, '**It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.** To the one who thirsts I will give freely of the fountain of the water of life. The one who overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son' " (Rev. 21:1-7). Thus, what God began in the Beginning, as recorded in Genesis, God will finish at the End, as recorded in the book of Revelation.

Warning Against Adding to or Diminishing from the Old Testament: In the Old Testament, God gave a stern warning to the children of Israel not to add to or take away from the written words that He had commanded Moses to write. Moses admonished the children of Israel: "And now, O Israel, hearken to the statutes and to the judgments which I teach you, in order to do them, so that you may live and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers gives *to* you. You shall not add to the word which I command you; neither shall you take away from it, so that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:1-2).

So important was the Word of God that God inspired Moses to warn the children of Israel a second time not to add to or diminish from it: "Be careful to observe and obey all these words which I command you, so that it may go well with you and with your children after you forever when you do that which is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God. When the LORD your God shall cut off the nations before you, where you go to possess them, and you take their place and dwell in their land, **Take heed to yourself that you do not become ensnared by following them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not ask about their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods that I may also do likewise?'** You shall not do so to the LORD your God, for every abomination to the LORD, which He hates, they have done to their gods; even their sons and their daughters they have burned in the fire to their gods. **Whatever thing that I command you, be careful to do it. You shall not add to it, nor take away from it**" (Deut. 12:28-32).

After the death of Moses, God admonished Joshua to have courage because He would fight for him and the children of Israel to cut off their enemies. Joshua was to lead Israel into the Promised Land with God's blessing and protection. However, after God had encouraged Joshua, He commanded him not to deviate from the words of the law that Moses had written: "Be strong and of good courage, for you shall divide for an inheritance to this people the land which I swore to their fathers to give it to them. **Only be strong and very courageous so that you may observe to do according to all the law which My servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may prosper wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate therein day and night, so that thou may observe to do according to all that is written in it,** for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success" (Joshua 1:6-8).

Again in the book of Proverbs, God inspired a written warning not to add to His words, "Every word of God *is* pure: He *is* a shield to those who put their trust in Him.

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Do not add to His words, lest He correct you and you be found a liar” (Prov. 30:5-6). So important is God’s Word that He has magnified His Word above His name (Psa. 138:2). Because the Bible is the Word of God, He expects those who have His Word to speak His Word faithfully. God has revealed that He will bless those who keep His Word and obey His commandments and will curse those who sin and transgress His laws and commandments (Deut. 28). Furthermore, God has made known His judgment against false prophets who twist and distort, add to or diminish from His Word. God says that they are stealing His Word. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God has pronounced His judgment against all false prophets: “ ‘The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream. And **he who has My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully**. What *is* the chaff to the wheat?’ says the LORD. ‘**Is not My Word like a fire?**’ says the LORD; ‘**and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?** Therefore, behold, **I am against the prophets, who steal My words each one from his neighbour**. Behold, I *am* against the prophets who use their tongues and say, “He says,” *when I did not say*. Behold, I *am* against those who prophesy false dreams and tell them, and cause My people to go astray by their lies and by their wantonness. Yet I did not send them nor command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all,’ ” says the LORD” (Jer. 23:28-32).

God has warned that anyone, especially a minister, preacher and priest, who perverts His words will receive His judgment likened to a fire and a hammer. The whole legacy of the children of Israel and Judah is that they continually perverted God’s Word, transgressed His laws and commandments, followed false prophets and worshipped false gods. As a result, they received His stern judgment.

Warning Against Traditions That Reject God’s Commandments: As previously noted, Jesus Christ made it absolutely clear that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. Matthew recorded Jesus’ words: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until the heaven and the earth shall pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the Law until everything has been fulfilled. Therefore, whoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever shall practice and teach *them*, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:17-19).

Jesus also proclaimed that mankind was to live by every word of God: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of *the* mouth of God’ ” (Matt. 4:4; see also Luke 4:4, Deut. 8:3).

However, the scribes and Pharisees corrupted the Way of the Lord and devised their own traditions, which nullified and rejected the Word of God. Jesus soundly corrected them and condemned their traditions. Mark recorded one of Jesus’ encounters with the Pharisees and scribes concerning their religious traditions: And He answered *and* said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you hypocrites, as it is written, “This people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from Me.” But in vain do they worship Me, teaching *for* doctrine the commandments of men. **For leaving the commandment of God, you hold fast the tradition of men, such as** the washing of pots and cups; and you practice many other things like *this*.” Then He said to them, ‘**Full well do you reject the commandment of God, so that you may observe your own tradition ... nullifying the authority of the Word of God by your tradition which you have passed down; and you practice many traditions such as this’ ”** (Mark 7:6-13).

In the days leading up to His crucifixion, Jesus intensified His condemnation of the hypocritical practices of the Pharisees and scribes. The entire chapter of Matthew 23 records Jesus’ scathing denunciation and condemnation. As the Lord God manifested in

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the flesh, Jesus' authority in correcting them is without parallel! His excoriating words against those who perverted the Word of God and substituted their own traditions and teachings for the commandments of God is documented. Jesus also warned them that if they did not repent, they would be destroyed: "Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures, "*The Stone that the builders rejected, this has become the head of the corner. This was from the Lord, and it is wonderful in our eyes*"? Because of this, I say to you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and it shall be given to a nation *that produces the fruits of it. And the one who falls on this Stone shall be broken; but on whomever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*' Now after hearing His parables, the chief priests and the Pharisees knew that He was speaking about them" (Matt. 21:42-45).

True to Jesus' warnings, God did destroy the temple and Jerusalem, and sent the Jews into their second captivity. History records that from the time of the destruction of the first temple by the Babylonians in 586 BC to the destruction of the second temple by the Romans in 70 AD, they were disbursed throughout the entire world because they rejected the Word of God.

Warning Against Adding to or Diminishing from the New Testament: In the New Testament, God has intensified the penalty for rejecting His Word. Jesus said that anyone who rejected Jesus Christ's words would be subject to the final judgment of God—the second death in the lake of fire (Rev. 21:8). Jesus left no doubt about the consequences for rejecting His words; His words will judge each person at the last day. The apostle John wrote: "**The one who rejects Me and does not receive My words has one who judges him; the word which I have spoken, that shall judge him in the last day.** For I have not spoken from Myself; but the Father, Who sent Me, gave Me commandment Himself, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life. Therefore, whatever I speak, I speak exactly as the Father has told Me" (John 12:48-50).

In his second epistle, the apostle Peter wrote of the absolute certainty of the "inspiration" of the Scriptures of God. He called the Scriptures of the New Testament "the confirmed prophetic Word" because they were the direct personal teachings of Jesus Christ to His disciples. Moreover, through the power of the Holy Spirit, He moved His apostles to write the New Testament. Peter penned these words: "We also possess the confirmed prophetic Word to which you do well to pay attention, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and *the morning star* arises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture originated as anyone's own *private* interpretation; because prophecy was not brought at any time by human will, but the holy men of God spoke as they were moved by *the Holy Spirit*" (II Pet. 1:19-21).

Beginning in the Second Chapter of this epistle, Peter wrote of false teachers, who would introduce damnable heresies and bring swift destruction upon themselves: "But there were also false prophets among the people, as indeed there will be false teachers among you, **who will stealthily introduce destructive heresies, personally denying the Lord who bought them, and bringing swift destruction upon themselves.** And many people will follow *as authoritative* their destructive ways; *and* because of them, the way of the truth will be blasphemed" (II Pet. 2:1-2).

In the same way that Peter called the New Testament Scriptures "the confirmed prophetic word," Paul likewise referred to his epistles as "the prophetic scriptures," proving that the New Testament is nothing less than the inspired Word of God: "Now to Him who has the power to establish you, according to **my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ**, according to *the revelation of the mystery* that in past ages has been kept secret; but **now is made manifest, and by the prophetic scriptures, according to the commandment of the eternal God**, has been made known to all the nations unto *the*

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obedience of faith” (Rom. 16:25-26).

The apostle Paul charged Timothy to preach the Word, and he also prophesied that after his death many people would no longer adhere to the truth of the Word of God. They would turn aside to fables and myths and exchange the truth of God for lies: “I charge you, therefore, in the sight of God, even the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is ready to judge *the* living and *the* dead at His appearing and His kingdom; **preach the Word!** Be urgent in season, out of season; convict, rebuke, encourage, with all patience and doctrine. **For there shall come a time when they will not tolerate sound doctrine;** but according to their own lusts they shall accumulate to themselves *a great number of* teachers, having ears itching *to hear what satisfies their cravings;* and **they shall turn away their own ears from the truth; and they shall be turned aside unto myths**” (II Tim. 4:1-4).

History shows that is precisely what happened! True to Paul’s prophecy, after the death of the apostles, the apostasy in Rome and Egypt gained momentum. An apostate church arose that exchanged the true teachings of Jesus Christ and His apostles for “Christianized” pagan myths and doctrines of demons. Jesse Lyman Hurlbut wrote of the church that emerged after the apostolic era: “We name the last generation of the first century, from 68 to 100 A. D. ‘The Age of Shadows,’ partly because the gloom of persecution was over the church; but more especially because of all periods in the history, it is one about which we know the least. We have no longer the clear light of the Book of Acts to guide us; and no author of that age has filled the blank in the history. We would like to read of the later work by such helpers of St. Paul as Timothy, Apollos and Titus, but all these and St. Paul’s other friends drop out of the record at his death. For fifty years after St. Paul’s life a curtain hangs over the church, through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises, about 120 A. D. with the writings of the earliest church-fathers, we find a church in many aspects very different from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul” (Hurlbut, *The Story of the Christian Church*, p. 41).

True to the prophecies that John recorded in the book of Revelation, a great false “Christ-professing” religious system arose in Rome (Rev. 13:11-18 and 17:1-17). Its leaders did not heed the warnings of God in the Bible about perverting the truth of His God-breathed Word; neither did they pay attention to John’s final written warning not to add to or take away from the Word of God. They even changed the commandments of God.

The Apostle John Recorded Jesus’ Final Warning: The apostle John was especially selected and set aside by Jesus Christ to finish writing and canonizing the New Testament. At the end of the book of Revelation, Jesus Christ inspired John to summarize the requirements for salvation and to reveal the fate of sinners. John wrote what Jesus had spoken to him: “And behold, I am coming quickly; and My reward is with Me, to render to each one according as his work shall be. **I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.**”

“Blessed are those who keep His commandments, that they may have the right to eat of the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. But excluded *are* dogs, and sorcerers, and fornicators, and murderers, and idolaters, and everyone who loves and devises a lie. I, Jesus, sent My angel to testify these things to you in the churches” (Rev. 22:12-16).

Jesus Christ ended the book of Revelation with a profound warning against adding to or taking away from the words of the Bible: “For I jointly testify [Jesus Christ and John] to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, **that if anyone adds to these things, God shall add to him the plagues that are written in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the book of life,** and from the holy city, and from the things that are

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written in this book” (Rev. 22:18-19). This warning is the same kind of warning that God gave in the Old Testament. Therefore, when the warnings of the Old Testament are combined with this warning in the book of Revelation, compiled with the other warnings in the New Testament, there is no doubt that Jesus Christ intended Revelation’s warning to be the final warning that applies to the whole Bible.

Thus, with this final warning, the apostle John finished the canonization of the New Testament—the most magnificent book in the world.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A TRIBUTE TO WILLIAM TYNDALE The “Father” of All English Bibles

“ ‘The history of our English Bible begins with the work of Tyndale and not with that of Wycliffe,’ says Dr. Westcott in his *History of the English Bible*, p. 316, and it is true that one of the most striking features of the work of Tyndale is its independence” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, vol. 3, p. 898).

The history of the modern English Bible rightly begins with William Tyndale, rather than Wycliffe, because he was the first man to translate both the New Testament from the Byzantine Greek and the Old Testament from the Hebrew text into English. So profound was his work that all subsequent English Bibles stand in the shadow of his translations. Noted Tyndale biographer David Daniell wrote: “William Tyndale (1494-1536) was the first person to translate the Bible into English from its original Greek and Hebrew and the first to print the Bible in English, which he did in exile. Giving the laity access to the word of God outraged the clerical establishment in England: he was condemned, hunted, and eventually murdered. However, his masterly translation formed the basis of all English bibles—including the ‘King James Bible’, many of whose finest passages were taken unchanged, though unacknowledged, from Tyndale’s work” (Daniell, *William Tyndale a Biography*, dust jacket sleeve).

Daniell commented that “Tyndale grew up to be a remarkable linguist, noted in Europe for knowing seven languages as well as English, like a native.” Apparently, at age twelve Tyndale attended Oxford University in 1506. Afterwards he attended Cambridge University from 1517-1520, where he and other fellow students were converted to Christ after studying the Greek New Testament—Erasmus’ 1516 Edition (Ibid., pp. 14, 27, 49).

From the evidence of his life and work, there is no doubt that God the Father and Jesus Christ had specially set apart, prepared, called and converted William Tyndale for the task of translating the Holy Scriptures into English. He was led by the Holy Spirit and by a holy passion to translate the Word of God so that common men and women—even the plowboy—could have the Holy Scriptures of God to read and study for themselves.

Daniell wrote of a key turning point in Tyndale’s life, revealing his unflinching resoluteness to make the Word of God available in English for the ordinary man: “Until it was available in English as a whole book, the humble layman and woman had even less chance of knowing what the New Testament said: it might have been in Chinese for all the sense the Latin made, though some scattered New Testament phrases circulated in proverbs in English, and a few might have seen parts of the Lollard Bible [Wycliffe’s translation in Old English from Jerome’s Latin Vulgate in 1380]. Tyndale saw that what was needed was a New Testament in English from the Greek. Richard Webb’s narrative concludes, famously: ‘And soon after Master Tyndall happened to be in the company of a learned man, and in communing and disputing with him drove him to that issue that the learned man said, **we were better be without God’s law than the pope’s**: Maister Tyndall hearing that, answered him, **I defy the Pope and all his laws**, and said, **if God spare my life ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough, shall know more of the scripture than thou dost.**’

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“The words echo Erasmus in his *Paraclesis*. Tyndale’s problem was finding a high enough authority [in the church] to work under, to exempt him from the fatal charge of heresy under the Constitutions of Oxford [of 1410—which strictly outlawed the Scriptures in English under penalty of death]” (Ibid., pp. 78-79, bold emphasis and bracketed comments added).

Thus, William Tyndale was single-minded and undaunted in his purpose of translating and printing the Bible in English. His calling had many parallels to the apostle Paul’s calling: Just as Jesus Christ had called Saul, who was a top leader in Judaism, out of the spiritual depths and darkness of Judaism to become the apostle Paul, in like manner, Jesus Christ called William Tyndale, who was a priest, out of the darkest spiritual bondage of Roman Catholicism. In the same way that Paul rejected Judaism, preached and wrote the Gospel of Jesus Christ and was martyred by the Roman authorities of his time, William Tyndale rejected Catholicism and was despised by the corrupt, intolerant religious establishment of his time and eventually martyred. As Paul was chased by the Jewish religious authorities from city to city and country to country, likewise while in exile, Tyndale was chased throughout Germany and the Low Countries. He was hated, rejected, and hounded as a common criminal by the Roman Catholic religious and civil authorities. Finally, he was betrayed by Henry Phillips in Antwerp and was arrested, tried and convicted as a heretic. He was strangled to death and burned at the stake in 1536 because he dared to defy the pope and the Roman Catholic Church authorities by translating and printing the first English New and Old Testaments from the original language.

So thorough and powerful was Tyndale’s knowledge of English that his translation of the Scriptures set the foundation for today’s modern English. It was not Shakespeare who established the power and beauty of the English language—it was William Tyndale, who lived two generations before Shakespeare (1564-1616). Shakespeare, by God’s grace, built on the foundation that Tyndale had established through His translation of the English Bible.

Tyndale Sets Out to Translate the New Testament: In the summer of 1523, six years after Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the Wittenberg Catholic church door, Tyndale went to London to seek permission from the bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall, to translate the Scriptures. Because Lutheranism—which rejected Roman Catholic traditional practices and the authority of the pope—had begun to influence England, Tunstall denied Tyndale permission to translate the New Testament into English (Ibid., p. 83). Therefore, Tyndale exiled himself to Europe, leaving England in April 1524. He first went to Hamburg, Germany, then to Wittenberg where he met Martin Luther, and then on to Cologne in 1525, where he not only translated the Greek New Testament into English but also proceeded to have it printed. However, in the midst of printing the Gospel of Matthew, he had to flee the authorities who were seeking to arrest him (Ibid., pp. 108-109). Tyndale and his helper William Roye escaped and went to Worms, where Tyndale first published his translation of the New Testament in 1526.

Daniell wrote extensively of Tyndale’s 1526 New Testament: “The small city of Worms, with its Roman Cathedral and eight-hundred-year-old history of meetings of the Diet, so recently linked with Luther’s name, was hospitable to ‘the English apostates’ who had fled from Cologne. Tyndale, assisted by Roye, successfully completed the printing of the translation of the whole New Testament at the press of Peter Schoeffer, probably in 1526. It was a simple, small, octavo (roughly hymn-book size), without prologue or marginal notes, with simple chapter-breaks, printed in exceptionally clear Bastard type (*Schwabacher*) with small illuminations at the start of each book. It is little else but seven hundred pages of text. Of a print-run said to be either three or six thousand, two copies survive, one imperfect. Neither has a title-page, but we know from Tyndale’s re-

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marks in the preface to *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* that he did not put his name to the book, following the counsel of Christ to do ‘good deeds secretly and to be content with the conscience of well doing’. The date on a title page might have been late 1525, or more probably 1526. Copies were brought to England and were already being sold openly, for example by ‘Master Garrett, Curate of All Hallows in Honey Lane London’ by early February 1526.

“It was Tyndale’s revision of this New Testament eight years later in 1534 which not only went forward into later Renaissance Bibles, most notably the Authorized Version [King James Version], but is still dominant, even today. Yet the 1534 Testament, important as it is, is a revision. We must not lose sight of the extraordinary quality of that first printed New Testament in English, as it was welcomed and read in London and southern and eastern England. Here was suddenly the complete New Testament, all twenty-seven books, the four gospels, the Acts, the twenty-one Epistles and Revelation, in very portable form, clearly printed. Here was the original Greek, in English. The bare text itself was complete, and without an iota of allegorising commentary. Everything that had been originally written was here, to be read freely without addition or subtraction. The only constraints were the implicit command to read it, and in reading to relate one text to another, even one book to another, so that the high theology of Paul in the Epistles could be understood in relation to the words and work of Jesus in the Gospels.

“It was the Greek in English, the common *koine* of the first-century Mediterranean in the common spoken language of England. Phrase after phrase after phrase came from English life as lived in the 1520s by English people: ‘A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid ... No man can serve two masters ... Ask and it shall be given you. Seek and ye shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you ... and the floods came, and the winds blew ... as sheep having no shepherd ... give unto one of these little ones to drink, a cup of cold water only ...’ These phrases, here taken at random from the earlier chapters of Matthew, would have been on the sheets of the abandoned Cologne edition and possibly were therefore already familiar to some readers. But here were no longer scattered fragments, but the whole thing, the precious first-century documents in which the Christian faith was first formulated, in modern English.

“What still strikes a late-twentieth-century reader is how modern it is. There are occasional words that have been lost to common use since 1526, like ‘noosell’ for nurture, or have changed their meaning, like ‘naughty’ for valueless, or ‘haunt’ for remain. But both vocabulary and syntax are not only recognisable today, they still belong to today’s language. This seems to be for two reasons. First, Tyndale goes for clear, everyday, spoken, English. Because it was largely the current language of his day, it remains largely a current language of ours. He is not out to make antiquarian effects, as the Authorised Version did, for partly political reasons. The result is that Tyndale usually feels more modern than the Authorised Version, though that revision was made nearly a century later. The second reason is that Tyndale makes a language for the Word of God, which speaks to the heart: ‘And all that heard it wondered, at those things which were told them of the shepherds. But Mary kept all those sayings, and pondered them in her heart.’ (Luke 2) ... Such phrases have gone deep into the consciousness of English-speakers ever since” (Daniell, *William Tyndale a Biography*, pp. 134-135).

Tyndale’s Translations and Writings Smuggled into England: Because of a unique secret alliance between Tyndale and his English merchant friends in Europe and London, thousands of Tyndale’s English New Testaments, and later Old Testaments, as well as his other books, were smuggled into England from Germany and Antwerp. They were cleverly hidden in flour sacks and bales of cloth. “Smuggling was efficient,” wrote Daniell. “Attempts at controls, forbidding people to receive books on a long list headed by the works of Tyndale, clearly did not work, for all the evidence points to there being

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increasing numbers of readers of contraband books year by year—in spite of punishments for people caught. Bales of cloth (the commonest method) would be secretly marked, containing well-hidden flat printed sheets. ‘Barrels or casks, apparently full of wine or oil, might secrete water-tight boxes holding dangerous propaganda. Cargoes of wheat or grain, hides or skins were not always made up exclusively of these items. Flour sacks often held carefully packed contraband books strategically placed in the meal. Chests with false sides or bases, hidden receptacles or secret compartments brought over documents ...’” (Ibid., p. 186).

England was literally flooded with Tyndale’s outlawed Bibles. In order to stamp out this heretical book, Roman Catholic authorities, under orders from Bishop Tunstell, burned thousands of his New Testaments and books. However, thousands more were smuggled in and sold on the black market, in spite of the fact that those who owned or read them were subject to torture or death by burning or beheading. History does not tell us how many English men and women were punished, tortured, burned at the stake or beheaded for possessing Tyndale’s outlawed Bible—or for professing Jesus Christ as Savior by faith and rejecting Roman Catholicism. Perhaps, one may glean an understanding of the horrific human carnage during the bloody struggle of the Reformation from John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments of Martyrs*, in three volumes. He chronicled the deaths of many thousands of martyrs of Jesus Christ throughout Europe, including England.

In addition to translating the New Testament and Old Testament, Tyndale wrote other books that explained and expounded upon the Scriptures. These are: *Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, 1527; *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 1528; Preface to the Five Books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, 1530; Prologues: *To the Prophet Jonas*; *The Gospels*: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; Prologues to the following Epistles: Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, I and II Peter, the three Epistles of John and Jude.

Tyndale was hoping for repentance and reformation in England. He realized that whenever God sent a prophet to preach repentance and the people did not repent, God’s hand of punishment was soon to follow. If they repented, as the people of Nineveh did when Jonah preached to them, God’s blessing would be upon the nation. In Tyndale’s prologue *To the Prophet Jonas*, one can see his hope that the people of England would also repent: “And so Christ came again after the resurrection in his Spirit, and preached repentance unto them [the Jewish nation] by the mouth of his apostles and disciples, and with miracles of the Holy Ghost. And all that repented not perished shortly after, and the rest [were] carried away captive into all quarters of the world for an example, as ye see unto this day.

“And in like manner, since the world began, wheresoever repentance was offered and not received, there God took cruel vengeance immediately: as ye see in the flood of Noe, in the overthrowing of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all the country about; and as ye see of Egypt, of the Amorites, Canaanites, and afterward of the very Israelites; and then at the last, of the Jews, too, and of the Assyrians and Babylonians; and so throughout all the empires of the world.

“Gildas [516-570] preached repentance unto the old Britains that inhabited England. They repented not, and therefore God sent in their enemies upon them on every side, and destroyed them up, and gave the land unto other nations. And great vengeance hath been taken in that land for sin since that time.

“Wickliffe [1320-1384] preached repentance unto our fathers not long since. They repented not; for their hearts were indurate [hardened], and their eyes blinded with their own pope-holy righteousness, wherewith they had made their souls gay [light-

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hearted] against the receiving again of the wicked spirit, that bringeth seven worse than himself with him, and maketh the latter end worse than the beginning: for in open sins there is hope of repentance, but in holy hypocrisy none at all. But what followed? They slew their true and right king, and set up three wrong kings [in] a row, under which all the noble blood was slain up, and half the commons thereto, what in France, and what with their own sword, in fighting among themselves for the crown; and the cities and towns decayed, and the land brought half into a wilderness, in respect of that it was before.

“And now Christ, to preach repentance, is risen yet once again out of his sepulchre, in which the pope had buried him, and kept him down with his pillars and poleaxes, and all disguisings of hypocrisy, with guile, wiles and falsehood, and with the sword of all princes, which he had blinded with his false merchandise. And as I doubt not of the ensamples that are past, so am I sure that great wrath [against England] will follow, except repentance turn it back again, and cease it” (Parker Society, *Prologue to the Prophet Jonas*, pp. 458-459).

In the end, Tyndale’s works, especially his New Testament and *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, ignited the fires of reformation in England and changed the course of history, for many did repent and turn to God. As a result, after Henry VIII read *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, given to him by his second wife, Anne Boleyn, he saw the Scriptural rationale that enabled him to take action and sever all ties with Rome. In 1534, he renounced the Pope and Rome’s control of the church in England and established himself as head of the Church of England, for he had previously received, in 1521, the title of *Defender of the Faith* from Pope Leo X.

In Langer’s *An Encyclopedia of World History* we find this summary: “1534. ACT OF SUPREMACY, appointing the king and his successors *Protector and only Supreme Head of the Church and Clergy of England*. This may be taken as the decisive beginning of the English Reformation. The break with Rome had political and personal origins; at first there were no real differences in dogma and liturgy. Refusal to take the oath of supremacy was made high treason, under which vote Sir Thomas More was condemned and beheaded (1535)” (p. 370).

The separation from Rome was the first step that eventually led Henry VIII to order the English Bible to be placed in all churches in England, printed under license from the king in 1537. The English Bible was actually Tyndale’s translation of the Old and New Testaments renamed the “Thomas Matthews” Bible. In 1538, also by the king’s authority, the “Great Bible,” published by Miles Coverdale, another one of Tyndale’s associates, was printed and placed in all the churches in England.

Tyndale’s Old Testament Translation: Not only did Tyndale translate the New Testament from Greek into English, but he translated the Old Testament as well. It is evident that he translated one-half of the Old Testament—the Pentateuch, Joshua to II Chronicles and Jonah. These subsequently were published. John Rogers, who assisted Tyndale while he was in prison awaiting execution, put together the rest of the Old Testament books that Tyndale had translated before he was arrested. Concerning Tyndale’s Old Testament and the Thomas Matthew Bible, Daniell wrote: “William Tyndale’s Old Testament translations laid the foundation of our English Bible. They have been even more hidden from general view than his work on the New Testament....Tyndale published his first translations from Hebrew into English—the earliest ever from that language into this—in 1530, when he printed his Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. He gave us our Bible language: the words and rhythms, for example, of the story of the Creation and the Fall—‘Let there be light and there was light’, ‘male and female created he them’, ‘who told thee that thou wast naked?’ and much else. **Two generations later, in 1611, the scholars and divines who made the Authorised Version**

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under King James were happy to use what Tyndale had given them, though without acknowledgement. Very many great passages from the Pentateuch come to us from Tyndale” (Daniell, *Introduction to Tyndale’s Old Testament*, p. ix, bold emphasis added).

In his biography of Tyndale, Daniell wrote of Tyndale’s Pentateuch: “Some time in January 1530 there began to appear in England, smuggled in from Antwerp, copies of a well-made little book, again printed by Hoochstraten of Antwerp ... the title-page of which simply announced *The first book of Moses called Genesis*, and nothing more. The next page began a prologue with the words ‘W.T. To the Reader’; so there could be no doubt about its origins” (Daniell, *William Tyndale a Biography*, p. 283).

“These opening chapters of Genesis are the first translations—not just the first printed, but the first translations—from Hebrew into English. This needs to be emphasised. Not only was the Hebrew language only known in England in 1529 and 1530 by, at the most, a tiny handful of scholars in Oxford and Cambridge, and quite possibly by none; that there was a language called Hebrew at all, or that it had any connection whatsoever with the Bible, would have been news to most of the ordinary population. Religion was in Latin: the Mass was in Latin; all the other services, like baptism, were in Latin; everything the priest did was in Latin; the Psalms in the Mass were in Latin; the Bible-readings in the services, such as they were, were in Latin; the Bible, when visible, was a big Latin volume; some priests, and most laymen ... [understood] only a few words of Latin, if that. The Bible was thought of only by a very few as a whole and complete thing, referring throughout, backwards and forwards, not just to itself from Genesis to Revelation, but also from Creation to the end of history—an entity. Now here in 1530 was Genesis, from the Hebrew, in English, in a form that fitted a pocket” (Ibid., p. 287).

“Tyndale’s Hebrew work did not stop in 1530. He printed a second edition of his Pentateuch in 1534, with some revisions in Genesis. At the back of his 1534 New Testament are fifteen pages containing forty Old Testament passages, for use in services in church, and translated not from the Latin of the service-books but from the original Hebrew and from the Greek of the Apocrypha. They again mark the first appearance of portions of scripture, from the prophets, Proverbs and Song of Solomon, in English direct from the Hebrew. Moreover, where the Greek New Testament writers quote from the Old Testament, Tyndale in his 1534 version tends to translate from the original Hebrew rather than through the Greek....A thousand years before Tyndale, the Bible had existed in a fourth-century Latin version known latterly as the Vulgate, very much the property of the Church. In Tyndale’s time, to go behind the Latin to the scriptural Greek and Hebrew, and then **furthermore to seek to make those Bible texts available in portable volumes printed in English, so that anyone at all could have a copy and read it, was blasphemous and treasonable, punishable by torture or death or both**—until the King, Henry VIII, altered course for his own reasons, tragically soon after Tyndale’s martyrdom in 1536 [sic]” (Daniell, *Introduction to Tyndale’s Old Testament*, p. ix, bold emphasis added).

“Yet that volume [the Pentateuch] was less than half his Old Testament work. Two years after his execution in 1536 [sic] there appeared a thick folio Bible, also printed abroad, which announced itself as both ‘set forth with the King’s most gracious licence’ (marking a change in Henry VIII’s policy) and ‘truly and purely translated into English by Thomas Matthew’. Matthew is a cover name. The volume was in fact assembled by Tyndale’s close friend John Rogers, who later became the first Protestant martyr in England under Catholic Queen Mary. In his ‘Matthew’s’ Bible, Rogers reprinted the Pentateuch and all the New Testament directly from Tyndale. The section after the Pentateuch, from Joshua to 2 Chronicles, was also Tyndale’s work. For this assertion, there is, it has to be said, no direct evidence. Yet the strong likelihood, together

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with an overwhelming accumulation of internal effects, convinces both the general reader and the scholar that this is Tyndale—probably from his manuscripts, entrusted to Rogers at his death” (Ibid., pp. ix-x).

“For the Christian, Tyndale insisted, it is essential to be able to study the whole of the Hebrew Law in order to understand what Christ did with it.... Moreover, Tyndale discovered that Hebrew goes wonderfully into English—better than into Latin, and better even than Latin goes into English. All that he did in translating Hebrew rings with that discovery, which is very much his own, and one which only ignorance and prejudice have prevented the English nation from properly praising.

“Tyndale, and Tyndale alone (with his one or two occasional helpers in Antwerp like George Joye, or in Hamburg like Miles Coverdale, whose Hebrew was not more than basic, if that), was engaged in a full-scale work of translating Hebrew into English. His discovery of the happy linguistic marriage of the two languages, though not *quite* as important as Newton’s discovery of universal gravitation, was still of high significance for the history of western Christian theology, language and literature—a high claim, but not difficult to support, though the work on it has largely still to be done: the immense influence of Hebrew forms on the English language has not been properly recognised even now.... All Old Testament English versions descend from Tyndale; even of the books of the Old Testament which he did not reach. Miles Coverdale, who first gave us printed in English the second half of the Old Testament, had worked with Tyndale, and imitated him” (Daniell, *William Tyndale a Biography*, pp. 288-289).

Tyndale—Grace, Faith and Law

Today, Protestant theology is an odd mixture of grace and lawlessness. On the one hand, it claims the grace of God for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life, which is accepted, praised and loudly preached; on the other hand, it insists that Jesus came to abolish the law. The conclusion is that once one has been “saved,” he or she no longer needs to keep the laws and commandments of God except to love God in one’s heart. The result is a counterfeit warm, fuzzy, emotional gospel mostly devoid of any need to obey God’s commands or to understand the doctrines of Jesus Christ. Hence, the hallmark of Protestantism today is a lawless grace that is contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ and His apostles.

Had all of Tyndale’s writings been retained, published and taught, perhaps the course of Protestantism in England would have been much different, because he did not teach a lawless grace. In the beginning of the Reformation in England, Tyndale was perhaps the most powerful influence through his translations of the Old and New Testaments as well as his other writings. Yet, the clergy of England, for political reasons as well as jealousy, rejected his clear teachings on law and grace. As a result, when the Bible was finally allowed to be printed in English, beginning in 1537, only the Scriptures were printed. All of Tyndale’s other writings that revealed the clear scriptural truth about law and grace were excluded. None of Tyndale’s forwards to the reader, prologues to the Gospels and Epistles, or any of his marginal notes were allowed. Thus, an uninspired clergy, through faulty interpretations of the Scriptures, gradually developed a lawless grace.

Tyndale wrote about human nature, Satan, sin, law, grace, mercy, forgiveness and the love of God. He fully believed in keeping the laws and commandments of God “from the bottom ground of the heart.” Furthermore, he taught repentance toward God, justification of sin through the blood of Jesus Christ and salvation by faith, not by works.

In *A Pathway to the Holy Scripture* Tyndale wrote: “The fall of Adam hath made us heirs of the vengeance and wrath of God, and heirs of eternal damnation; and hath

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brought us into captivity and bondage under the devil. And the devil is our lord, and our ruler, our head, our governor, our prince, yea, and our god. And our will is locked and knit faster unto the will of the devil, than could an hundred thousand chains bind a man unto a post. Unto the devil's will consent we with all our hearts, with all our minds, with all our might, power, strength, will and lusts; [so that the law and will of the devil is written as well in our hearts as in our members, and we run headlong after the devil with full zeal, and the whole swing of all the power we have; as a stone cast up into the air cometh down naturally of his own self, with all the violence and swing of his own weight.] With what poison, deadly, and venomous hate hateth a man his enemy! With how great malice of mind, inwardly, do we slay and murder! With what violence and rage, yea, and with how fervent lust commit we advoutry [adultery], fornication, and such like uncleanness! With what pleasure and delectation, inwardly, serveth a glutton his belly! With what diligence deceive we! How busily seek we the things of this world! Whatsoever we do, think, or imagine, is abominable in the sight of God. [For we can refer nothing unto the honour of God; neither is his law, or will, written in our members or in our hearts: neither is there any more power in us to follow the will of God, than in a stone to ascend upward of his own self.] And [beside that,] we are as it were asleep in so deep blindness, that we can neither see nor feel what misery, thralldom, and wretchedness we are in, till Moses come and wake us, and publish the law. When we hear the law truly preached, how that we ought to love and honour God with all our strength and might, from the low bottom of the heart, [because he hath created us, and both heaven and earth for our sakes, and made us lord thereof;] and our neighbours (yea, our enemies) as ourselves, inwardly, from the ground of the heart, [because God hath made them after the likeness of his own image, and they are his sons as well as we, and Christ hath bought them with his blood, and made them heirs of everlasting life as well as us; and how we ought to] do whatsoever God biddeth, and abstain from whatsoever God forbiddeth, with all love and meekness, with a fervent and a burning lust [desire] from the center of the heart; then beginneth the conscience to rage against the law, and against God. No sea, be it ever so great a tempest, is so quiet. For it is not possible for a natural man to consent to the law, that it should be good, or that God should be righteous which maketh the law; [inasmuch as it is contrary unto his nature, and damneth him and all that he can do, and neither sheweth him where to fetch help, nor preacheth any mercy; but only setteth man at variance with God, (as witnesseth Paul, Rom. iv) and provoketh him and stirreth him to rail on God, and to blaspheme him as a cruel tyrant. For it is not possible for a man, till he be born [begotten] again [by of the Spirit of God], to think that God is righteous to make him of so poison a nature, either for his own pleasure or for the sin of another man, and to give him a law that is impossible for him to do, or to consent to;] his wit, reason, and will being so fast glued, yea, nailed and chained unto the will of the devil. Neither can any creature loose the bonds, save the blood of Christ [only].

“This is the captivity and bondage, whence Christ delivered us, redeemed and loosed us. His blood, his death, his patience in suffering rebukes and wrongs, his prayers and fastings, his meekness and fulfilling of the uttermost point of the law, appeased the wrath of God; brought the favour of God to us again; obtained that God should love us first, and be our Father, and that a merciful Father, that will consider our infirmities and weakness, and will give us his Spirit again (which was taken away in the fall of Adam) to rule, govern, and strength us, and to break the bonds of Satan, wherein we were so strait bound. When Christ is thuswise preached, and the promises rehearsed, which are contained in the prophets, in the psalms, and in divers places of the five books of Moses, [which preaching is called the Gospel or glad tidings;] then the hearts of them which are elect and chosen, begin to wax soft and melt at the bounteous mercy of God, and kindness shewed of Christ. For when the evangelion [the gospel] is preached, [upon repen-

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tance and baptism] the Spirit of God entereth into them which God hath ordained and appointed unto eternal life; and openeth their inward eyes, and worketh such belief in them. When the woful consciences feel and taste how sweet a thing the bitter death of Christ is, and how merciful and loving God is, through Christ's purchasing and merits; they begin to love again, and to consent to the law of God, how that it is good and ought so to be, and that God is righteous which made it; and desire to fulfil the law, even as a sick man desireth to be whole, and are an hungred and thirst after more righteousness, and after more strength, to fulfil the law more perfectly. And in all that they do, or omit and leave undone, they seek God's honour and his will with meekness, ever condemning the unperfectness of their deeds by the law.

“Now Christ standeth us in double stead; and us serveth, two manner wise. First, he is our Redeemer, Deliverer, Reconciler, Mediator, Intercessor, Advocate, Attorney, Solicitor, our Hope, Comfort, Shield, Protection, Defender, Strength, Health, Satisfaction and Salvation. His blood, his death, all that he ever did, is ours. And Christ himself, with all that he is or can do, is ours. His blood-shedding, and all that he did, doth me as good service as though I myself had done it. And God (as great as he is) is mine, with all that he hath, [as a husband is his wife's,] through Christ and his purchasing.

“Secondarily, after that we be overcome with love and kindness, and now seek to do the will of God (which is a Christian man's nature), then have we Christ an example to counterfeit; as saith Christ himself in John, ‘I have given you an example.’ And in another evangelist he saith, ‘He that will be great among you, shall be your servant and minister; as the Son of man came to minister, and not to be ministered unto.’ And Paul saith, ‘Counterfeit Christ’ ” (Parker Society, pp. 17-20).

Contrary to Protestant or Catholic theology, Tyndale correctly understood law and grace. He clearly discerned the difference between practicing vain works of human religious traditions and superstitions as opposed to keeping the commandments and laws of God from the heart. Moreover, he fully comprehended that justification of past sins comes only by deep personal repentance toward God and faith in the blood of Christ for forgiveness, followed by baptism. He understood that eternal life cannot come through any law; rather it is the gift of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In an era of gross superstition and spiritual ignorance, it is astounding that William Tyndale had such a deep and profound spiritual understanding of the Scriptures. It is evident that he was led by the Holy Spirit into the truth of the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Word of God.

W. T. unto the Reader—1534 Revised New Testament. The following selected excerpts are from Tyndale's forward to the reader as found in Daniell's modern spelling edition. These excerpts show that Tyndale never taught a lawless grace: “Moreover, because the kingdom of heaven, which is the scripture and word of God, may be so locked up, that he which readeth or heareth it, cannot understand it: as Christ testifieth how that the scribes and Pharisees had so shut it up (Matt. 23) and had taken away the key of knowledge (Luke 11) that their Jews [who followed the Pharisees] which thought themselves within, were yet so locked out, and are to this day that they can understand no sentence of the scripture unto their salvation, though they can rehearse the texts everywhere and dispute thereof as subtly as the popish doctors of the dunce's dark learning, which with their sophistry, served us, as the Pharisees did the Jews. Therefore (that I might be found faithful to my father and Lord in distributing unto my brethren and fellows of one faith, their due and necessary food: so dressing it and seasoning it, that the weak stomachs may receive it also, and be better for it, I thought it my duty (most dear reader), to warn thee before, and to shew thee the right way in [to understanding the Scriptures], and to give thee the true key to open it withal, and to arm thee against false prophets and malicious hypocrites, whose perpetual study is to leaven the scriptures with glosses, and

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there to lock it up where [instead] it should save thy soul, and to make us shoot at the wrong mark, to put our trust in those things that profit their bellies only and slay our souls.

“The right way: yea and the only way to understand the scripture unto our salvation, is, that we earnestly and above all thing, search for the profession of our baptism or covenants made between God and us....If ye shall forgive men their faults, your heavenly father shall forgive you: but and if ye shall not forgive men their faults, no more shall your father forgive you your faults. Here also by the virtue and strength of this covenant wherewith God of his mercy hath bound himself to us unworthy, may he that forgiveth his neighbour, be bold when he returneth and amendeth to believe and trust in God for remission of whatsoever he hath done amiss. And contrary-wise, he that will not forgive, cannot but despair of forgiveness in the end, and fear judgement without mercy.

“The general covenant wherein all other are comprehended and included, is this. **If we meek ourselves to God to keep all his laws**, after the example of Christ: then God hath bound himself unto us to keep and make good all the mercies promised in Christ, throughout all the scripture.

“**All the whole law** which was given to utter [to expose] our corrupt nature, **is comprehended in the ten commandments**. And the ten commandments are comprehended in these two: love God and thy neighbour. And he that loveth his neighbour in God and Christ, fulfilleth these two, and consequently the ten, and finally all the other ...” (David Daniell, *Tyndale’s New Testament, Modern Spelling*, W. T. Unto the Reader, pp. 3-4, bold emphasis and bracketed comments added).

“**Now if any man that submitteth not himself to keep the commandments, do think that he hath any faith in God: the same man’s faith is vain, worldly, damnable, devilish and plain presumption, as it is above said, and is no faith that can justify or be accepted before God**. And that is it that James meaneth in his Epistle. For how can a man believe saith Paul, without a preacher (Rom. 10). **Now read all the scripture and see where God sent any to preach mercy to any, save unto them only that repent and turn to God with all their hearts, to keep his commandments**. Unto the disobedient that will not turn, is threatened, wrath, vengeance and damnation, according to all the terrible curses and fearful examples of the Bible.

“Faith now in God the father through our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the covenants and appointment made between God and us, is our salvation ...” (Ibid., pp. 4-5).

“Also ye see that two things are required to begin a Christian man. The first is a steadfast faith and trust in almighty God, to obtain all the mercy that he hath promised us, through the deserving and merits of Christ’s blood only, without all respect to our own works. And the other is, that **we forsake evil and turn to God, to keep his laws and fight against ourselves and our corrupt nature perpetually**, that we may do the will of God every day better and better.

“This have I said (most dear reader) to warn thee, lest thou shouldest be deceived, and shouldest not only read the scripture in vain and to no profit, but also unto thy greater damnation. For the nature of God’s word is, that whosoever read it or hear it reasoned and disputed before him, it will begin immediately to make him every day better and better, till he be grown into a perfect man in the **knowledge of Christ and the love of the law of God**: or else make him worse and worse, till he be hardened that he openly resist the spirit of God, and then blaspheme, after the example of Pharaoh, Coza [Cora, Numbers 16], Abiram, Balaam, Judas, Simon Magus and such other” (Ibid., p. 5, bold emphasis added).

“Let us therefore that have now at this time our eyes opened again through the tender mercy of God, keep in mean [keep this in mind]. **Let us so put our trust in the**

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mercy of God through Christ, that we know it our duty to keep the law of God and to love our neighbours for their father's [God the Father's] sake which created them and for their Lord's sake which redeemed them, and bought them so dearly with his blood. Let us walk in the fear of God, and have our eyes open unto both parts of God's covenants, certified that **none shall be partaker of the mercy, save he that will fight against the flesh, to keep the law.** And let us arm ourselves with this remembrance, that as Christ's works justify from sin and set us the favour of God, **so our deeds through the working of the spirit of God, helps us to continue in the favour and grace, into which Christ hath brought us; and that we can no longer continue in favour and grace [other] than our hearts are to keep the law.**

“Furthermore concerning the law of God, this is the general conclusion, that the whole law, whether they be ceremonies, sacrifices, yea or sacraments either, or precepts of equity between man and man throughout all degrees of the world, all were given for our profit and necessity only, and not for any need that God hath of our keeping them, or that his joy is increased thereby or that the deed for the deed itself, doth please him. That is, all that God requireth of us when we be at one with him and do put our trust in him and love him, is that we love every man his neighbour to pity him and to have compassion on him in all his needs and to be merciful unto him. This to be even so, Christ testi-fieth (Matt. 7) saying: this is the law and the prophets” (Ibid., p. 7).

“**For only love and mercifulness understandeth the law, and else nothing. And he that hath not that written in his heart, shall never understand the law,** no: though all the angels of heaven went about to teach him. And he that hath that graven in his heart, shall not only understand the law but also shall do of his own inclination all that is required of the law....The gospel is glad tidings of mercy and grace and that our corrupt nature shall be healed again for Christ's sake and for the merits of his deservings only: **Yet on the condition that we will turn to God [in repentance], to learn to keep his laws spiritually,** that is to say, of love for his sake, and will also suffer [bring about] the curing of our infirmities [that is, the weaknesses of human nature]” (Ibid., p. 8, bold emphasis and bracketed comments added).

It is evident that Tyndale taught an active living faith, based on repentance, forgiveness and grace. In addition, he taught that Christians are to keep the commandments of God, to love God and neighbor from “the bottom ground of the heart.”

The Sabbath and Holy Days: Tyndale knew that living faith caused a Christian to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ and become more perfect day by day. Likewise, through translating the Scriptures, he himself was learning and growing in grace and knowledge. In his *Pathway Into the Holy Scripture*, there is evidence that perhaps he was beginning to understand the commands of God to keep the seventh day Sabbath, and the annual holy days. Tyndale mostly lived alone, because he was hiding from the authorities in order to do his work of translating; therefore, of necessity, if he kept the Sabbath and holy days, he had to keep them by himself.

The following excerpts from Tyndale's *Pathway Into the Holy Scripture* reveal his growing knowledge of the Sabbath and holy days. In this book he did not mention Sunday, as he did in *Obedience of a Christian Man*: “These things to know: first, the law; how that it is natural right, and equity; that we have but one God to put our hope and trust in, and him to love with all the heart, all the soul, and all our might and power, and **neither to move heart nor hand but at his commandment,** because he hath first created us of nought, and heaven and earth for our sakes; and afterwards when we had marred ourself through sin, he forgave us, and created us again, in the blood of his beloved Son:

“And that we have the name of our one God in fear and reverence; and that we dishonour it not, in swearing thereby about light trifles or vanity, or call it to record for

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the confirming of wickedness or falsehood, or aught that is to the dishonour of God, which is the breaking of his laws, or unto the hurt of our neighbour: and inasmuch as he is our Lord and God, and we his double possession, by creation and redemption, and therefore ought (as I said) neither to move heart or hand without his commandment; **it is right that we have needful holy days to come together, and learn his will, both the law which he will have us ruled by, and also the promises of mercy which he will have us trust unto;** and to give God thanks together for his mercy, and to commit our infirmities to him through our Saviour Jesus, and to reconcile ourselves unto him, and each to other, if aught be between brother and brother that requireth it. **And for this purpose and such like, as to visit the sick and needy, and redress peace and unity, were the holy days ordained only; and so far forth are they to be kept holy from all manner works that may be conveniently spared for the time,** till this be done [the observing of the holy day], and no further, but [after the holy day] then lawfully to work” (Parker Society, 1968, Tyndale, *Pathway Into the Holy Scripture*, pp. 24-25, bold emphasis and bracketed comments added).

“And even so he that trusteth in any thing, save in God only and in his Son Jesus Christ, keepeth no commandment at all, in the sight of God. For he that hath trust in any creature, whether in heaven or in earth, save in God and his Son Jesus, can see no cause to love God with all his heart ... neither to abstain from dishonouring his name, nor **to keep the holy day for the love of his doctrine,** nor to obey lovingly the rulers of this world; nor any cause to love his neighbour as himself, and to abstain from hurting him, where he may get profit by him, and save himself harmless. And in like wise, against this law, 'Love thy neighbor as thyself,' **I may obey no worldly power, to do aught at any man's commandment** unto the hurt of my neighbor that hath not deserved it, though he be a Turk:

“And to know how contrary this law is unto our nature, and how it is damnation not to have this law written in our hearts, though we never commit the deeds; and how there is no other means to be saved from this damnation, than through repentance toward the law, and faith in Christ's blood; which are the very inward baptism of our souls, and the washing and the dipping of our bodies in the water is the outward sign. The plunging of the body under the water signifieth that we repent and profess to fight against sin and lusts, and to kill them every day more and more, with the help of God, and our diligence in following the doctrine of Christ and the leading of his Spirit; and that we believe to be washed from our natural damnation in which we are born, and from all the wrath of the law, and from all the infirmities and weaknesses that remain in us after we have given our consent unto the law, and yielded ourself to be scholars thereof; and from all the imperfectness of all our deeds done with cold love, and from all actual sin which shall chance on us, while we enforce the contrary and ever fight there against, and hope to sin no more. **And thus repentance and faith begin at our baptism, and first professing the laws of God; and continue unto our lives' end, and grow as we grow in the Spirit: for the perfecter we be, the greater is our repentance, and the stronger our faith.**

“And thus, as the Spirit and doctrine on God's part, and repentance and faith on our part, beget us anew in Christ, even so they make us grow, and wax perfect, and save us unto the end; and never leave us until all sin be put off, and we clean purified, and full formed, and fashioned after the similitude and likeness of the perfectness of our Savior Jesus, whose gift all is” (Ibid., Society, pp. 26-27, bold emphasis added).

There is no question that Tyndale fully understood and taught that Christians are obligated to keep the laws and commandments of God, motivated by love. Yet, at the same time, they are to trust in God's grace and mercy through Jesus Christ for forgive-

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ness of sin, justification and eternal life. Tyndale also conveyed that those who love God and keep His commandments ought not keep any commandments of men that were contrary to the Word of God. Could it be that he was coming to an understanding that true Christians ought to keep the holy days of God, which had to include the weekly Sabbath—the seventh day of the week? Could it be, if Tyndale’s life had not been cut short by martyrdom, he would also have rejected the Christianized pagan Sunday and holidays of Roman Catholicism and would have embraced the biblical Sabbath and holy days?

Perhaps, if his teachings had not been deliberately ignored and rejected because of ecclesiastical politics and envy by secret Romanists and Latinists (who preferred the Latin text over the Greek text), English Protestantism would not have eventually succumbed to a lawless grace and would instead have accepted the full gospel of Jesus Christ, including the Sabbath and holy days of God. If Tyndale had lived and been free to teach and preach publicly, there is little doubt that the English Reformation would have resulted in a more complete separation from Roman Catholicism. Unfortunately, because the Church of England did not wholly accept the Scriptures as its final authority, it removed itself only a few steps away from Catholic doctrines.

The English Reformation caused Protestants to reject the following false doctrines: papal authority; that Peter was the first pope; the perpetual virginity of Mary; Mary as a mediator; celibacy of priests; confession of sins to a priest; transubstantiation of the bread and wine of the Eucharist; vows of chastity and celibacy, the rosary; prayers for the dead; prayers to saints; purgatory; and most idols. However, they, as well as most other Protestants in Europe, retained these major doctrines that are based solely on the authority of the pope of Rome: the Trinity; Sunday keeping; infant baptism; Christmas, Easter, and Halloween observance; and a hierarchical church government. Instead of a full return to the Word of God to follow the Scriptures only, “sola scriptura”—which was the original Protestant slogan—they fell short. As a result, Protestants merely substituted the orthodox Catholic doctrine of salvation by works and sacraments for salvation through a lawless grace. Both doctrines of salvation are unscriptural. (See: Appendix K, p. 790, *Rome’s Challenge to the Protestants*).

Tyndale Exposed and Rejected the Evils and Corruption of Roman Catholicism

Tyndale wrote extensively against the evils and corruption of Roman Catholicism using the most impassioned words possible. He denounced the foolish ceremonies of the Mass and the evil and fearful superstitions instilled in the people by the clergy in order to keep the people in bondage to Rome. “What helpeth it also that the priest, when he goeth to mass, disguiseth himself with a great part of the passion of Christ, and playeth out the rest under silence, with signs and proffers, with noddings, becking and mowing [gestures with the mouth], as it were jackanapes, when neither he himself, neither any man else wotteth [knows] what he meaneth? Not at all, verily; but hurteth, and that exceedingly; for as much as it not only destroyeth the faith, and quencheth the love that should be given unto the commandments, and maketh the people unthankful, in that it bringeth them into such superstition, that they think that they have done abundantly enough for God, yea, and deserved above measure, if they be present once in a day at such mumming; but also maketh the infidels to mock us and abhor us, in that they see nothing but such apes’ play among us, whereof no man can give a reason.

“All this cometh to pass to fulfill the prophecy which Christ prophesied; that there shall come in his name, which shall say that they themselves are Christ. That do verily the pope and our holy orders of religion. For they, under the name of Christ, preach themselves, their own word and their own traditions, and teach the people to be-

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lieve in them. The pope giveth pardons of his full power, of the treasure of the church, and of the merits of saints. The friars likewise make their benefactors (which only they call their brethren and sisters) partakers of their masses, fasting, watchings, prayings, and woolward goings. Yea, and when a novice of the Observants is professed, the father asketh him, Will ye keep the rules of holy St Francis? And he saith, Yea. Will ye so in deed? saith he. The other answereth, Yea, forsooth [in truth], father. Then saith the father, And I promise you again everlasting life. Oh blasphemy! If eternal life be due unto the pilled [bare] traditions of lousy friars, where is the testament become that God made unto us in Christ's blood? Christ saith, 'That there shall come pseudo-Christi'; which though I, for a consideration, have translated false Christs, keeping the Greek word, yet signifieth it in the English 'false anointed,' and ought so to be translated. 'There shall come,' saith Christ 'false anointed, and false prophets, and shall do miracles and wonders so greatly, that if it were possible, the very elect, or chosen, should be brought out of the way.' Compare the pope's doctrine unto the word of God, and thou shalt find that there hath been, and yet is, a great going out of the way; and that evil men and deceivers (as Paul prophesied in 2 Tim. iii.) have prevailed, and waxed worse and worse, beguiling other as they are beguiled themselves. Thou tremblest and quakest, saying, Shall God let us go so sore out of the right way? I answer, It is Christ that warneth us; which, as he knew all that should follow, so prophesied he before, and is a true prophet, and his prophecies must needs be fulfilled. (Parker Society, *Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to Different Portions of the Holy Scriptures by William Tyndale, Obedience of a Christian Man*, pp. 226-228).

The Protestant Reformers Show Antichrist Is the Pope of Rome: In his day, William Tyndale was one of many who were raising their voices against the Church of Rome and the abuses of the papacy. However, because he was translating and printing the Bible in English, he was their number one enemy. John Foxe's (Last Unabridged Edition) *Acts and Monuments of Martyrs*, vol. 1, pp. 887-893 published in 1684, reveals, without a doubt, that the pope is, in fact, Antichrist. The decrees given by various popes down through the centuries show how the Catholic Church sought to destroy the Reformation. The true freedom in Christ found in the Scriptures struck at the very heart of Rome's religious bondage and political power. The following excerpts of various papal decrees illustrate Rome's intent to establish supremacy:

"For asmuch as it standeth upon necessity of Salvation, for every human Creature to be subject to me the Pope of *Rome*, it shall be therefore requisite and necessary for all Men that will be saved, to learn and know the Dignity of my See and Excellency of my Domination, as here is set forth according to the truth and very words of mine own Laws, in style as followeth: First my Institution began in the *Old Testament*, and was consummate and finished in the *New*, in that my Priesthood was prefigured by *Aaron*; And other bishops under me were prefigured by the Sons of *Aaron*, that were under him. Neither is it to be thought that my Church of *Rome* hath been preferred by any General Council, but obtained the Primacy only by the Voice of the Gospel, and the mouth of the Saviour. And hath in it neither spot nor wrinkle, nor any such like thing. Wherefore as other Seats be all inferior to me, and as they cannot Absolve me: so have they no power to bind me or to stand against me, no more than the Axe hath power to stand or presume above him that heweth with it, or the Saw to presume above him that ruleth it. This is the Holy and Apostolick Mother-Church of all other Churches of Christ."

"Thus then forasmuch as the holy Church of *Rome* whereof I am Governor, is setup the whole World for a glass [a mirror] or example, reason would what thing soever the said Church determineth, or ordaineth; that to be received of all Men for a general and a perpetual rule for ever. Whereupon we see it now verified in this Church, that was fore-prophesied by *Jeremy* [Jeremiah], saying, *Behold, I have set thee up over Nations*

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and Kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to build and to plant &c. Whoso understandeth not the Prerogative of this my Priesthood, let him look up to the Firmament, where he may see two great Lights, the Sun and the Moon, one ruling over the day, the other over the night; So in the Firmament of the Universal Church, God hath set two great Dignities, the Authority of the Pope, and of the Emperor. Of which two, this our Dignity is so much more weightier, as we have the greater charge to give account to God for Kings of the Earth, and the Laws of Men. Wherefore [be] it known to you Emperors, which know it also right well, that you depend upon the judgment of us; we must not be brought and reduced to your will. For (as I said) look what difference there is betwixt the Sun and the Moon, so great is the power of the Pope ruling over the day, that is, over the Spirituality, above Emperors and Kings, ruling over the night; that is, over the Laity. Now seeing then the Earth is Seven times bigger than the Moon, and the Sun Eight times greater than the Earth; it followeth that the Popes Dignity fifty six times doth surmount the Estate of the Emperors.”

“... Now I say to all other Emperors, That they receiving of me their Approbation, Uncion, Consecration, and Crown Imperial, must not disdain to submit their heads under me, and Swear unto me their Allegiance....By reason whereof, seeing my power is not of Man, but of God, who by his Celestial Providence hath set me over his whole Universal Church, Master and Governor, it belongeth therefore to my office, to look upon every mortal sin of every Christian Man....Thus you see all must be judged by me, and I of no man. Yea, and though I Pope of *Rome*, by my negligence or evil demeanour, be found unprofitable, or hurtful, either to my self or others; yea, if I should draw with me innumerable Souls by heaps to Hell, yet may no mortal Man be so hardy, so bold, or so presumptuous to reprove me....Wherefore be it known to all Men, that my Church of *Rome* is Prince and Head of all Nations, the Mother of the Faith, the Foundation Cardinal, whereupon all Churches do depend, as the Door doth depend by the Hinges, the first of all other Seats, without all spot or blemish. Lady, Mistress and Instructor of all Churches, a glass [mirror] and a spectacle unto all Men, to be followed in all whatsoever she observeth....Against which Church of *Rome* whosoever speaketh any evil, is forthwith an Heretick, yea, a very Pagan, a Witch, and an Idolater or Infidel, [the Church] having fulness of power only in her own hands in ruling, deciding, absolving, condemning, casting out, or receiving in.”

“By the Authority of which Church of *Rome* all Synods and Decrees of Councils stand confirmed. And hath always full Authority in her hands to make new laws and Decrements; And to alter Statutes, Priviledges, Rights of Documents of Churches, to separate things joyned, and to joyn things separated upon right consideration, either in whole or in part, either personally or generally. Of the which Church of *Rome* I am head as a King is over his Judges, the Vicar of St. *Peter*, yea, not the Vicar of *Peter* properly, but the Vicar of Christ properly, an successor of Peter, Vicar of Jesus Christ, Rector of the Universal Church, director of the Lords Universal flock, Chief Magistrate of the whole World ... head and chief of the Apostolick Church, Universal Pope, and Diocesan in all places exempt, as well as every Bishop is in places not exempt, most mighty Priest ... a living Law in the Earth judged to have all Laws in the cleft of my Brest, bearing the room of no pure Man, being neither God nor Man, but the admiration of the World, and a middle thing betwixt both. Having both Swords in my power, both of the Spiritual and Temporal Jurisdiction, so far surmounting the Authority of the Emperor, that I of mine own power alone without a Council, have Authority to depose him, or to transfer his Kingdom, and to give a new Election...”

“What power then or potentate in all the World is comparable to me, who have Authority to bind and loose both in Heaven and Earth? That is, who have power both of Heavenly things, and also of Temporal things, To whom Emperors and Kings be more

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inferior, than Lead is inferior to Gold. For do you not see the necks of great Kings and Princes bend under our knees, yea and think themselves happy and well defended if they may kiss our hand....If we, I say, have Power to bind and loose in Heaven, how much more then is it to be thought, that we have Power in Earth to loose and to take away Empires, Kingdoms, Dukedoms, and what else soever mortal Men may have, and to give them where he will? And if we have authority over Angels, which be the Governours of Princes, what then may we do upon their inferiors and servants? And for that you shall not marvel that I say Angels be subject to us, you shall hear what my blessed Clerk *Antoninus* writeth of the matter, saying, That our power, of *Peter* and me is greater than Angels in four things; 1. In jurisdiction, 2. In administration of Sacraments, 3. In knowledge, 4. and in reward, &c....Briefly, who is able to comprehend the greatness of my Power and of my Seat? For by me only general Councils take their force and confirmation, and the interpretation of the said Councils, and of all other causes hard and doubtful, ought to be referred and stand to my determination. By me the Works of all Writers, whatsoever they be, either be reprov'd or allowed. Then how much more ought my Writings and Decrees to be preferred before all other? Insomuch that my Letters and Epistles Decretal be equivalent with the general Councils, And whereas God hath ordained all causes of Men to be judged by Men, he hath only reserved me, that is, the Pope of *Rome*, without all question of Men, unto his own judgment. And therefore where all other creatures be under their Judge, only I, which in Earth am the Judge of all, can be judged of none, either of Emperor, nor the whole Clergy, nor of Kings, nor of the People. For who hath the power to judge upon his Judge? This Judge am I, and that alone without any other resistance of any Council joyned to me. For I have Power upon Councils; Councils have no Power upon me....Only my Sentence and judgment must stand ... Wherefore it is manifest, and testified by the voice of Holy Bishops, that the Dignity of this my Seat is to be revered through the whole World, in that all the faithful submit themselves to it as to the head of the whole body.

“Wherefore as I condemn all such worthily which will not obey my Decrees, to be dispossessed of all their honour without restitution; So all they that believe not my Doctrine, or stand against the priviledge of the Church, especially the Church of *Rome*, I pronounce them Hereticks....Only I am subject to no Creature, no not to my self, except I lift ... to my ghostly Father submitting my self as a sinner, but not as Pope. So that my papal Majesty ever remains unpunished; Superior to all Men, whom all persons ought to obey, and follow, whom no Man must judge nor accuse of any Crime, either of Murder, Adultery, Simony, or such like; No man depose, but I my self; No man can Excommunicate me, yea though I Communicate with the Excommunicate, for no Canon bindeth me. Whom no Man must lie to, For he that lieth to me is a Church Robber, And who obeyeth not me is an Heretick, and an excommunicate Person ... I am greater than the Angels; and that in four things, as is afore declared; and have power to bind and loose in Heaven, and to give Heaven to them that fight in my Wars ... I have power to deliver out of Purgatory whom I please ...”

“And to the intent I would all Men to see and understand that I lack not witnesses mo[r]e besides these, if I list [desire] to bring them out, you shall hear the whole Quire of my divine Clergy brought out, with the full voice testifying in my behalf in their Books, Tractations, Distinctions, Title, Glosses, and Summaries, as by their own words here followeth. The Pope (say they) being the Vicar of Jesus Christ through the whole World, in the stead of the living God, hath that Dominion and Lordship which Christ here in Earth would not have, although he had it in *habitu*, and gave it to *Peter* in *Actu*, that is, the Universal jurisdiction both of Spiritual things, and also of Temporal, which double jurisdiction was signified by the two swords in the Gospel, and also by the offering of the wise men, who offered not only Incense, but also Gold, to signifie not only the spiritual

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Dominion, but also the Temporal to belong to Christ and to his Vicar. For as we read, *The Earth is the Lords and the fulness thereof*; as Christ saith, *All power is given to him both in Heaven and earth*: So it is to be affirmed *Inclusive*, that the Vicar of Christ hath Power on things Celestial, Terrestrial, and Infernal.... For I owe to Emperors no due Obedience that they can claim; but they owe to me as their Superior ... And as I am Superior to them, so am I Superior to all Laws, and free from all constitutions. Which am able of my self, and by my interpretation to prefer equity not being written before the Law written; having all Laws within the cleft of my Brest ...”

“All the Earth is my Diocess, and I the Ordinary of all men, having the Authority of the King of all Kings upon Subjects. I am all in all, and above all, so that God Himself and I the Vicar of God have both one Consistory, and I am able to do almost all that God can do ... It is said of me, that I have an heavenly Arbitrement, and therefore am able to change the nature of things ... and of nothing to make things to be; and of a Sentence that is nothing to make it stand in effect; In all things that I list [desire], my will to stand for reason. For I am able to the Law to dispense above the Law, and of Wrong to make Justice, in correcting Laws and changing them....Do you not see there manifestly expressed, how not Man, but God alone separateth that which the Bishop of *Rome* doth dissolve and separate? Wherefore if those things that I do be said to be done not of man, but of God; **What can you make me but God?** Again if Prelates of the Church be called and counted of *Constantinus* for gods, **I then being above all Prelates seem by this reason to be above all gods. Wherefore no marvel, if it be in my power to change time and times, to alter and abrogate Laws, to dispense with all things, yea with the Precepts of Christ**” (various excerpts from John Foxe’s (Last Unabridged Edition) *Acts and Monuments of Martyrs*, vol. 1, pp. 887-893, bold emphasis and brackets added).

Contrary to these presumptuous and blasphemous edicts of various popes, Tyndale fully understood that anyone who professed to represent God and His Word would believe, teach and follow God’s Word as led by the Holy Spirit. He vehemently opposed the pope, the Roman Catholic Church and their teachings as those of Antichrist. Tyndale wrote: “Antichrist of another manner hath sent forth his disciples, those ‘false anointed,’ of which Christ warneth us before, that they should come and shew miracles and wonders, even to bring the very elect out of the way, if it were possible. He [the pope] anointeth them after the manner of the Jews; and shaveth them and sheareth them after the manner of the heathen priests, which serve the idols. He sendeth them forth not with false oil only, but with false names also: for compare their names unto their deeds, and thou shalt find them false. He sendeth them forth, as Paul prophesied of them, with lying signs and wonders. What sign is the [true] anointing [of God]? That they be full of the Holy Ghost. Compare them to the signs of the Holy Ghost, which Paul reckoneth, and thou shalt find it a false sign. ‘A bishop must be faultless, the husband of one wife.’ Nay, saith the pope, the husband of no wife, but the holder of as many whores as he listeth [desires]. God commandeth all degrees [of church leaders], if they burn, and cannot live chaste, to marry. The pope saith, If thou burn, take a dispensation for a concubine, and put her away when thou art old; or else, as our lawyers say, *Si non caste, tamen caute*; that is, If ye live not chaste, see ye carry clean, and play the knave secretly. ‘Harborous’: yea, to whores and bawds [brothel keepers, perhaps including homosexuals] for a poor man shall as soon break his neck as his fast with them, but of the scraps and with the dogs, when dinner is done. ‘Apt to teach,’ and, as Peter saith, ‘ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that ye have, and that with meekness.’ Which thing is signified by the boots [symbolic of being shod with the preparation of preaching the gospel] which doctors of divinity are created in, because they should be ready always to go through thick and thin, to preach God’s word; and by the bishop’s two-horned mitre, which betokeneth the absolute and perfect knowledge that

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they ought to have in the new Testament and the old. Be not these false signs? For they beat only, and teach not. “Yea,” saith the pope, “If they will not be ruled, cite them to appear; and pose [interrogate] them sharply, what they hold [believe] of the pope’s power, of his pardons, of his bulls, of purgatory, of ceremonies, of confession and such like creatures of our most holy father’s. If they miss in any point, make heretics of them, and burn them. If they be of mine anointed, and bear my mark, disgrace them, (I would say disgraduate them,) and after the ensample of noble Antiochus (2 Macc. vii) pare [by scraping with sharp shards of glass] the crowns [heads] and the finger[nail]s of them, and torment them craftily, and for very pain make them deny the truth.” (“But now,” say our bishops, “because the truth is come too far abroad, and the lay-people begin to smell our wiles, it is best to oppress them with craft secretly, and to tame them in prison. Yea, let us find the means to have them in the King’s prison, and to make treason of such doctrine: yea, we must stir up some war, one where or another, to bring the people into another imagination.”) “If they be gentlemen, abjure them secretly. Curse them four times in the year. Make them afraid of every thing; and namely, to touch mine anointed; and make them to fear the sentence of the church, suspensions, excommunications and curses. Be they right or wrong, bear them in hand that they are to be feared yet. Preach me [the pope] and mine authority, and how terrible a thing my curse is, and how black it maketh their souls. On the holidays, which were ordained to preach God’s word, set up long ceremonies, long matins [midnight and daybreak prayers—with mandatory attendance], long masses, and long evening songs, and all in Latin, that they understand not; and roll them in darkness, that ye may lead them whither ye will. And lest such things should be too tedious, sing some, say some, pipe some, ring the bells, and lull them and rock them asleep [in spiritual darkness and keep them from God’s word].” And yet Paul (1 Cor. xiv.) forbiddeth to speak in the church or congregation, save in the tongue that all understand. For the layman thereby is not edified or taught. How shall the layman say Amen (saith Paul) to thy blessing or thanksgiving, when he wotteth [knows] not what thou sayest? He wotteth not whether thou bless or curse.”

“What then saith the pope? ‘What care I for Paul? I command by virtue of obedience, to read the gospel in Latin. Let them not pray but in Latin, no, not their *Pater noster*. If any be sick, go also and say them a gospel, and all in Latin: yea, to the very corn and fruits of the field, in the procession week, preach the gospel in Latin: make the people believe, that it shall grow the better.’ It is verily as good to preach it to a swine as to men, if thou preach it in a tongue they understand not. How shall I prepare myself to God’s commandments? How shall I be thankful to Christ for his kindness? How shall I believe the truth and promises which God hath sworn, while thou tellest them unto me in a tongue which I understand not?” (Parker Society, Tyndale, *Obedience of a Christian Man*, pp. 232-234).

Tyndale’s writings clearly show that he understood the Roman Catholic Church to be the “Great Whore” and “Antichrist” spoken of in Revelation 13 and 17. Both from history and the current events of his time, he understood that she was the apostate church, exercising great power to rule over kingdoms and to instigate wars in order to reign supreme over kings of the earth as depicted in Revelation. The false religious system she propagates appears as if it is Christian, but it is counterfeit, receiving its authority from the dragon—Satan the devil: “And I saw another beast rising out of the earth; and he had **two horns like a lamb, but spoke like a dragon**; and he exercises all the authority of the first beast before him; and he causes the earth and those who dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed” (Rev. 13:11-12).

In Revelation 17, a full description of this ruling world religious and political system is revealed: “And one of the seven angels who had the seven vials came and spoke with me, saying to me, ‘Come here; I will show you the judgment of the great whore

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who sits upon many waters; with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.’ Then he carried me away in *the* spirit to a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast that had seven heads and ten horns, full of names of blasphemy. And the woman *was* clothed in purple and scarlet, and *was* adorned with gold and pearls and precious stones; *and* she had a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominations and *the* filthiness of her fornication; and across her forehead a name *was* written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. **And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.** And after seeing her, I wondered with great amazement....Then he said to me, ‘The waters that you saw, where the whore sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. But the ten horns that you saw on the beast shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and shall burn her with fire; for God has put into their hearts to do His will, and to act with one accord, and to give their kingdom to the beast until the words of God have been fulfilled. **And the woman whom you saw is the great city that has royal power over the kings of the earth’**” (Rev. 17: 1-6, 15-18).

In the most resolute terms, Tyndale wrote of the political power and intrigue of the Roman Catholic Church, the only church in the world that is a sovereign state and has diplomatic relations with nearly every nation in the world: “Traitors they are to all creatures, and have a secret conspiracy between themselves. One craft they have, to make many kingdoms, large and small; and to nourish old titles or quarrels; that they may ever move them to war at their pleasure; and if much lands by chance fall to one man, ever to cast a bone in the way, that he shall never be able to obtain it, as we now see in the emperor. Why? For as long as the kings be small, if God would open the eyes of any to set a reformation in his realm, then should the pope interdict his land, and send other princes to conquer it....**They are not content to reign over king and emperor, and the whole earth; but challenge authority also in heaven and in hell. It is not enough for them to reign over all that are quick [living], but have created them a purgatory, to reign also over the dead, and to have one kingdom more that God himself hath**” (Parker Society, p. 235, bold emphasis added).

Little did Tyndale realize that what he wrote would turn out to be a prophecy for England. After Tyndale died, King Henry VIII severed all ties with Rome, furthering the reformation and establishing the Church of England as the state church. In turn, Rome did exactly as Tyndale prophesied and tried to destroy the English Reformation; and for a time under Catholic Queen “bloody” Mary (1553-1558), those loyal to the pope again seized political and religious power. They then instituted an intense inquisition against the reformers, whom they tortured and executed by burning or beheading. Afterwards, during Queen Elizabeth’s reign (1558-1603)—the daughter of Henry VIII by his second wife, Ann Boyelyn—the reformed Protestant Church of England was re-established. True to Tyndale’s words, Rome did indeed raise up the Catholic Empire of Spain in a final attempt to retake England and once again make it a Catholic realm. The Spanish assembled the largest army possible and the greatest fleet of war ships that the world had ever seen—the Spanish Armada. However, by the hand of God, the Spanish were totally defeated in this epoch battle with the destruction of their entire armada in 1588. After this providential intervention, England finally had rest from the foreign wars that were instigated by the papacy against her.

Toward the end of his book, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, Tyndale again exposed the hypocrisy of the apostate religious system of Roman Catholicism, comparing its teachings to the teachings of Scripture. He wrote: “Thus is God and Christ all in all; good and bad receive I of God. Them that are good I love, because they are in

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Christ; and the evil, to bring them to Christ. When any man doth well, I rejoyce that God is honoured; and when any man doth evil, I sorrow because God is dishonoured. Finally, inasmuch as God hath created all, and Christ bought all with his blood, therefore ought all to seek God and Christ in all, and else nothing.

“But contrariwise unto monks, friars, and to the other of our holy spirituality, the belly is all in all, and the cause of all love. Offer thereto; so art thou father, mother, sister and brother unto them. Offerest thou not? so know they thee not; thou art neither father, mother, sister, brother, nor any kin at all to them. ‘She is a sister of ours, he is a brother of ours,’ say they; ‘he is verily a good man, for he doth much for our religion: she is a mother of our convent; we be greatly bound to pray for them. And as for such and such, (say they,) we know not whether they be good or bad, or whether they be fish or flesh, for they do nought for us: we be more bound to pray for our benefactors (say they) and for them that give us, than for them that give us not.’ For them that give little are they little bound, and them they love little: and for them that give much they are much bound, and them they love much: and for them that give nought are the nought bound, and them they love not at all. And as they love thee when thou givest, so hate they thee when thou takest away from them, and run all under a stool, and curse thee as black as pitch. So is the cloister-love belly-love; cloister-prayer, belly-prayer; and cloister-brotherhood, belly-brotherhood” (Ibid., p. 299).

“The spirituality increaseth daily. More prelates, more priests, more monks, friars, canons, nuns, and more heretics, (I would say heremites,) with like draff [drawing in as with a fish net]. Set before thee the increase of St Francis’s disciples in so few years. Reckon how many thousands, yea, how many twenty thousands, not disciples only, but whole cloisters, are sprung out of hell of them in so little space. Pattering of prayers increaseth daily. Their service, as they call it, waxeth longer and longer, and the labour of their lips greater; new saints, new service, new feasts, and new holidays. What take all these away? Sin? Nay; for we see the contrary by experience, and that sin groweth as they grow. But they take away first God’s word, with faith, hope, peace, unity, love and concord; then house and land, rent and fee, tower and town, goods and cattle, and the very meat out of men’s mouths. All these live by purgatory. When other weep for their friends, they sing merrily; when other lose their friends, they get friends. The pope, with all his pardons, is grounded on purgatory. Priests, monks, canons, friars, with all other swarms of hypocrites, do but empty purgatory, and fill hell. Every mass, say they, delivereth one soul out of purgatory. If that were true, yea, if ten masses were enough for one soul, yet were the parish priests and curates of every parish sufficient to scour purgatory: all the other costly workmen might be well spared” (Ibid., pp. 302-303).

These extended quotes from Tyndale and Foxe convey the overwhelming oppression and tyranny of the popes and the Roman Catholic Church, which sparked the Reformation. History records the fierce, hellish inquisition unleashed by the lawless, antichrist popes and clergy in torturing, burning, killing, and warring against those persons and nations who opposed them. The bloodbath of millions of innocent people, who were slaughtered because they loved God more than their own lives, is a perpetual witness against such a lawless, satanic and ungodly system.

Tyndale’s Betrayal, Arrest and Execution: During the years 1525 to 1535, Tyndale was able to evade the authorities who were seeking to arrest and execute him. In the spring of 1535, Tyndale was living in Antwerp with Thomas Poyntz. Little did he realize that a traitor named Henry Phillips was stalking him at the behest and hire of the Catholic authorities of England and Brussels. Using stealth, cunning and charm, Phillips discovered where Tyndale was living. After befriending Tyndale, Phillips arranged to betray him and led the authorities to entrap and arrest him. Tyndale was arrested in May 1535, and authorities imprisoned him at Vilvorde Castle, near Brussels, where he remained until

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his death in October 1536. (Daniell, *Biography of William Tyndale*, pp. 361-384).

Of Tyndale's execution Daniell wrote: "... Early in the morning of one of the first days of October 1536, Tyndale was executed. Tradition has it that it was the sixth day of the month, and the Anglican Church has always commemorated his death on that day. We have only Foxe's meagre account of what happened. He was not burned alive, a fiercer punishment reserved for lesser creatures. He was strangled at the stake, and his dead body then burned: 'At last, after much reasoning, when no reason could serve, although he deserved no death, he was condemned by virtue of the emperor's decree ... and, upon the same, brought forth to the place of execution, was there tied to the stake, and then strangled first by the hangman, and afterwards with fire consumed, in the morning at the town of Vilvorde, A. D. 1536: crying thus at the stake with a fervent zeal, and a loud voice, "**Lord! Open the king of England's eyes**" ' ' ' (Daniell, *Biography of William Tyndale*, pp. 382-383).

From other records of similar executions, Daniell reconstructed the scene of Tyndale's last moments and death in vivid, gruesome details: "We have, however, eye-witness accounts of two such executions, one in Brussels and one in Louvain, recorded by Enzinas, a Spaniard arrested at Brussels seven years later for translating the New Testament into Spanish. From it we can reconstruct Tyndale's last hour. We are to imagine a large crowd held back by a barricade. In the middle of the circular space two great beams were raised in the form of a cross, with at the top iron chains, and a rope of hemp passing through holes in the beams. Brushwood, straw and logs were heaped ready near by. At a set time, the procurer-general and his colleagues on the commission came and sat on prepared chairs within the circle. The crowd parted to let the guards bring the prisoner through the barricade. As they crossed the space and approached the cross, the prisoner was allowed a moment to pray, with a last appeal for him to recant. Then he alone moved to the cross, and the guards busily knelt to tie his feet to the bottom of the cross. Around his neck the chain was passed, with the hempen noose hanging slack. The brushwood, straw and logs were packed close round the prisoner, making a sort of hut with him inside. A scattering of gunpowder was added. The executioner went to stand behind the cross, and looked across at the procurer-general. It is at this moment, most probably, that Tyndale cried, '**Lord, open the king of England's eyes.**' When the procurer-general was ready, he gave the signal, and the executioner quickly tightened the hempen noose, strangling Tyndale. The procurer-general watched Tyndale die, and as soon as he judged him dead, he reached for a lighted wax torch being held near him, took it and handed it to the executioner, who touched off the straw, brushwood and gunpowder" (Ibid., p. 383).

Thus, William Tyndale was martyred. He was executed for his "high crimes" against the pope and emperor, because he loved God the Father and Jesus Christ with all his heart, all his soul, all his mind and all his strength; and for translating the Bible from the Greek and Hebrew into English for the common man and woman—even the plow-boy.

How God Answered Tyndale's Prayer: Almost immediately God began to answer William Tyndale's prayer, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes." Unknown to Henry Phillips, Tyndale's "Judas," Tyndale had a friend named John Rogers who assisted him at the time he was betrayed and arrested. Apparently, John Rogers fell heir to all of Tyndale's notes and unpublished translations of the Old Testament. God inspired Rogers to finalize the rest of Tyndale's work on the Old Testament, making it ready for printing.

God continued His intervention to answer Tyndale's prayer in a profound way. He caused King Henry VIII to change his mind and allow the Bible to be printed in English. Daniell wrote of this extraordinary incident: "The King's policy about the Bible in

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English had been changing, and Cromwell had been able to persuade him to license this book. This volume is generally considered to be the primary version of our English Bible” (Ibid., p. 335).

Thus, in 1537, less than two years after Tyndale’s prayer, King Henry VIII authorized a license for the Thomas Matthew Bible to be printed. As Daniell recorded: “In 1537 there appeared a large folio Bible, well printed (probably in Antwerp) in double columns of black-letter, and on the title-page [it read as follows]: ‘The Bible, which is all the holy Scripture: In which are contained the Old and New Testaments truly and purely translated into English by Thomas Matthew Esq. Harken to ye heavens and thou earth give ear: For the Lord speaketh. MD XXXVII. Set forth with the King’s most gracious licence’ ” (Ibid., p. 334).

“ ‘Thomas Matthew’ with his good New Testament names, making this whole Bible, is a fiction, to hide Tyndale’s presence. That has been understood from the earliest time. John Bale in 1548, and Foxe in 1563 and 1570, refer to a Bible ‘under the name of Thomas Matthew’. Both authorities, further, say that the volume was in fact prepared by Tyndale’s friend John Rogers” (Daniell, p. 335). However, John Rogers made it clear that the translation of the entire Old Testament was, in fact, William Tyndale’s. On the last page of the Old Testament, Rogers intentionally placed the huge initials, “ ‘W.T.’... which may be intended to stand for the larger presence of William Tyndale in the whole” (Ibid., p. 335).

Unfortunately, as history records, John Rogers “returned to England, and early in [Catholic Queen “bloody”] Mary’s reign [1553-1558 and wife of Philip II of Spain] was in serious trouble for his reformer’s views. In that year [1553] he went to the stake, the first of the three hundred or so Protestants burned by Mary. Official documents about him refer to ‘John Rogers alias Matthew’ ” (Ibid., p. 335).

Tyndale’s Humility and His Mistakes

Tyndale’s godly humility shines forth in all of his writings. Without a doubt, through the Spirit of God, he understood the evil depths of human nature. Daily, he realized his own weaknesses and proclivity to sin and cried out to God the Father and Jesus Christ for His Spirit, His mercy, His forgiveness and His love. Likewise, his humble spirit was evident when he wrote about his translations of the Word of God. It was his consuming desire to translate the Word of God from the Greek and Hebrew into English as faithfully as possible so that their true meaning would be conveyed.

In spite of his best effort and work, he realized that he made some errors, mistakes, or misinterpretations. For this reason, Tyndale was always revising his translations as he grew in grace and knowledge. He was constantly refining and improving his work, endeavoring to present the pure words of God in English.

In the opening sentence “W. T. to the Reader,” which prefaced His Old Testament, Tyndale wrote, “When I had translated the new testament, I added an epistle unto the latter end, in which I desired them that were learned to amend if ought were found amiss” (Daniell, *Tyndale’s Old Testament, a Modern Spelling Edition*, p. 1). This appeal also occurs in a footnote at the beginning of *A Pathway Into the Holy Scripture*, where he wrote: “I have here translated, brethren and sisters, most dear and tenderly beloved in Christ, the New Testament, for your spiritual edifying, consolation, and solace; exhorting instantly and beseeching those that are better seen in the tongues than I, and that have better gifts of grace, to interpret the sense of the Scripture, and meaning of the Spirit, than I, to consider and ponder my labour, and that with the spirit of meekness; and if they perceive in any places that I have not attained the very sense of the tongue, or meaning of the scripture, or have not given the right English word, that they put to their hands to

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amend it, remembering that so is their duty to do. For we have not received the gifts of God for ourselves only, or for to hide them; but for to bestow them unto the honouring of GOD and Christ, and edifying the congregation, which is the body of Christ” (Parker Society, p. 7).

In his *Introduction to Tyndale’s New Testament, Modern Spelling*, Daniell notes some of Tyndale’s mistakes, showing the probable reasons for them: “Understanding the original Greek has become a more formidable task than Tyndale could have imagined, as modern translators are faced with so many families of textual variants and vast accumulations of knowledge of vocabulary, idiom and social and religious contexts. By modern standards, Tyndale got things wrong. He followed Erasmus’s Greek New Testament. Though he pursued true Greek manuscript readings like a modern scholar, Erasmus had occasional second thoughts between his first (1516) edition, and the four more he published (1519, 1522, 1527, 1535). Tyndale used the second and third editions, where Erasmus sometimes went astray, as in including (albeit in parentheses) the sentences in 1 John 5 that have no proper Greek authority. Tyndale misunderstood the Greek word *asson* (*asson*, ‘nearer’) in Acts 27, and also the Greek word for serving as a soldier in James 4, which he translates as ‘rain’ (i.e., reign). Also in James 4 Tyndale has ‘ye envy’, following a conjecture of Erasmus, instead of ‘ye kill’. Tyndale was, as any translator must be, an incessant reviser, and he restored in 1534 the doxology at the end of the Lord’s Prayer (omitted by the Vulgate) in Matthew 6; and so on.... More seriously, Tyndale can be accused, on occasion, of not properly appreciating the importance of Greek particles, the little words which give the language its character suppleness. Most seriously of all, he never satisfactorily solved the problem of what to do consistently with proper names—whether to transliterate or translate them. Thus in the gospels he can give ‘Sabot’ (Sabbath) and then, anachronistically, ‘Sunday’, leading to ‘Good Friday’, ‘Easter’, and in Acts, ‘Whitsunday’, leaving him wide open to all those attacks on him as ‘homely’ and rather comic. Today it seems an unfortunate decision to have followed Luther’s German and given ‘sweet bread’ for *azumos* (ἄζυμος)—what, since the Geneva Bible, we know as ‘unleavened bread’ ” (Daniell, pp. xx-xxi). These mistakes are easily noted and are readily corrected, as later translations have done. For Tyndale’s treatment of three key doctrinal subjects, “born again,” “born of God” and “the works of the law” please see Appendices L, M and N.

William Tyndale, one man against the world, empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, filled with the love of God, thirsting for the Word of God, with selfless sacrifice and dedicated determination, translated the Bible into English so that even the plowboy could read the Holy Bible. From his day to this, the English Bible, beginning with his translations, has impacted the civilizations of English-speaking people more than any other book. Tyndale could never have imagined that nearly five hundred years after his prayer to open the king of England’s eyes, God would cause the English language to become the predominant language to be used to preach and publish the Gospel worldwide.

Part Two

Commentaries

About

The History and Preservation

of The Bible

The Word of God

“Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in the heavens.” Psa. 119:89

“Your word is true from the beginning, and every one of Your righteous ordinances endures forever.” Psa. 119:160

“The heaven and the earth shall pass away, but My words shall never pass away.” Matt. 24:35

“You have magnified above all—Your name *and* Your word.” Psa. 138:2

“The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.” Psa. 12:6

“Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.” Prov. 30:5-6

“Sanctify them in Your truth; Your Word is the truth.” John 17:17

“Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is the truth.” Psa. 119:142

“You are near, O LORD, and all Your commandments are truth.” Psa. 119:151

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” Psa. 119:105

“Your word I have laid up in my heart, so that I might not sin against You.” Psa. 119:11

“I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, and in His word do I hope .” Psa. 130:5

“Therefore I love Your commandments above gold—yea, above fine gold ... I esteem all Your precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way.” Psa. 119:127-128

“For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of both soul and spirit, *and* of both *the* joints and *the* marrow, and is able to discern *the* thoughts and intents of *the* heart.” Heb. 4:12

“For He Whom God has sent speaks the words of God; and God gives not the Spirit by measure *unto Him*.” John 3:34

“It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life.” John 6:63

“He who has My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully.” Jer. 23:28

“The one who is of God hears the words of God.” John 8:47

CHAPTER NINE

OVERVIEW

Which Texts Comprise the Pure Words of God?

The question of which texts comprise the pure words of God is generating more controversy and argument today than at any time since this “great debate” began in earnest in the late nineteenth century. In best-selling books, leading theological journals and especially on the Internet, every aspect of biblical textual criticism is being intensely debated. The mass of textual data collected by researchers over the centuries presents many “facts” about the history, form and readings of the manuscripts that testify to the original writings of the biblical authors. However, the opposing interpretations of these facts, and even the misinformation created by vocal members of this debate, have often left Bible believers confused and frustrated.

It is understandable why the question about the purity of the biblical texts attracts so much attention. The Bible has affected our society, at least Western civilization, more than any other book. No other book has done more to shape our view of ourselves and how we interact with the world. The Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, respectively, undergird two of the world’s most influential religious faiths: Judaism and Christianity.

Origins of the Current Debate

The current debate over the biblical texts stems largely from the 1881 revision of the Authorized or King James Version (KJV) of the New Testament. History records that the English monarchy and segments of the Church of England refused to be associated with the revision of this venerable translation, itself a product of the English Reformation. In fact, numerous scholars, even those on the actual revision committee, differed widely in their beliefs on how to proceed with improving the KJV for purposes of public worship.

In short, committee members were initially commissioned to correct only “plain and clear errors” in the Greek text underlying the KJV. According to the committee’s second chairman, Dr. Charles John Ellicott, the revisers agreed to “**make the current Textus Receptus the standard**; departing from it only when critical or grammatical considerations show that it is clearly necessary” (Ellicott, *Considerations on Revision*, p. 30, quoted by Burgon, *The Revision Revised*, pp. 39, 414 and bold added).

(The “current” Textus Receptus was the 1550 Stephens Text, one of the Reformation printed editions of the Greek New Testament. The term Textus Receptus was first assigned to the 1633 Elzevir Greek text because this Latin phrase (meaning Received Text) appeared in its preface. This expression was later used to refer collectively to the editions of Erasmus (1516), Stephens (1550), Beza (1598) and Elzevir (1633). Professor George Ricker Berry noted that “In the main they [in particular the Stephens and Elzevir texts] are one and the same; and either [i.e., any] of them may be referred to as the Textus Receptus” (Berry, *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, p. ii). The text of these early editions reflects a near-identical agreement with the common text of the Byzantine manuscript family, which consists of the vast majority of Greek scribal copies of the New Testament. Even though many of these copies date later than the fifth century AD,

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most of their readings circulated in Byzantium, Greece, Asia Minor and elsewhere and are confirmed by the early papyri, ancient versions and writings of the early “Christian” scholars and theologians. Other types of Greek texts include the Alexandrian, Western and Caesarean, generally reflecting the geographical areas from which their manuscripts originated.)

Instead of holding to their agreed upon standard text, a majority of the revisers established a radically different Greek text as the basis for the New Testament translation and produced the 1881 English Revised Version (ERV). This different text was largely founded on the Greek New Testament of two Anglican scholars, Drs. B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort. In building their own text, Westcott and Hort showed undeserved partiality to two previously unused Greek manuscripts from the Sinai desert and Vatican library. Most scholars consider these two manuscripts, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, to be the chief representatives of what is known as the Alexandrian (Egyptian) text.

What might have been an excellent opportunity to correct the KJV and its underlying Greek text was lost amidst inner-committee clashes over the comparative value of the manuscript evidence.

The late John William Burgon (1813-1888), an Anglican theologian and textual scholar, was one of the most vocal opponents of the committee and its work. In *The Revision Revised*, published in 1883, Burgon released a barrage of evidence from the manuscripts, ancient versions and early church scholars that highlighted the deficiencies of the Westcott-Hort Greek text, the theory behind that text and the 1881 New Testament translation based largely upon it.

The ERV was not the first attempt to emend the Greek text and revise the KJV. In the eighteenth century, several men produced English versions using supposedly “better” manuscripts to correct critically the readings and language of the KJV. Probably the most famous endeavor was undertaken by William Whiston, the translator of the Jewish historian Josephus. Whiston published his *Primitive New Testament* in 1745. Many other scholars labored in the 1700s and 1800s to correct the Textus Receptus via marginal footnotes or by actually producing new Greek editions based on differing principles and manuscripts.

The 1881 revision caused a violent shift to occur in New Testament textual criticism, which entailed a wholesale rejection of the Textus Receptus and the vast majority of manuscripts for establishing the Greek text and translating the New Testament into English. Modern eclectic or critical Greek texts differ significantly in many places from the accepted text (Textus Receptus) used for almost all Protestant translations of the New Testament into English from the Reformation down to the late nineteenth century. These modern Greek editions are over 97 percent identical to the 1881 Westcott-Hort text that underlies the ERV (Fowler, *Evaluating Versions of the New Testament*, p. 66).

An objective listing of the most significant translatable differences between the modern eclectic or critical Greek texts and the Textus Receptus texts is available in a book titled *Evaluating Versions of the New Testament* by Everett W. Fowler. This publication records whole verses, significant portions of verses and divine names that have been omitted by the Westcott-Hort, Nestle and the latest United Bible Societies (Nestle-Aland) editions, all of which depend heavily on an Alexandrian type of text. It also highlights the differences between the various modern and early Protestant translations, which stem from the opposing Greek texts. More than 40 of these differences directly involve Christian doctrine and over 480 substantially affect the meaning of scripture (Fowler, p. 21). Many have been adopted by translators of contemporary English versions, including the popular New International Version (NIV). More specific information on each variant reading is available by consulting the respective printed editions of the Greek New Testament.

Overview: Which Texts Comprise the Pure Words of God?

Why Study the Biblical Texts?

Since the 1880s, advocates and antagonists of the various Greek texts have traded barbs and directed charges of “conspiracy” at one another. At one extreme, some American fundamentalist ministers and scholars have labeled modern Greek texts as “satanic” and filled with heresy. Conversely, some textual critics and theologians have blamed evangelicalism and a so-called “dumbing down” of Christianity as the real culprit behind the rise of conspiracy theories about the biblical texts (cf. Wallace, “The Conspiracy Behind the New Bible Translations,” www.bible.org).

No doubt there are elements of truth in all positions assumed in this debate. The difficult task for most people is sorting out the valuable kernels of truth from the often highly prejudiced chaff.

The debate has escalated in recent decades to include the various modern English versions. One major point of contention is the glaring differences in wording between the various modern translations and those of the Protestant Reformers, including the 1611 KJV. In some modern versions, words, phrases and even whole verses have been relegated to the margins or sometimes omitted without notice (e.g., the account of the woman taken in adultery in John 7:53-8:11 and Mark 16:9-20).

These omissions, especially evident in the NIV published in the late 1970s, have drawn considerable attention. According to one fundamentalist pundit, the NIV contains 64,000 fewer words than the KJV (Riplinger, *New Age Bible Versions*, p. 28). If this is true, can it with confidence be labeled an accurate translation?

In addition, in the last decade, Bible versions trafficking a more gender-neutral language have begun to appear. A recent example is *The New Testament and Psalms*, an adaptation of the liberally-translated New Revised Standard Version. The editors of this inclusive version state that their goal was to replace all “pejorative references to race, color or religion, and all identifications of persons by their physical disability alone, by means of paraphrase, alternative renderings and other acceptable means of conforming language to the work of an inclusive idea” (*The New Testament and Psalms*, pp. viii and ix). Zondervan Publishing House and the International Bible Society are planning to release a complete gender-inclusive revision of the NIV by 2005. This new version will be titled TNIV (Today’s NIV). The language of these versions is in line with the anti-patriarchal agendas of modern feminists and the ideologies of other groups who want to use the English Bible as a forum for activism—the eradication of social, economic and political inequities in society. Publishers of such inclusive versions bank on sales in the market-driven Bible industry, soaring due to these compromises with the sacred text.

Even more scandalous is the release of the scholars’ version of the Gospels produced by the Jesus Seminar and Westar Institute of Santa Rosa, Calif. Notoriously known for their radical redaction (editing) of the Gospel narratives, the fellows of the Jesus Seminar have tried to salvage the integrity of the New Testament (as they see it) by systematically going through the four Gospels and voting on which passages to accept as authentic and which to reject as myth. Through majority vote, 82-84 percent of the Gospel records have been categorized as partial or complete fiction, while only 16 percent of the events and 18 percent of the sayings of Jesus as recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John have been accepted as authentic, or nearly authentic. They have also added the Coptic Gnostic gospel of Thomas to their leaner canon of the authentic Gospels.

This bold move heralds future plans by the Jesus Seminar to reduce (by eliminating the book of Revelation) and expand the current biblical canon (collection of books) of the New Testament. A “Canon Seminar” has been convened to consider which ancient “Christian” documents to include in its forthcoming version of *The Complete New Testament*. This proposed canon will probably contain many documents that were never

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a part of the Bible, including the Gnostic writings found in the area of Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt (cf. Funk, “The Once and Future New Testament,” *The Canon Debate*, pp. 541ff). Such a venture, if published, will undoubtedly cause greater division among the ranks of larger Protestant denominations and other non-denominational Christian organizations.

Christians who desire the truth about God’s Word need to possess a basic understanding of how their English Bibles relate to the original texts and some knowledge of the theories scholars use to translate those texts into English.

Type of Text: The process of establishing the most reliable or pure text of the Bible belongs to the realm of textual criticism. The key is whether the original God-breathed letters, syllables and words of the biblical authors have been accurately preserved in the surviving documents. The type of text ultimately produced for translation is dependent on its editor’s view of the history and canon of the Bible and the value he or she places on the comparative textual data. If text editors believe the original text of the books of the Bible has been lost through the centuries, they will choose methods and manuscripts to produce a text different from those editors who are otherwise-minded. The methods and manuscripts employed can significantly alter the accuracy of the readings. The result can greatly affect exegesis (technical interpretation of the text) and preaching.

Translation Theory: Different theories and practices of translation can affect the purity of the original words when rendered into English. According to English professor and biblical literary stylist Leland Ryken, “In some translation processes this care to preserve the original text is repeatedly and casually disregarded when translators turn the original into English. Words are changed, added, and deleted with apparent ease and frequency. Surely there should be some carryover of principle between the scrupulousness of attention to the actual words of the Bible in the original languages and the way in which that text is transcribed into English” (Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, pp. 29-30).

The NIV and TNIV demonstrate how translators can begin with the same Greek base, yet produce vastly different versions that in many instances only loosely resemble the original wording. “The basic distinction between the Renaissance [a time period marked by increased artistic and scientific activity that laid the foundation for the Reformation and translation of the Bible into English] and the modern translators is one of fidelity to their original [text],” writes University of Manchester Professor of English Language and Literature Gerald Hammond. “Partly the loss of faith in the Hebrew and Greek as the definitive word of God has led to the translators’ loss of contact with it, but more responsibility lies in the belief that a modern Bible should aim not to tax its readers’ linguistic or interpretative abilities one bit. If this aim is to be achieved then it seems clear that a new Bible will have to be produced for every generation—each one probably moving us further away from the original text, now that the initial break has been made” (Hammond, *The Making of the English Bible*, pp. 12-13).

What will the next decade of English translations bring? Many conservative scholars predict the trend will probably lead to a universally accepted Bible and a one-world religion under the authority of Babylon the Great (cf. Revelation 17-18).

Christian Concerns

While the present debate originated with the 1881 revision of the KJV in the nineteenth century, its seeds were actually sown in the Protestant Reformation. The question for Bible believers today, to a large extent, is the same as that for Reformers: “Have the original texts of the Old and New Testaments come down to us pure and uncorrupted?”

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This was the question raised by Francis Turretin (1623-1687), a Reformed scholar of the Academy of Geneva, in his *Institutio Theologicae Elencticae*. It served as a prelude to his discussion about the purity of the Hebrew Masoretic and Greek Byzantine manuscripts upon which the Reformation texts were based. Turretin's query concisely captured the essence of the divisive debate in his day between the Roman church and Protestants over the use of the original language texts for translation.

What is often lost in the rhetorical monologue offered by all sides in this dispute is the clear teaching of Scripture. What does the Bible have to say about its divine authorship? It states unequivocally that "All Scripture is God-breathed" (II Tim. 3:16).

Does the Bible explicitly state how God would preserve His word? The Bible offers numerous general promises that the Word of God would be preserved intact. The Bible was written over a 1,500-year time period by about 40 authors who originally penned its messages in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, often on highly perishable papyrus scrolls and later, parchment codices. Today we possess literally thousands of witnesses to the original writings of the biblical authors. Some of the oldest passages of Holy Writ were copied by hand for more than 2,800 years.

How can we bridge the gap between the surviving manuscripts and the autographs or original writings of the prophets, apostles and their scribes? Do the texts of the surviving manuscripts represent the *ipsissima verba*—that is, the "very words" of the original writings? For many theologians and scholars, the debate over the biblical texts involves proper scholarship, namely textual, historical and literary criticism. However, there are shortfalls within the fields of textual and biblical criticism.

Shortfalls of Textual and Biblical Criticism

It is important to remember that all attempts by textual critics to recover or reconstruct the original text of the Bible are restricted to the existing evidence and their critical judgments of it. In short, one textual theory may have certain merits over others, but in the end all are based on conjecture and incomplete information. For example, some manuscripts with ancient readings referenced by the early church scholars no longer exist. In terms of quantity and quality, these readings are 3:2 in favor of the Byzantine Text (Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established*, vol. 1, pp. 94-122).

In addition, all events relating to the literary history of the biblical texts that occurred prior to their copying are beyond the scope of the so-called textual specialists (Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 297). A graphic example concerns the Pauline Epistles. From their copying and transmission, Paul's letters have had the same general form as they have today (cf. Aland, p. 296). The evidence of textual criticism (manuscript record) cannot explain how Paul's Epistles were compiled in their present form before they began to be circulated as an entire group or as several smaller groups. Scholars have presented various theories over the years to explain how this process occurred. Only the Bible offers clues to this textual mystery. They are recorded in II Timothy 4:11-13 and II Peter 3:16.

Yet, another example involves the discovery of the Bodmer Papyrus 75 (P⁷⁵), a codex of the third century AD that contains portions of the Gospels of Luke and John. Before the mid-1900s AD, scholars presumed that the earliest "pure" copy of the Alexandrian text was the fourth-century Vatican manuscript; the discovery of P⁷⁵ in 1955 changed that (Robinson, "New Testament Textual Criticism: The Case for the Byzantine Priority," *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism*, par. 79). Many scholars, including Professor J.C. O'Neill, now doubt whether Vaticanus is a carefully preserved text with ties to the late second or early third century. A careful study of scribal habits sug-

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gests instead that it was the result of a deliberate editing process at an Alexandrian scriptorium or copying center (O'Neill, "The Rules Followed by The Editors of the Text Found in Codex Vaticanus," *New Testament Studies*, vol. 35, p. 220).

Similarly, before the mid-1900s, scholars believed that Greek manuscripts with Byzantine readings did not exist before the fourth century. This notion stems from the flawed textual theory of Westcott and Hort, in which they speculated that the Byzantine Text was a creation of fourth-century church scholars. Most modern textual critics have followed the lead of Westcott and Hort on this issue and have dismissed the Byzantine Text for purposes of textual criticism. However, the discovery of early Egyptian papyri with distinctively Byzantine readings (not shared with other text types), has now made it increasingly difficult for scholars to reject the Byzantine Text in producing a Greek New Testament (cf. Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type & New Testament Textual Criticism*). In fact, the editors of the United Bible Societies third edition of the Greek New Testament restored nearly 300 Byzantine readings to their text, which they had earlier rejected due to an alleged lack of support among the early surviving Alexandrian witnesses (Robinson, "Investigating Text-Critical Dichotomy: A Critique of Modern Eclectic Praxis from a Byzantine-Priority Perspective," *Faith & Mission*, vol. 16, no. 2, p. 28).

Today we can better understand Westcott and Hort's partiality toward the Sinaitic and Vatican manuscripts, including Hort's motive for labeling the Textus Receptus as "vile." The influence of Attic Greek was not well-known during the nineteenth century. During the second century there was a tendency by Alexandrian scribes to correct the New Testament text stylistically to the Attic. This type of Greek was known for its brevity akin to classical Greek, which both Anglican scholars were accustomed to. In contrast, the New Testament (Textus Receptus) was almost always written in *Koiné* Greek (Kilpatrick, "Atticism and the Future of ZHN," *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 25, p. 151).

The Nature of Modern Biblical Scholarship

Bible readers are unlikely to be familiar with the texts underlying the English Bibles they read and study and even less acquainted with the methods of textual criticism used to produce those texts.

Consequently, they might be surprised to know that scholars today, in many instances, cannot agree on the original wording of the sacred text. In fact, interpretation of the textual evidence varies widely depending on one's personal theology and worldview. Modern textual criticism is largely a product of The Enlightenment or Age of Reason, a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophical movement that followed the Renaissance and Protestant Reformation and exalted human reason (rationalism) as the sole guide in establishing truth. Out of this movement arose a way of thinking known as naturalism, which denies the supernatural significance behind historical events. Naturalism uses science and logic to explain all phenomena.

According to the late Dr. David Fuller, former director of the Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, "The one feature that separated the Enlightenment from the Reformation [a religious movement during the Renaissance period] regarding text [textual] critical matters was the latter's firmly held belief that the texts of scripture were canonically established by the providence of God. The Enlightenment replaced the idea that God was behind historical circumstance...with the idea that man was his own measure and must determine for himself what he will regard as scripture" (Letis, *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate*, p. i).

It is the modern age that has injected naturalistic thinking into the study of the biblical texts (known as textual criticism). The two are diametrically opposed to each other. Historical examples of naturalistic thought include attributing the miracles sur-

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rounding Jesus' feeding of the five thousand and His resurrection to trivial circumstances and natural laws. Skeptical scholars, like those of the Jesus Seminar, maintain that the biblical books were not "inspired" in the traditional sense but were written decades, if not centuries, after the deaths of the prophets and apostles.

In Burgon's day, the naturalistic approach was becoming widespread in textual criticism. He wrote: "For we assume that the Bible is to be taken as inspired [God-breathed], and not regarded upon a level with the Books of the East....It is chiefly from inattention to this circumstance that misconception prevails in ... 'Textual Criticism.' Aware that the New Testament is like no other book in its origin, its contents, its history, many critics of the present day nevertheless permit themselves to reason concerning its Text, as if they entertained no suspicion that the words and sentences of which it is composed were destined to experience an extraordinary fate also. They make no allowances for the fact that influences of an entirely different kind from any with which profane literature is acquainted have made themselves felt in this department ... therefore ... **those principles of Textual Criticism which in the case of profane authors** are regarded as fundamental **are often out of place here**" (Burgon, p. 9, emphasis added).

Though it is not often clearly stated, naturalistic textual scholars contend that the text of the Greek New Testament, like that of other ancient books, has been damaged and lost during its journey through time. The only way to recover the original wording in places where the manuscripts disagree, they argue, is to appeal to the testimony of the "earliest and best" Greek copies. (Ironically, the Christian Church has rejected many of these manuscripts and their readings for over 1,000 years!)

In the twentieth century, scholars have favored the eclectic method to recover the original text of the New Testament in places where the Greek manuscripts disagree. **Eclecticism** is a method of textual criticism that relies heavily on human instinct in establishing the biblical text by selecting readings randomly from one witness and then another based on a number of subjective criteria. The methods and manuscripts used by many modern eclectics have often led to self-refuting and questionable results regarding the form and readings of the New Testament. Therefore, it is a myth to presume modern eclectic Greek texts and English translations are more accurate than those printed during the Reformation period. (Oddly, the most popular Greek texts on the market today are eclectic in nature.)

More than four decades ago, the late Dr. Edward F. Hills (1912-1981), an internationally recognized textual critic, anticipated this eclectic trend in textual criticism and translation. He wrote: "Thus naturalistic New Testament textual criticism is inclining more and more toward a free handling of the text. The final authority is not the testimony of the extant manuscripts, even in places in which they all disagree, but the subjective insight and judgment of the critics. Thus the future of the New Testament text is unpredictable, since it depends on these intangible forces. The way is open for a multiplicity of texts—as many as there are critics....The Moffat [sic] version (1913) has already made a start in this direction with its rearrangement of chapters and its all too frequent employment of conjectural emendation" (Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 1956 ed., p. 14).

The eclectic method is only partially responsible for the many different critical editions and translations of the New Testament text since the early 1900s. The loss of a recognized standard edition of the Greek New Testament within Christendom during the last century has been used by some as a license to revise, add and omit letters, syllables, words and whole sentences of the biblical narrative.

The work of the Jesus Seminar is a prime example of modern scholars who have exploited the differences (variant readings) found in the Greek manuscripts and modern editions for their own purposes. Robert Funk, the director of the Westar Institute and a leading seminar scholar, holds to the erroneous belief that variant readings make the text

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of the New Testament uncertain. He wrote: “So far as I know, no one has ever canonized the Greek text of the New Testament; the United Bible Societies are claiming copyright of the Nestle-Aland version, but they have not canonized it. Both Protestant and Catholic scholars simply buy each new edition of Nestle-Aland critical edition of the Greek New Testament as it appears and use it as though it were the real New Testament. **Which edition of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament with its catalogue of more than seventy thousand significant variants is canonical? No one has yet been willing to say**” (Funk, p. 546, emphasis added).

Naturalistic methods and principles have permeated every aspect of biblical criticism so that any reading created in the transcription process and copied by some ancient scribe of the sacred text is held up and justified as legitimate. **The result of the indiscriminate acceptance of such readings has led to confusion over what actually constitutes the pure words of God, both in terms of the texts produced and the translations upon which they are based.**

A Christian Approach to the Texts

While only the Lord knows the hearts of the men and women who have studied the biblical texts over the centuries from a naturalistic perspective, their actions have left the biblical texts in a state of uncertainty as previously noted. This does not imply that all textual critical methods need to be discarded. Many sincere textual scholars have contributed to the discovery of evidence that attests to the reliability of the sacred texts.

There is an honest and defensible method that allows us to avoid the pitfalls of unbelieving and naturalistic scholarship. Dr. Hills advocated a “consistently Christian” approach to the study of the biblical texts. He rightly discerned that this approach was the only resolution to the dilemmas concerning the biblical texts. His approach was starkly different from the neutral, naturalistic methods followed by most of his fellow textual scholars, who viewed the Bible as “nothing more than just a human book.” Dr. Hills built his analysis of the Greek New Testament text “squarely and solidly on the historic doctrines of divine inspiration [authorship] and providential preservation of the Holy Scripture” and interpreted the evidence of textual criticism accordingly (Hills, 1984 ed., pp. vi, 3, 113).

Dr. Hills believed that when faithful Christians discarded “unbelieving thought” and followed this “consistently Christian” approach in their textual criticism, they would “find themselves led back step by step (perhaps, at first, against their wills) to the text of the Protestant Reformation, namely, that form of the New Testament text which underlies the King James Version and the other early Protestant translations” (Ibid., p. 1). As such, Dr. Hills was a defender of the Byzantine Text, which is reflected in the vast majority of Greek manuscripts. He preferred to call it the Traditional Text as Burgon did, because it is the “text which has been handed down by the God-guided tradition of the Church from the time of the Apostles unto the present day” (Ibid., p. 106).

From his perspective as a textual scholar and classicist, Dr. Hills asserted that he has witnessed many Bible students “panic and become virtual unbelievers in their biblical studies” because they have felt “obligated to depend almost entirely on the writings” of scholars, “most of whom are unbelievers” (Ibid., p. 113). To avoid possible “catastrophes of unbelief” that could accompany such an indepth study of the biblical texts, Hills wrote: “... we must always emphasize the Christian starting point that all our thinking ought to have. If we are Christians, then **we must begin our thinking not with the assertions of unbelieving scholars and their naturalistic human logic, but with Christ and the logic of faith**” (Ibid., emphasis added).

In his book, *The King James Version Defended*, Dr. Hills discussed how the early

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Reformers followed the methodology he called the “logic of faith” in compiling, editing and printing the Greek texts used in translating the early Protestant English versions. As noted previously, these texts became known collectively as the Textus Receptus and are essentially identical to the common text used by the Greek Orthodox church for centuries.

While Dr. Hills “did not hold an uncritical, perfectionist view of the Textus Receptus,” he did contend that it best represented the Greek canon and its true readings (Ibid., p. viii). He believed that the Textus Receptus offered Christians “maximum certainty” for their faith in contrast to the uncertainty of the dubious eclectic or critical texts offered by naturalistic textual criticism (Ibid., pp. 3, 106-108, 224-225).

While our approach to this topic is similar to that of Dr. Hills because of his Bible-believing viewpoint, references to his research are not necessarily an endorsement of all his conclusions. However, his work and intimacy with the issues involved in this study, along with that of other defenders of the traditional Hebrew and Greek texts, form the basis of our technical study of the biblical texts.

Furthermore, our study of the sacred text is based on the same premise as Dr. Hills: “In the past true believers won great victories for God through their faith....Today we also can be victorious through faith if *we doubt not, if we take God and His revelation of Himself in holy Scripture as the starting point of all our thinking*....in New Testament textual criticism, and in every other field of intellectual endeavor, our thinking must differ from the thinking of the unbelievers. We must begin with God” (Ibid., p. 61, bold added).

Historical Reliability of the Text

Scholars estimate that almost all Greek manuscripts, regardless of their origin, agree on at least 90 percent of the New Testament text. This percentage “presents the autograph [original] form of the NT [New Testament] text with *no* variation” (cf. Robinson, par. 107, n. 9). Scholars disagree over how to treat the remaining 10 percent of variant readings, many of which, depending on the New Testament book, are minor and have no bearing on how the text is translated into English.

The historical reliability of the biblical manuscripts can be verified using the same principles for confirming the reliability of other historical documents. Author Josh McDowell offers an indepth review of this evidence. It can be found on pages 23-109 in his book *The Best of Josh McDowell: A Ready Defense* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993). In addition to the historical reliability of the documents, the actual wording of the Bible can be determined in nearly every case by examining faithful representatives of the original text in accordance with the precepts given in Scripture, a Christian approach to textual criticism and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Under these circumstances, 98-99 percent of the original wording of the Greek New Testament text, for example, can be recovered. In the remaining 250-400 places where two closely competing readings make it impossible to determine the original wording of the autographs, textual scholar, author and linguist Dr. Wilbur N. Pickering wrote that in most of these instances “the difference of meaning is slight” (Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, www.esgm.org). In a personal correspondence, Dr. Pickering clarified that 80 percent or more of these places relate to “matters of spelling, word order, absence of a pronoun (where it [i.e., the pronoun] must be understood anyway), and change in verb tense that doesn’t alter the point [i.e., meaning of the text]. In those places where the meaning is altered no doctrinal problem is created” (Pickering, “Personal interview,” Sept. 5, 2003). There are still unknowns in the wording of Scripture because most of the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament have not been thor-

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oroughly studied and their readings made available to scholars (Aland, “The Significance of the Papyri for New Testament Research,” *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, p. 330).

Some of the principles of a Christian approach to textual criticism are outlined by the late Dr. Edward F. Hills in his book entitled *The King James Version Defended* (cf. pp. 2-3, 86, 111-114). The late John William Burgon also established principles of sound textual criticism. A description of his seven principles is available on pages 40-67 in his book *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established* (London: George Bell, 1896).

Believers can approach the Old and New Testament texts of their Bibles with confidence when faithful and reliable manuscripts are employed and sound methods of textual criticism and translation are followed. **Ultimately, believers must place their confidence in God’s promises to preserve His word intact.** These promises were made to reassure true believers that they would possess His very words in every age. Thus, they could with confidence fulfill the commissions that He had given them, which were contingent on their having an accurate record of the words spoken by Jesus and written by the New Testament prophets and apostles (Matt. 28:19-20; II Tim. 3:15-17, 4:2-3).

A Standard, Reliable Greek Text

A great deal of uncertainty about the state of the Greek New Testament needlessly exists among the ranks of textual critics today. The editors of the two popular eclectic or critical Greek New Testaments inform us that they do not yet consider their texts as established (cf. Aland, *The Greek New Testament*, p. viii). These texts include the various Nestle-Aland editions (NA²⁷) and those of the United Bible Societies (UBS⁴) and form the basis of almost all recent English translations of the New Testament such as the NIV and TNIV.

The editors of *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982) are equally explicit and inform us that they “do not imagine that the text of this edition represents in all particulars the exact form of the originals. Desirable as such a text certainly is, **much further work must be done** before it can be produced...the present work ... is both **preliminary and provisional**” (Hodges, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, p. x, bold added).

In spite of the uncertainty being expressed by the editors of the most popular Greek texts on the market today, there is a standard, reliable Greek text available for use. After researching the alternate Greek texts—eclectic or critical and Majority Text—we stand firmly behind the tradition of the Textus Receptus (1550 Stephens Text). Our choosing the Textus Receptus does not imply that it is perfect in every detail, for no text has been untouched by human hands; however, the Stephens Text is a highly reliable New Testament text, which is **98 percent or more** in agreement with the Byzantine Text, which was the dominant form of the Greek text during the age of manual copying. We believe that the Byzantine Text, more than any other, represents the original God-breathed words of the New Testament.

There is a modern Greek text whose editors claim reflects the primary and dominant form of the Byzantine Text and likely represents the canonical autographs more accurately than any other text type (i.e., Alexandrian, Western and Caesarean). This text, *The New Testament in the Original Greek according to the Byzantine/Majority Textform* by Dr. Maurice Robinson and the late William G. Pierpont (1991, 2004), had a seasoned textual critic as one of its editors and a sound underlying theory; yet, being a recent edition of the Greek New Testament, it needs further evaluation.

What sets the Textus Receptus (and its various editions) apart from all other Greek texts, including the Robinson-Pierpont edition, is its unique, proven pedigree

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rooted in the ancient history of the Greek-speaking church. From the first printing by Erasmus and Johann Froben in 1516 AD, it had the near universal acceptance of Bible-believing Protestants for nearly 375 years. The Textus Receptus is largely a product of the pre-critical era, having been edited without being fully subjected to the musings of the human mind.

The excerpt that follows is from an article written in 1983, in which historian S.M. Houghton evaluated the Majority Text. At that time, he concluded the Textus Receptus was sufficient and preferable in light of the alternatives. It seems fitting to recall Houghton's words in our study of the Greek text: "For scholars to suggest that a particular translation of the Word is faulty is one thing; to suggest that the *final* form of the divine revelation is still remote—a form, as some might even say, that will never be reached—would appear to not a few to place the Christian Faith itself in jeopardy. Finality belongs to the Faith, and in a very true and real sense finality belongs to the Word on which that Faith is based and in which it is rooted.

"We are not infrequently told by liberal theologians that the Christian Faith is a progressive Faith. They intend to convey a very different meaning from that of the Puritan John Robinson who, in taking leave as their pastor of some of the Pilgrim Fathers of 1620, expressed himself as 'very confident the Lord had more truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy word.' We thank God that it is so. At the same time we can surely thank Him, too, that across 'the running centuries' He has never left His Word at haphazard. The discovery some thirty years ago of the Dead Sea scrolls gave us amazing confirmation of the accuracy with which OT Scripture has been transmitted to us, and we may be sure that God has taken no less care of the NT Scripture" (Letis, p. 208).

Our Approach to This Study

As you read this lengthy volume, containing a modern English translation of the New Testament and many essays pertaining to the texts and canon of the Bible, you may encounter numerous terms and concepts that are unfamiliar. We have attempted to present the information contained in this publication in an understandable format. Some sections may require multiple readings in order to fully comprehend them.

We encourage you to persevere in your efforts to understand the information presented in this publication because it concerns the Holy Bible, the most important book ever written. A Bible that accurately reflects the original texts (letters, syllables and words) given by God is extremely critical for Christians. If we cannot have confidence in the words of the Bible, we cannot base our lives and doctrine on it. Since very few of us are fluent in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, we must rely on text editors and Bible translators for the Word of God. The subject matter of this volume is vital because of the confusion created by many modern English versions of the Bible, which are based on highly questionable texts and translation methods. It is also vital because of the many prophecies concerning a one-world government and religion that have yet to be fulfilled. These prophecies will have a direct impact on the Bible, its texts and the lives of Christians.

In our analysis of the divine authorship, preservation and translation of the biblical texts, we have endeavored to "prove all things" (I Thes. 5:21). Our goal, as far as is humanly possible, has been to furnish you with an accurate and thorough understanding of the history of the Bible and its sacred texts. If you believe that we have strayed from this task, we encourage you to offer your evaluation in a Christ-like manner.

This volume does contain extra-biblical material, such as citations from the apocrypha, Jewish or rabbinic literature and writings of certain historical figures. Citations taken from these writings are not an uncritical endorsement of them or of the beliefs and actions of the writers. Also, the authors are not bona fide textual critics, and those sec-

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tions pertaining to textual matters have not been peer reviewed by seasoned professionals. In an effort to present reliable evidence in these areas, we have included the research of scholars, whose scholarship has been distilled through the filter of truth contained in the Bible.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how God has faithfully preserved His Word for us today. Our hope is that readers will be strengthened in knowing that God has indeed kept His promises and the veracity of His Word intact.

This publication is not intended to replace other resources on biblical criticism. That would be an impossible task, considering the width, breadth and depth of this subject, which in many cases covers a span of almost 2,000 years. One essay alone on Mark 16:9-20 fills a 300-page book (cf. Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to Mark, Vindicated Against Recent Critical Objectors and Established*, Oxford: Parker and Co., 1871). For this reason, only a few indepth reviews of selected important passages of Scripture have been offered for your edification.

A Base of Knowledge: An introductory chapter has been written to assist readers in acclimating to the numerous terms and concepts that pertain to an indepth study of the biblical texts. Charts, appendices and a glossary of terms have been provided for easy reference. In addition, a recommended reading list has been furnished for those readers who wish to further explore any of the textual and historical topics in this publication (see Appendix Y, page 874).

Westcott and Hort: As a part of this historical overview of the biblical texts, we have briefly reconstructed the steps leading to the change in the Greek New Testament text in the late 1800s. We have also assessed the main elements of the theory of Westcott and Hort in our study of the preservation of the Greek New Testament.

The Historic and Modern Controversy: Numerous chapters offer abbreviated historical accounts of this controversy and review the words of scholars, translators, theologians and Bible publishers, allowing their own rhetoric to reveal if an alleged “conspiracy” surrounds the biblical texts and modern translations. We have highlighted ways in which the Roman Church and its various agents, including the papacy and the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), have tried to keep the Bible from true believers and the masses at large.

At various points, we have examined how the rhetoric and arguments of prominent theologians and scholars have obscured honest textual criticism over the centuries, and how their actions have unwittingly concealed the true doctrines of the Bible and set stumbling blocks before Bible-believing Christians.

Today, these same forces, including the various Bible societies, are using the latest scholarship and the common language of the masses to keep the truth of God’s Word from Bible readers, marshaling in another “Dark Age” through their critical arguments, theology and the various ecumenical, humanistic Bible translations.

Divine Authorship and Preservation of the Bible: When viewed in the light of clear scriptural evidence, the historical record offers clues and proof of the Bible’s integrity. Chapters Eleven through Fifteen frame this subject for us by highlighting the Bible’s view of divine authorship (i.e., inspiration in the traditional sense), canonization and preservation.

Chapters Three through Seven provide a scriptural and historical reconstruction of how the New Testament authors and scribes composed and sealed their autographs or original writings. Charts tracing this process, and how the scribal copies of the original writings were preserved throughout history, are included.

Early and Modern Texts and Translations: It is beyond the scope of this publication to review the reliability of every English translation available today. Leland Ryken’s book entitled *The Word of God in English* explores common fallacies and sound principles of Bible translation. It also offers standards for comparing contemporary English versions.

CHAPTER TEN

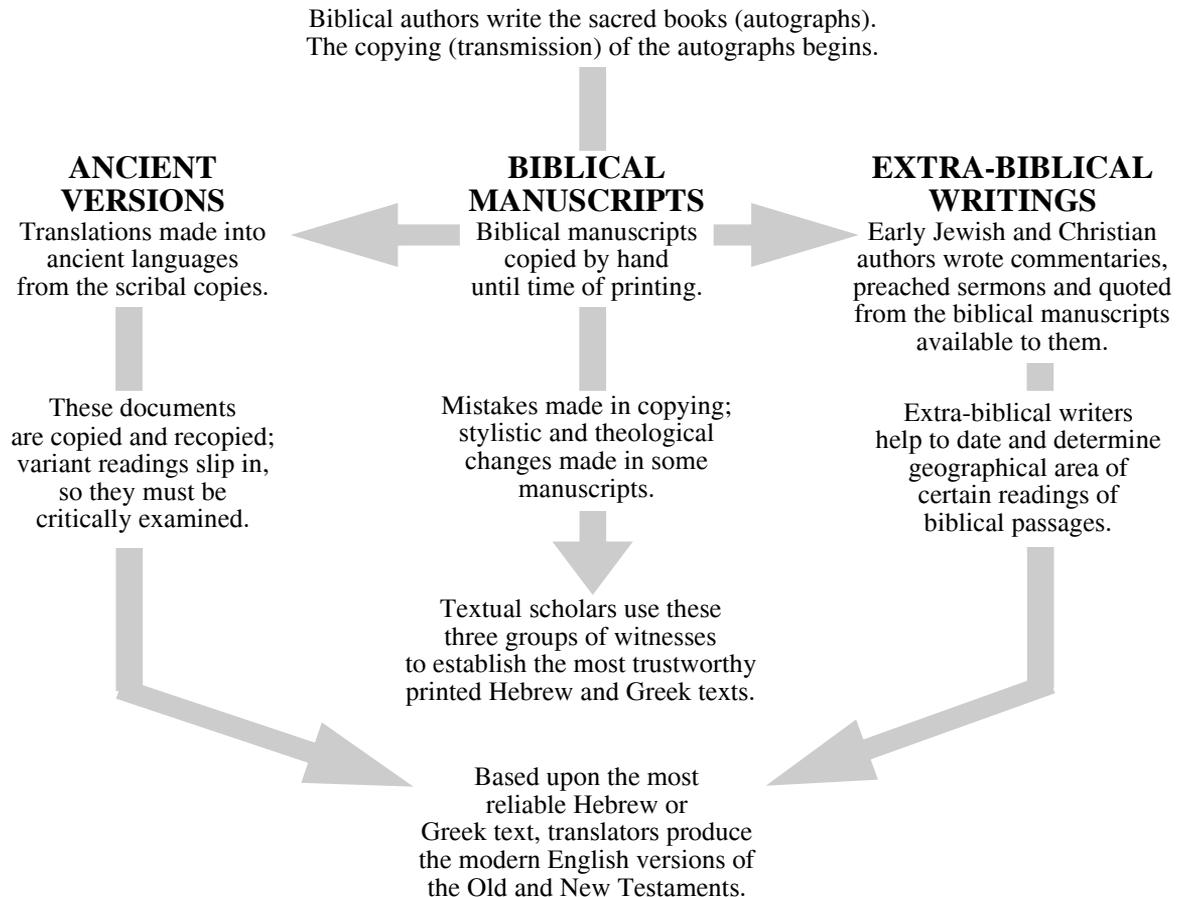
WHERE ARE THE WITNESSES?

It is a well-known fact that the original documents penned by the prophets, apostles and their scribes no longer exist. Most likely they were worn out through extensive use early on. For many Bible believers, this truth can be disconcerting. Yet, there is hope. Thousands of handwritten scribal copies (i.e., manuscripts) exist today that testify to the original text of the God-breathed sacred writings. **The dispute over the biblical texts centers on how well these copies and their texts have been preserved.** In order to come to an understanding on this issue, we must follow the trail of witnesses to the sacred writings.

Witnesses to the Sacred Writings

Text editors use three major groups of witnesses to produce what they believe to be the most trustworthy Hebrew and Greek texts for translating: 1) biblical manuscripts, 2) ancient versions and 3) extra-biblical writings (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Witnesses to the Biblical Texts



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These witnesses are very important in evaluating the reliability of the printed texts used today for translating. A review of each group follows.

Biblical Manuscripts

Before the invention of movable type printing in the mid-1400s AD, all biblical manuscripts were copied by hand. The process of transmission began the very first time scribes made copies (apographs) of the God-breathed writings (known as autographs or the original text depending on the context). For more than 2,800 years, priests and Levitical scribes copied portions of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible). Early believers, monks and professional scribes transcribed manuscripts of the Greek Scriptures (i.e., New Testament) for almost 1,500 years. The process of copying and recopying over centuries has produced thousands of manuscripts of the biblical books. These surviving documents form the **primary** witnesses to the original text of the Old and New Testaments.

Each manuscript has its own history and character. Some are more reliable witnesses than others, depending on the scribes who copied them. These scribes operated under very different circumstances from one another.

The word “manuscript” traditionally refers to any handwritten or printed document that contains some part of scripture on it. This term could include anything from papyrus fragments of any book of the Bible to a lectionary (liturgical work). For our purposes and for clarity, we have confined the use of the word “manuscript(s)” to the original biblical writings or their handwritten scribal copies, whether Hebrew or Greek. For example, an early papyrus fragment of the Gospel of John has been classified as a manuscript. All other evidence, such as lectionaries or ancient versions, has been referred to by its specific descriptive term. We have used the word “text(s)” to refer to the handwritten or printed letters, syllables, words and sentences that appear on the page of a manuscript of any book of the Bible.

Over the last two centuries, archaeologists have discovered hundreds of manuscripts that can be dated closer in age to the autographs. These newly discovered papyrus or vellum manuscripts have often consisted of fragments of books of the Bible.

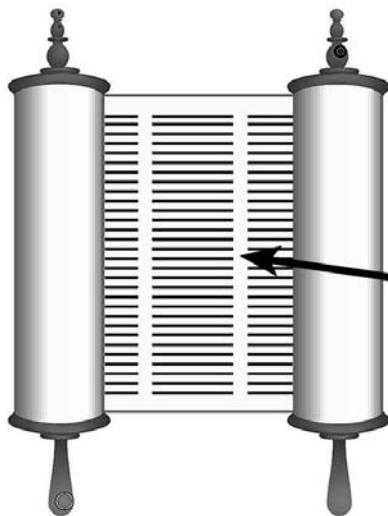
Many modern textual theories are linked to manuscript age. One theory held by many scholars, albeit wrongly, is that the “oldest” manuscripts offer a more trustworthy witness to the text of the autographs. The scholarly-designated term “older” used to describe manuscripts is a misnomer. Most of the early Greek manuscripts, for instance, contain a text that was copied at least 150-400 years after the text of the New Testament autographs were written. More appropriate terms for these manuscripts would be “earliest” or “oldest surviving” or some variation thereof. We have adopted these labels except in direct quotes.

Scholars use the material that a manuscript is written on to determine its age. Radiocarbon (carbon-14) testing and paleography (study of ancient writings) are also employed to determine a relative dating if the condition of the manuscript permits.

The Bible reveals that stone, wooden tablets and other materials were used to record a limited number of words for specific short-term purposes (e.g., Ex. 34:1; Isa. 30:8; Luke 1:63). It is the long-term, widespread preservation of the Word of God that concerns our study; hence, we have confined our review to the usage of papyrus, leather and paper to preserve the books of the Bible in the scroll and codex formats (see Figure 2).

Where are the Witnesses?

Figure 2
Biblical Manuscripts



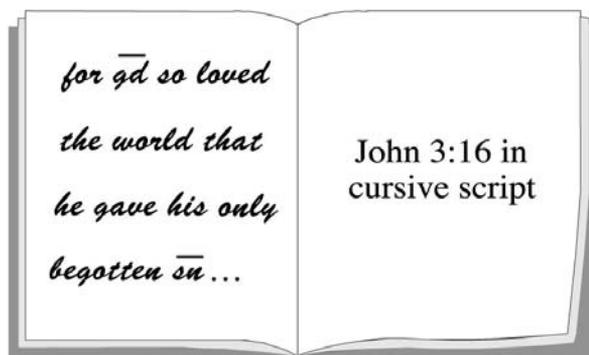
Scrolls (Rolls)

Old and New Testament books were copied on papyrus and leather scrolls averaging 30 feet in length and 9-10 inches in height. The book of Luke was this size and the book of Isaiah was 24 feet in length.

Scribes wrote scrolls in columns like this.

Codex

Developed in the first century AD, the codex or modern book form made it possible to gather the New Testament books into one or two volumes. Old Testament books were not copied in codex form until the 700s AD.



Papyrus Codex
50-300 AD

Vellum Codex
300-1100 AD

Paper Codex
1100 AD-present

Three General Transmission Periods

Papyrus (antiquity to ca. 800 AD): Papyrus was produced from the fibrous pith of a water plant that grew in Egypt or northern Galilee. It was widely used in Egypt from 2000-3000 BC, about a thousand years before Moses' time (Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, p. 5).

The pith of the papyrus plant was cut into thin strips, and the strips were placed side by side vertically, overlapping slightly. More strips were laid across this first layer horizontally. The two layers were then glued together. After the assembled sheet dried, manufacturers polished it to produce a white smooth surface, giving it the consistency of

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paper. Scribes normally wrote on the side with the horizontal strips (known as *recto*), but sometimes on other side (*verso*) as well (Kenyon, *The Text of the Greek Bible*, p. 15).

Papyrus was common in Palestine until about 300 AD. Scribes frequently used it when copying Old Testament synagogue scrolls (cf. Mark 12:26 as a possible example). The apostles and their amanuenses (scribes) apparently wrote the Gospels, Acts, general Epistles and Revelation with ink and a split reed on papyrus scrolls, the accepted publication form of the first century AD (Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, p. 815). John used the Greek word *chártou*, meaning papyrus, to describe the material upon which he composed his Second Epistle (II John 12).

The earliest biblical papyrus manuscripts found by archaeologists are the Dead Sea Scrolls, comprising the earliest remains of the Old Testament text. The earliest New Testament manuscripts from this period include fragments of papyrus codices (modern book form) written in uncial script (capital letters). Because papyrus is very perishable, only about 100 papyri (mostly fragments) exist today. Archaeologists have discovered all of these papyri in Egypt, which alone offers the climatic conditions favoring the preservation of early manuscripts (Aland, “The Text of the Church,” *The Trinity Journal*, p. 138). The most important of these early manuscripts is Papyrus 66 (containing most of John’s Gospel) and Papyrus 75 (containing portions of Luke and John), copied about 150 years after the Gospels were first written.

Leather (Parchment and Vellum, 300-1100 AD): Scribes wrote on treated animal skins from ancient times. Processors tanned leather from sheep, goat and any clean animal skin to preserve it from decay and make it pliable for writing.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia explains that “[s]hortly before the Christian era a method was discovered of treating animal skins with lime and drying them in such a way as to produce an exceedingly fine, smooth, and firm writing surface. In precise definitions, vellum is calfskin or similar fine skin treated as described above, while parchment (named for the city of Pergamum, which produced much of it) is made from the more ordinary types of skins [i.e., sheep, goats]. At present, however, the two terms are used interchangeably” (Bromiley, p. 815). Vellum was mostly white in color, enduring in quality, and formed a good background for black ink and for decoration in color (Kenyon, p. 20).

Leather was the accepted material for official Hebrew Old Testament scrolls. Ernest Würthwein, professor emeritus at Germany’s Philipps-Universität and a well-known expert in the text of the Old Testament, explains, “Jewish regulations still require that a copy of the Torah intended for liturgical use be written on leather made from a clean animal ... this surely represents ancient usage” (Würthwein, p. 6). In his study of sacred books and scrolls of ancient Israel before the Babylonian exile and during the Second Temple period (539 BC-70 AD), scholar Menahem Haran found that the transition to leather from papyrus was a normal progression for the Scriptures and was associated with their canonization (Ibid.).

An increased use of leather (vellum) for writing New Testament manuscripts was the result of a copying revolution that occurred shortly after Roman Emperor Constantine legalized mainstream Christianity in the *Edict of Milan* (313 AD). Dr. Maurice Robinson, a well-trained textual critic and professor of New Testament Greek, explains the significance of this event to the production of the New Testament manuscripts: “The church of the early fourth century [300s AD] moved from a persecuted minority to an approved entity with governmental sponsorship. It is no coincidence that a change in writing material (from cheap and fragile papyrus to costly and durable vellum) occurred at this time. The earliest extant vellum MSS [manuscripts] ... and many later uncials would have been copied directly from papyrus exemplars [model manuscripts]” (Robinson, “New Testament Textual Criticism: The Case for the Byzantine Priority,” *TC: A Journal of*

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Biblical Textual Criticism, par. 60).

Early uncial and later minuscule codices comprise the manuscripts of this period. (See section titled “Greek New Testament Manuscripts.”) Parchment and vellum eventually superseded papyrus for Greek New Testament manuscripts. The change to parchment was limited at first, perhaps due to economics. An average New Testament manuscript of 250 pages required the hides of about 50-60 goats or sheep (Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 77). Larger collections of books required more hides.

There have been differing opinions about the meaning of the word “parchments” in II Timothy 4:13. In this passage, the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, requesting him to “bring the chest that I left in Troas with Carpus, and the books—especially the **parchments**.” Is there any evidence for a literal interpretation of this passage? Yes, there is.

Eighty-five percent of the biblical and religious writings found at Qumran, a monastic community northwest of the Dead Sea, were written on leather (Comfort, *The Origin of the Bible*, p. 159). Researchers believe a hide processing center at Ein Feshka, a satellite location two miles south of the main Qumran facility, likely supported this widespread use of leather by the Qumran scribes. Historically, Ein Feshka has supported sheep and goat herding (Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scroll*, pp. 57-60). The scribal use of leather and parchment by the Qumran society before and during the time of Paul likely reflects a general Jewish scribal pattern of that era for sacred or precious books. Therefore, the apostle Paul and his scribes would have used these materials.

This conclusion is supported in II Timothy 4:13 by the presence of the Greek word *membránas*, traditionally used for parchments produced from animal skins. Paul’s use of this word suggests that the autographs of his books were initially written on parchment. Paul’s scribes would have made and sent certified papyrus scrolls from these masters to their intended destinations (cf. Gal. 6:11; II Thes. 3:17). Paul obviously knew that only parchment could provide the needed durability the sacred Scriptures demanded.

Paper (1100 AD to the present): Paper first appeared in the 800s AD and gained popularity in the 1100s AD. It was adapted from China, where it was first produced. Paper was used regularly after 1100 AD in copying and later in printing the biblical texts, including whole books. Nearly 25 percent of the surviving New Testament manuscripts and lectionaries are written on paper (Aland, p. 77).

Text Storage Formats

Scroll Format: Papyrus and parchment were ideally suited for the roll or scroll format of early published books. Papyrus sheets were glued (and parchment segments sewn) together to form scrolls of varying dimensions. Common scroll sizes were 30 feet or more in length and nine to ten inches in height. Scribes normally wrote on one side of a scroll in columns about three inches wide arranged across the sheet from right to left for Old Testament books and from left to right for Greek New Testament books. Margins between the columns were small (about one-half of an inch), allowing some space for notes. Space was left at the beginning and end of scrolls to protect the text and give the reader something on which to hold or to insert a wooden shaft (roller) for turning. Titles were usually given at the end of the manuscript (Kenyon, p. 16).

Mark used the Greek word *bíblo* to refer to Exodus, a “book of Moses,” written in a papyrus scroll format (Mark 12:26). Scrolls written in Hebrew without the vowel points and accent marks are still employed today for liturgical purposes in synagogues. Jesus also read from a scroll of Isaiah, which was probably about 23-25 feet in length (Luke 4:17-20). Most New Testament books were written initially in a papyrus scroll format of about 30 feet in length. A copy of the book of Luke would have needed a scroll of this length (Moorman, *Forever Settled*, p. 65). The book of Ephesians would have been four

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feet in length, and the Acts of the Apostles might have formed a scroll about 30 feet in length (Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, 1898 ed., p. 94).

Sir Frederic Kenyon, the late director and principal librarian of the British Museum, explained the effect of the papyrus scroll on the early transmission of the New Testament books: "... so long as the papyrus roll [scroll] was the normal vehicle for literature, each of the Gospels and the Acts must have circulated separately. It was not possible to possess in a single volume all the four Gospels or all the Epistles of St. Paul, still less a complete New Testament. In the earliest days each book had its own separate history, and not every Christian community would have had a complete collection [initially] of all that we now know as the canonical books" (Kenyon, *The Text*, p. 16).

Codex Format: This situation changed dramatically in the latter half of the first century AD with the creation of the codex or modern book form (a document with leaves attached at the spine with writing on both sides). The codex made it possible to gather the New Testament books into a single volume. Kenyon described its effect on the production of the biblical books: "The advantage of the codex was that it could include much more matter than the roll, without becoming unduly cumbersome [clumsy]. The earliest papyrus codex known contained the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy, which would have required three rolls. Another, of the early third century, contained all four Gospels and the Acts, which would previously have occupied five separate rolls. Another, of the same date, contained all the Epistles of St. Paul, except (apparently) the Pastorals [epistles to the ministry or pastors]" (Kenyon, p. 19).

Archaeological evidence indicates that all but four of the oldest surviving New Testament papyri were written in codex form (Aland, p. 102). The earliest codex, dated 100-150 AD, is the Rylands papyrus fragment of John 18 (Papyrus 52). This historical evidence implies that the use of the codex by Christians for their writings extends back into the first century. By contrast, pagan and Jewish literature is found in the scroll format for a period of time afterwards.

This evidence supports Paul's use of the word "codex" in II Timothy 4:13 to compile, seal and preserve his books. The possible redating of an early papyrus codex of his Epistles (Papyrus 46), from 200 to 85 AD, certainly adds credibility to a literal reading of this passage (Holland, *Crowned with Glory*, p. 246). Nonetheless, Paul's use of the word parchments in this verse in connection with the words *tá biblíá*, translated "the books," indicates at the very least that Paul was "canonizing" his books. Paul would have closely followed the practice of using leather for the canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures. The fact that parchment is specifically mentioned in this passage suggests that Paul's books were composed on this material. It also indicates that his books were bound and sealed in codex form for long-term preservation after they had been fully edited. Writings on parchment awaiting minor edits were not placed in the codex form.

The vellum codex was favored by scribes for copying the New Testament beginning in the fourth century AD. Sinaiticus and Vaticanus are two of the most famous Greek codices (plural of codex) of the Old and New Testaments.

Masoretic scribes began to adopt the codex form around 700 AD for copying and preserving the books of the Hebrew Scriptures (Würthwein, p. 8). The larger writing area of the codex undoubtedly offered more space to accommodate the marginal scribal notes (Masora) for correct copying and reading of the Old Testament text.

Ancient Versions

Ancient translations directly from the sacred apographs play a key role in modern textual criticism. "Translation of literature was not common in ancient times, and the translation of the Hebrew OT [Old Testament] into Greek before the time of Christ occu-

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pies a unique place in ancient literature. In contrast, the NT [New Testament] was translated into other languages [e.g., Old Latin and Syriac] as early as the 2nd century” (Bromiley, p. 817).

The *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* explains why Christian missionaries of the early centuries translated the Scriptures into local languages. “When the first Christian missionaries began to carry the gospel message beyond the bounds of Judea and Samaria, the Greek language was known and spoken almost everywhere they went throughout the Roman empire. Even Latin, the official language of the Roman conquerors, was less the common language of the empire than was Greek.

“This means that many people of the lands around the Mediterranean were bilingual or even trilingual, speaking their own language as well as Greek and often Latin. To many, of course, either Greek or Latin was their native tongue; but in many areas their own language was neither of these.... Although a missionary could have preached in Greek in many areas, in order to be lastingly effective the Gospel needed to be translated into the language which the people used in their homes and in intimate conversation. An indication of this fact is seen in Paul’s experience at Lystra (Acts 14:8-18), where, even though the people evidently understood Paul when he spoke in Greek, when they themselves wanted to speak of religious matters they used their own Lycaonian speech.

“The ancient versions of the New Testament, in common with virtually all subsequent versions, were missionary in origin and purpose. They were made so that the people to whom the Christian message was being taken could read it in their own language rather than in a language which they may have known, if at all, only as a language of trade and commerce [i.e., Greek]” (Tenney, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 871).

Scholars have historically used the ancient versions to reconstruct obscure passages or correct alleged errors that exist in the biblical texts. They have also utilized them to identify the source text (*Vorlage*) used by ancient translators. This information is used to date and determine the geographical area in which a text circulated. However, there are limitations in using ancient versions for these purposes.

Ernest Würthwein describes the shortcomings of early versions in textual studies, especially for reconstructing the Hebrew Old Testament text: “... each of the versions comes with its own peculiar range of problems. For a long period the versions were approached rather naively and used directly for textual criticism on the uncritical assumption that the base from which they were translated could be readily determined. But the matter is not that simple. Anyone who translates also interprets: the translation is not simply a rendering of the underlying text but also an expression of the translator’s understanding of it. And every translator is a child of a particular time and of a particular culture. Consequently, every translation, and especially a translation of the Bible produced to meet the practical needs of a community, must be understood and appreciated independently in its own right.

“Translations reflect the intellectual assumptions of their translators ... and most translations of the Bible are the work of a number of anonymous translators. Therefore we must distinguish between what is derived from the original text and what is contributed by the translator. This is a formidable task to be accomplished before we can proceed to use the versions for purposes of textual criticism.

“The history of most of the versions is beset by many problems which are yet unsolved and are perhaps insoluble [incapable of being solved], especially for the early period [e.g., the Septuagint and Syriac Peshitta]...of all the problems of literary criticism, that of the biblical versions is encumbered with such a variety of diverse factors that any hope for a scientifically conclusive solution is very slight” (Würthwein, pp. 48-49).

These potential weaknesses have not deterred scholars from using ancient versions to try to establish the original wording of the biblical texts in places where manu-

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scripts differ (variant readings). Many scholars still emphasize the contributions of ancient versions to textual criticism and the translation process, especially in identifying the presence or absence of phrases or passages in the underlying text and in determining the wording where passages appear obscure.

As noted, the original documents of many of these versions are fragmentary or lost; thus their real value to textual criticism is limited in many respects. The process of recovering an original reading from an ancient version is complicated because many were subsequently copied and recopied or even revised (e.g., the Septuagint, Old Latin and Syriac Peshitta). During this process, alternate readings (letters and words) have crept into their texts. Another factor limiting the usefulness of certain versions to textual criticism is that many were translated from other versions, not the original biblical languages of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. For example, the Septuagint has served as the basis for the Old Testament in many early Christian versions because the Hebrew language was virtually unknown to early translators in comparison to Greek.

There are also other difficulties related to grammar and translation quality. Certain ancient versions cannot confirm the presence or absence of the Greek article in the New Testament text since some languages, like Latin for instance, have no definite article (adapted from Bromiley, p. 817 and Tenney, p. 872). Other languages cannot translate the Greek verb tenses (e.g., aorist, perfect and imperfect tenses) (Tenney, p. 872). An interpretative translation (targum) will not often reflect the word order, style and characteristics of the original biblical texts in comparison to one that is more literal

(A comprehensive description of the origins, transmission and limitations of ancient versions for use in New Testament textual criticism is available in the book titled *The Early Versions of the New Testament* by Bruce M. Metzger. The most important ancient versions for use in Old Testament criticism are evaluated by Ernst Würthwein in his book *The Text of the Old Testament*, pp. 50-104.)

Extra-Biblical Writings

Scholars often consult the citations of Jewish and Christian writers to recover the wording of the original biblical text at places where manuscripts disagree or passages seem obscure. Extra-biblical writings include those of Jewish medieval rabbis, historians such as Josephus and early Greek, Latin and Syriac Christian writers. These individuals authored commentaries and theological treatises, preached sermons and presumably quoted directly from the biblical texts.

Like translations, the original documents written by these authors have been lost. The fact that some of these writings have been translated into and preserved in a secondary language often limits their use for textual criticism. Therefore, citations must be treated judiciously. Serious questions must be answered: Did a writer carefully and directly quote from the biblical manuscripts before them, from a translation or from memory? Did scribes alter later quotations within these writings to harmonize with the text known to them? Was the author influenced in his writing by the prevailing philosophical climate of his time (i.e., Gnostic or Hellenistic Christianity)? These are some of the issues that scholars contend with when dealing with these writings (adapted from Bromiley, pp. 803, 818).

Witnesses to the Hebrew Scriptures

Figure 3 on pages 218-219 traces some of the various witnesses to the Hebrew Old Testament text. What follows is a brief overview (cf. Würthwein, pp. 10-104).

Where are the Witnesses?

Hebrew Old Testament Manuscripts

The most important Hebrew witnesses of the Old Testament books include manuscripts of the Masoretic Text, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Samaritan Pentateuch.

Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT): The chief and most reliable witness of the Hebrew Scriptures is the Masoretic Text. It has been the authoritative Old Testament text of Judaism since the second century AD. Protestants adopted it at the beginning of the Reformation when they largely forsook the Latin Vulgate and Greek Septuagint as the basis for their translations of the Old Testament. The Roman Church has historically relied on Jerome's Latin Vulgate for its English versions of the Old Testament. Catholics have employed the MT as well, following the papal encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in 1943 and the translation of the New American Bible in 1970. The Greek Orthodox Church has traditionally used a Septuagint translation as its official Old Testament text.

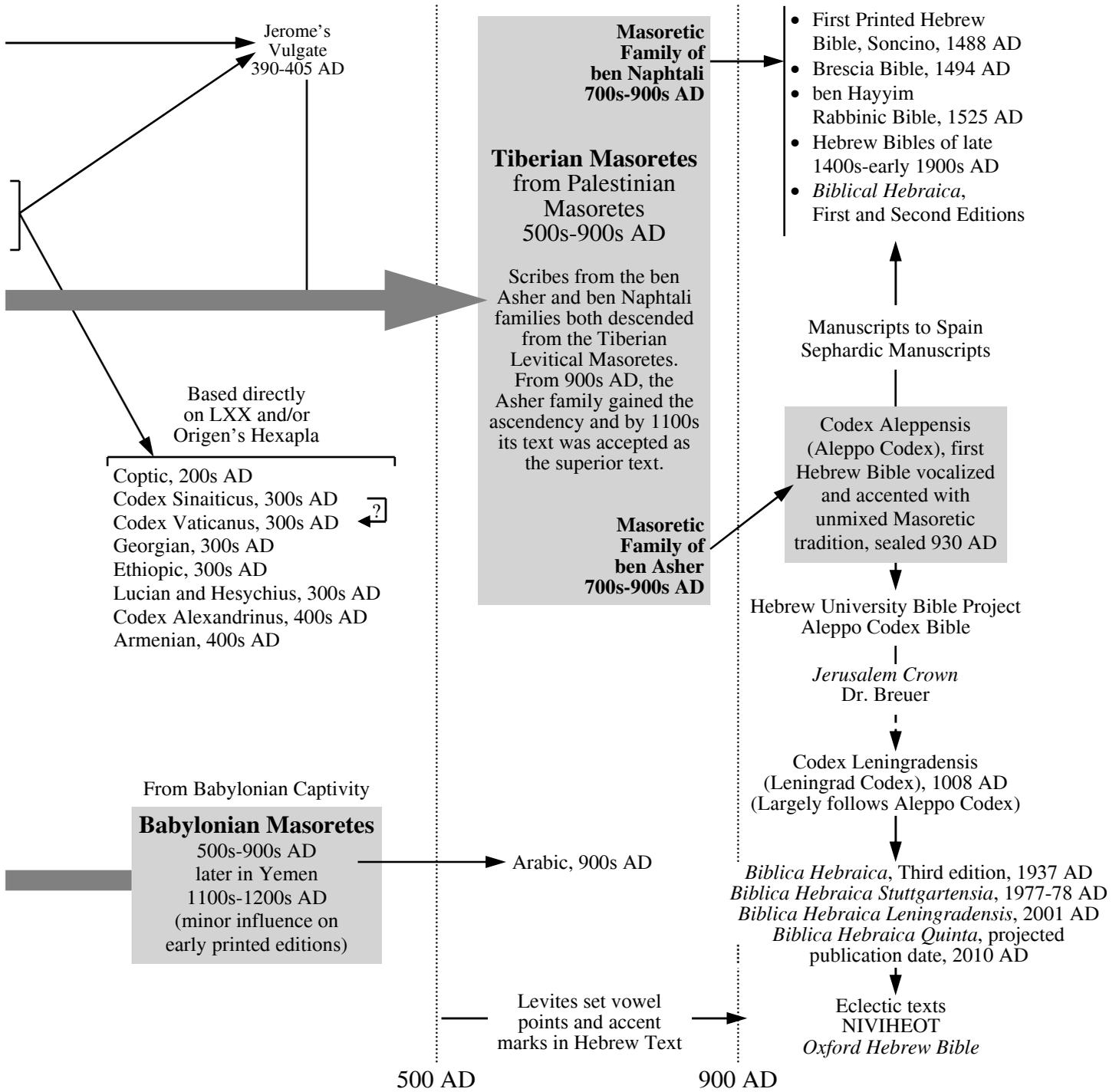
The Hebrew Bible was initially transmitted through the meticulous care of Levites who copied portions of the original text in consecutive generations from the time of Moses until the time of Ezra (cf. Deut. 17:18, 31:9, 24-26). The MT acquired its name from the Hebrew word *masora*, meaning tradition. The text in its present form is based on the Masora, the textual tradition and marginal notes of the Levitical scholars known as Masoretes. The Masoretes were active from about 500-950 AD and continued the work of earlier Levitical scribes known as Sopherim, who were appointed by Ezra as the official guardians of the Hebrew text following its revision and official "canonization" by Ezra and the Great Assembly (500s-400s BC). The Masoretes developed a system of vowel points and accent marks superimposed on the fixed consonantal text. Their goal was to preserve the proper pronunciation of the Old Testament text after Hebrew ceased to be a commonly spoken language. (Hebrew scrolls used for worship purposes do not contain the Masora, accent marks and vowel points.)

There were originally three different Masoretic vowel and accent systems: the Palestinian, Babylonian and Tiberian. By the 900s AD, the Masoretes from Tiberias in Palestine had developed a more elaborate system that represented the pronunciation and intonation of the Hebrew text in minute detail (Würthwein, pp. 21-24). Their system eventually superseded all others. The Tiberian Masoretes, led by the family of ben Asher, played a leading role in standardizing the Old Testament text for five generations (700s-900s AD). Aaron ben Moses ben Asher is credited with sealing the first codex of the complete Hebrew Bible with full Masoretic notes about 930 AD. The ben Asher text, contained in the Aleppo Codex, eventually became the accepted form of the Hebrew Old Testament text by the Jewish community in the 1100s AD after an endorsement by acclaimed Jewish scholar and theologian Maimonides. Another important manuscript reflecting the tradition of ben Asher is the Leningrad Codex.

The oldest surviving MT manuscripts date from 800-1000 AD. Twentieth-century archaeologists and scholars have discovered numerous Hebrew fragments in Egypt. One significant find was the Nash Papyrus (a liturgical text of the Decalogue and Shema of Deut. 6:4), which dates from 100-200 BC. A second group includes the Cairo Genizah fragments, consisting of thousands of parchment fragments preserved and uncovered in a storeroom (genizah) for old books and documents at Ben Ezra Synagogue in Fustat, Old Cairo. These fragments date from 500-800 AD and hold value in determining the historical development of the Masoretic vocalization system.

Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS): In 1947, two shepherd boys discovered some scrolls in a cave at Qumran, eight miles south of Jericho in Palestine, northwest of the Dead Sea. These were the first of hundreds of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek scrolls found in 11 caves between 1947 and 1956. The biblical manuscripts found near the Dead Sea number 223 and form the earliest surviving witnesses to the Hebrew Scriptures (Schiffman,

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pp. 34-35). These manuscripts pre-date the MT by nearly 1,000 years. Every Old Testament book is presumed to be represented among the Dead Sea documents except Esther, including two nearly complete copies of the book of Isaiah and the first two chapters of Habakkuk (Ibid., p. 163).

Manuscripts relating to the religious life of the Qumran community, the Septuagint, the Samaritan Pentateuch and various apocryphal works were also located among the archaeological remains. In addition, sets of Hebrew texts were found in the Judean Desert near Masada (ca. 73 AD), Wadi Murabba'at and Nahal Hever (copied before 135 AD). The entire collection, now known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, dates from 250 BC to about 70 AD. The scrolls comprise the most ancient documents written in the Hebrew language and have added a new dimension to Old Testament textual criticism and Hebrew philology (study and science of language). They hold value in determining the development of Judaism from the Second Temple period following the close of the Hebrew canon (400s BC) to the editing of the Mishnah (ca. 200 AD).

Samaritan Pentateuch: The first five books of the Bible (Genesis to Deuteronomy) form the official text of the renegade Levites who settled in the area of southern Samaria during postexilic Judaism (ca. 539 BC-70 AD). These books were preserved in the old Hebrew script rather than in the square script of the MT. Scholars traditionally had assumed that the Samaritan Pentateuch contained a text earlier than the MT. However, modern paleographic research dates the text to about 128 BC (Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, p. 83). It contains numerous alternate readings introduced by the Samaritan sect to preserve its cultic practices. Its only real value to textual criticism is the few out of 1,900 cases where its wording closely agrees with the Septuagint or a text supposedly quoted by some of the New Testament writers in contrast to the MT (Würthwein, p. 46).

Ancient Versions

The translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek before the time of Christ holds a unique place in the history of ancient Bible versions. Since Biblical Hebrew ceased to be the common language spoken among the Jews in Palestine and elsewhere by the time of Christ, the Greek Septuagint (later Origen's Hexapla) served as the logical source for translations of the Old Testament books. The Old Latin, Coptic, Ethiopic and Armenian versions were made from the Septuagint beginning in the mid-100s AD. This increases their value to Septuagint textual studies, while limiting their merits for textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible.

Translations made directly from the Hebrew Old Testament text consist of the Greek Septuagint, Aramaic Targums, Syriac Peshitta and Jerome's Latin Vulgate. These are the most important ancient versions for Hebrew Old Testament textual criticism because of their possible value as witnesses to the pre-Masoretic Hebrew consonantal text and its pronunciation.

Aramaic Targums: Since a portion of the Jewish community did not understand Hebrew after its return from captivity in Babylon, it became necessary to combine synagogue lessons with an Aramaic translation. The Jewish tradition of translating, called *targem*, is traced to Ezra (Neh. 8:8). Written targums for study and training of translators were in existence by the first century AD. These interpretative and paraphrased documents sometimes ignore the literal meaning and wording of the Hebrew text, making them more valuable for exegesis (technical interpretation of the text) than textual criticism (Würthwein, pp. 79-80).

Syriac Peshitta: The origins of the Peshitta Old Testament are largely unknown. Scholars believe that the Pentateuch was first translated about 40-70 AD to meet the

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needs of Jewish converts, namely the ruling house of Adiabene, a kingdom east of the Tigris River. The scholarly consensus is that the Pentateuch was faithfully translated from the Hebrew text into Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic spoken in Mesopotamia. The view that the Peshitta Old Testament is of Christian origins has been proven to have no merit. It is more probable that converts to Christianity in the region later adopted it for their own use. The remaining Old Testament books, except Isaiah, are of unknown origin. They reflect a departure away from the Hebrew text and toward the Targum and Septuagint versions. Scholars consider the Peshitta an important Old Testament witness because its language is closely related to Hebrew and the type of Aramaic spoken by Jesus and His disciples (cf. Würthwein, pp. 85-87; Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament*, p. 222; Moorman, pp. 34-36).

Greek Septuagint (LXX): The Septuagint is the earliest and most influential ancient translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Its origins are shrouded in legend and contradiction. Archaeological and historical evidence suggests that the Pentateuch was translated into Greek for the royal library of the Egyptian king Ptolemy Philadelphus II by Hellenistic Jews in Alexandria about 278 BC. Whether this event actually occurred is debatable. It is reasonable to presume that Alexandrian Jews later adopted a Greek version for their own use after they could no longer understand Hebrew (Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, p. ii). It is commonly believed that different Jewish scholars translated the remaining Old Testament books over the next century or so. Clearly some form of Greek Old Testament translation was used among Diaspora Jews within the centuries prior to and during Jesus' time.

It is very probable that regional Greek versions of the Prophets and Writings sections of the Old Testament existed by Jesus' time. According to Würthwein, these versions would have provided Jews and non-Jews an opportunity to study the Old Testament in the common language of the day—Greek (Würthwein, p. 54; cf. Acts 8:26ff as a possible example).

Later revisions of the LXX or new Greek translations of the Hebrew Old Testament include those of Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion and Origen (182-251 AD). Origen's Hexapla (240 AD) contained six columns consisting of the four versions listed previously, along with the fixed Hebrew consonantal text and a Greek transliteration of it. Origen's disciples in Caesarea, Pamphilus and Eusebius, copied and circulated the Hexapla for more than half a century after his death. The Sinaitic manuscript (dated 300s AD), which contains the Old Testament, was corrected against a copy of Origen's Hexapla, (Kenyon, pp. 47-48). In the fourth century AD, Lucian, a scholarly theologian of Antioch, and Hesychius, a bishop in Alexandria, produced similar revisions of the LXX text as Origen had done earlier. These two texts became popular to some extent among the Eastern churches. An unknown form of the Septuagint text was adopted by the Greek Orthodox church by the end of the fourth century AD.

Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, along with the Hexapla, were apparently the first texts to include the apocrypha among the canonical Old Testament books. Vaticanus, Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus (another Greek uncial) are the manuscripts primarily used by scholars in producing modern editions of the LXX because they contain complete or nearly complete texts of the Old Testament translated into Greek.

Jerome's Latin Vulgate: Pope Damasus I commissioned the Greek and Latin scholar Eusebius Hieronymus (also known as Jerome) in 383 AD to revise the Gospels of the Old Latin Bible. Jerome's major contribution to the Latin versions was his later translation of the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew text. Scholars use Jerome's version for textual criticism, claiming it reflects the pronunciation and text of Biblical Hebrew of the late fourth century AD.

Jerome made a first revision of the Psalms (Roman Psalter) based on the LXX

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while living in Rome in 383 AD. Some time after Damasus' death in 385 AD, Jerome completed a second revision of the Psalms titled the Gallican Psalter from Origen's Hexapla. It reflected his desire to bring the Psalms more in line with the Hebrew text. He allegedly revised the entire Old Testament from the Hexapla; only the text of Job and fragments of Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes have survived. He soon found working from the Hexapla unsatisfactory and realized the Hebrew text was vastly superior (cf. Sparks, *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, pp. 513-515, 518-521, 531; Würthwein, p. 96).

Scholars believe that it was either at the request of friends or due to his own ambition that Jerome turned to the Hebrew text used in Palestine at the time to translate the Old Testament into Latin (Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6, p. 1021). This translation was apparently made at Bethlehem ca. 390-405 AD. Despite his return to the Hebrew text and assistance from Jewish scholars in Tiberias, he was heavily dependent on the various Greek versions (Origen, Aquila, et al.) as translation aids because no Hebrew dictionaries or grammars existed to assist him in his work (Comfort, p. 168; Würthwein, p. 97).

Scholars are divided on whether Jerome translated the entire Old Testament from the Hebrew text or simply revised the existing Old Latin translation of the Old Testament according to the Hebrew. His Hebrew version of the Psalms is found in a number of manuscripts alongside the Gallican version, which is part of the official Roman church edition of the Vulgate. The general distrust of Jerome's work by the majority of his fellow theologians, including Augustine, might have persuaded him to consider carefully how far to deviate from the Old Latin text. In contradiction to popular belief, Jerome did not revise several of the Old Testament apocryphal books (Baruch, Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom of Solomon, and Maccabees) because he believed them to be non-canonical (Würthwein, pp. 96-97, 99).

Over the centuries, Jerome's Latin version was revised numerous times. According to scholar Merrill F. Unger, it contains elements from every period, including his 1) unrevised apocryphal books; 2) Old Latin revised Psalter from the LXX; 3) free Latin translation of the apocryphal Judith and Tobit; 4) Old Testament translation from Hebrew, except the Psalter; 5) Old Latin revised Gospels; and 6) lightly revised remainder of the Old Latin New Testament (Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 1348). It was in this haphazard state that the Vulgate appeared in 1456 AD as the first printed book known as the Gutenberg or Mazarin Bible.

In the ensuing battle over the biblical texts with Protestant Reformers, the Council of Trent in 1546 AD declared the Vulgate, including 12 apocryphal works dispersed among the Old Testament books, as the standard text of the Roman church. The 1592 revision of the Vulgate by Pope Clement VIII finally became its official Bible. Over 8,000 Latin manuscripts of Jerome's Vulgate exist today.

Quotations from Jewish or Christian Authors

Testimony for an original text is drawn from citations from the Hebrew Scriptures, which are frequently found in Jewish literature beginning in the Second Temple period. These include references in non-canonical books and the works of Jewish theologian and Hellenistic philosopher Philo and Jewish historian Josephus. Testimony is also drawn from the Old Testament commentaries of so-called Christian writers such as Origen and Jerome. Moreover, quotations from Old Testament books found in the New Testament offer additional insight into what the original text of the Hebrew Bible might have been.

Many scholars believe that the literature of the Jewish rabbis offers a rich supply

Where are the Witnesses?

of data to verify the credibility of the MT. Rabbinic literature contains hundreds of deviations from the accepted, standard Masoretic Text, many from manuscripts with a supposedly different consonantal text. Rabbinic traditions often comment on scribal activities in transmitting the texts. “These tell of [alleged] ‘scribal corrections’ and of divergent readings in different scrolls....There are reports of the existence of an official Temple model scroll from which other scrolls were corrected” (Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 2, p. 161).

Witnesses to the Greek Scriptures

Figure 4 on pages 224-225 traces the various witnesses to the Greek New Testament text. A brief overview follows (cf. Holland, pp. 6-11 or Harrison, *Biblical Criticism: Historical, Literary and Textual*, pp. 125-138).

Greek New Testament Manuscripts

The Greek manuscripts form the chief witnesses to the original New Testament writings. At the time the apostles and their scribes wrote the New Testament, two styles of handwriting were commonly used: **uncial** (continuous capital letters) and **cursive** (connected or running lowercase letters). See Figure 5 on page 226. The first style was used typically for literary works, while the second was used for private, commercial and legal purposes. It is possible that the apostle Paul wrote his Epistles in a cursive script, reflecting their epistolary nature as personal correspondence to the brethren. However, it is more probable that his Epistles were written in the uncial type since the earliest known manuscripts of all books of the New Testament appear only in uncial handwriting (Bromiley, p. 815). This might have been what Paul meant in Galatians 6:11 where he wrote, “See with what large letters I have written to you with my *own* hand.”

Today there are about 100 papyri, 300 uncials and 2,800 minuscule Greek manuscripts that serve as primary witnesses to the New Testament text (Aland, pp. 87, 103, 128). Nearly 80 percent of all Greek scribal copies are kept on microfilm or otherwise stored at the Institute for New Testament Textual Research, a manuscript center in Münster, Westfalia, Germany. Virtually all copies are in the codex or modern book form. Definitions of the primary witnesses follow:

Papyri (ca. 50-800 AD): Codices with papyrus pages written in a uncial style.

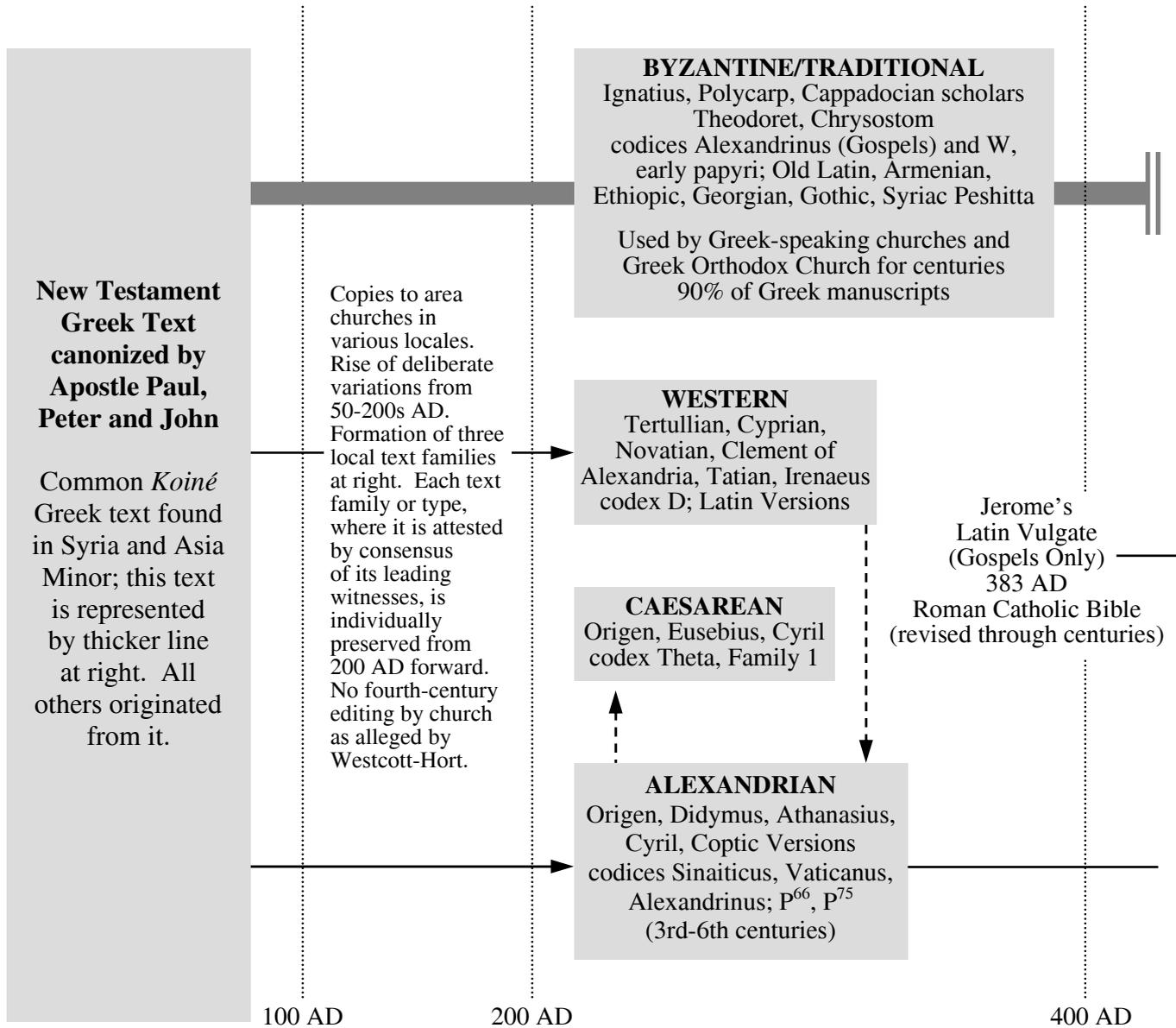
Uncials (ca. 300-1100 AD): Codices with vellum pages written in uncial style.

Minuscules (Cursives) (ca. 800-1600 AD): Codices with either vellum or paper pages written in a modified cursive style adapted after centuries of use for personal, commercial and legal purposes.

A copying revolution occurred in the 800s AD, which had a direct impact on the transmission of the Greek New Testament manuscripts. According to Dr. Robinson, the handwriting of codices switched rapidly from a uncial to a cursive script. He explains, this “change likely was initiated by Theodore of Studium [a Byzantine monastic reformer, 759-826 AD] and was swiftly accepted throughout the Greek-speaking world as a replacement for the more ponderous [i.e., clumsy] uncial script. Within a century and a half uncial script had ceased to exist among continuous-text NT MSS and soon after that disappeared even from the more traditional and conservative lectionaries. The upshot of this copying revolution was similar to what transpired following the papyrus-to-vellum conversion of the fourth century: uncial MSS of far earlier date were recopied in great quantity into the new and popular minuscule script and then destroyed” (Robinson, par. 61). This revolution plays a key role in the identification of the authentic Greek text of the New Testament.

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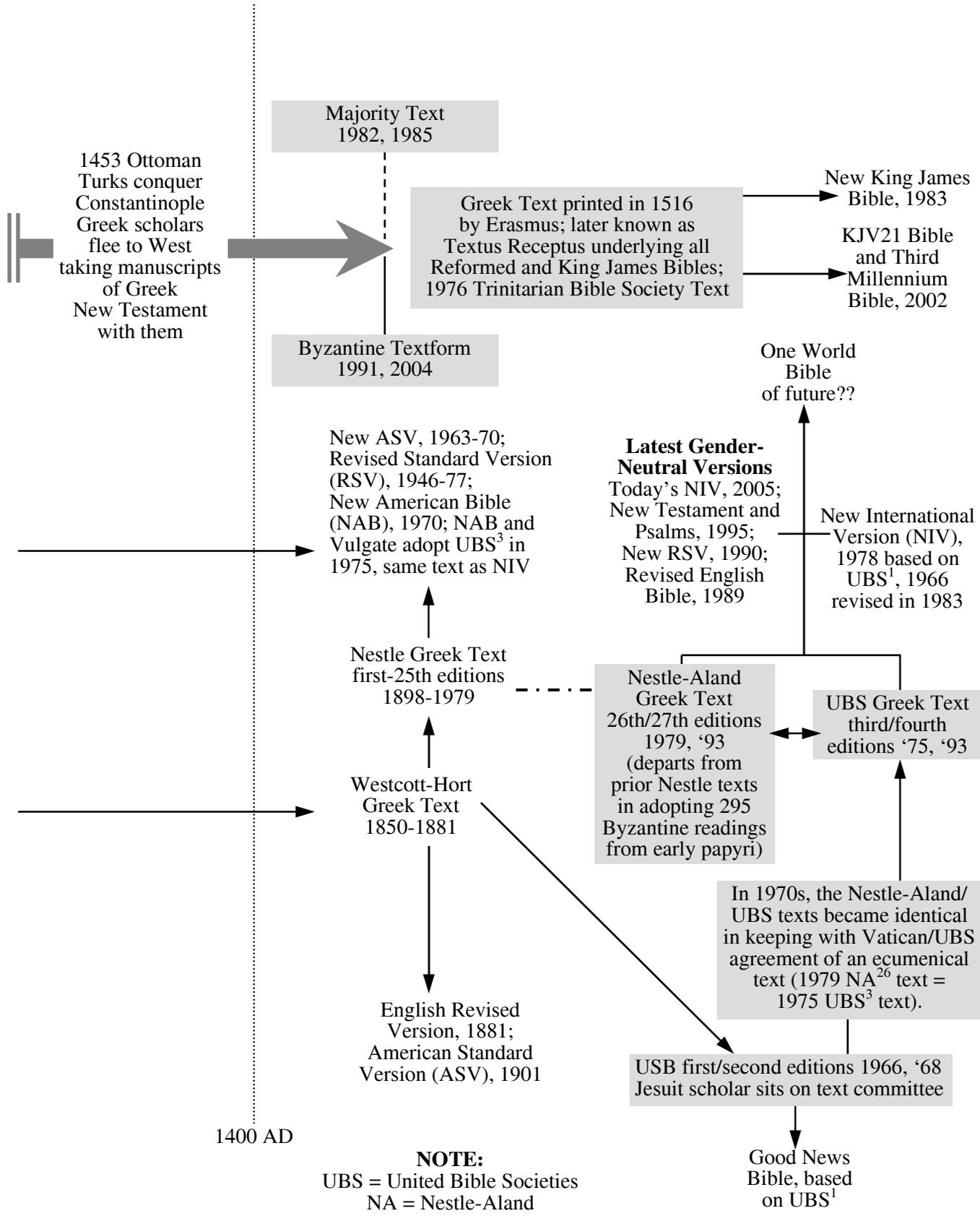
Figure 4
Transmission of the Greek New Testament Text



| KEY | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ————— | = direct influence from source text |
| ----- | = indirect influence from source text |
| - . - . - . - | = departure from earlier editions |
| █ | = preservation of original text |
| See Glossary for definition of terms; all dating is approximate unless specified. | |

Sources include Harry Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type*, p. 131; Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 1984 ed., pp. 226-229; www.bible-researcher.com

Where are the Witnesses?

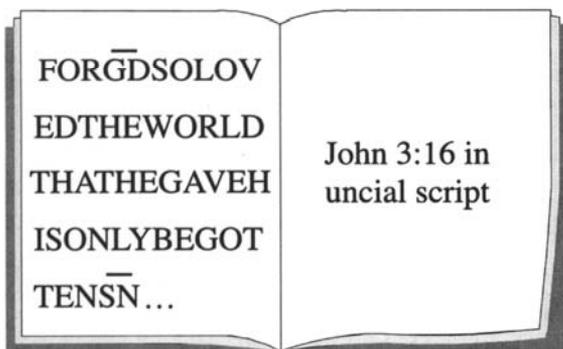


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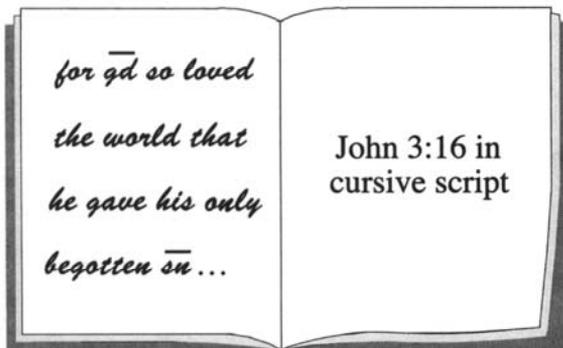
During the centuries following the printing of the Authorized Version (known as the King James Version or KJV), scholars collected, compared and classified data on variant readings (differences) found in the Greek copies of the New Testament. One fact became apparent due to these efforts: No two Greek copies were exactly identical in all their particulars. Despite the differences, enough similarities existed between the handwritten copies for scholars to group them into four **artificial** manuscript families.

Johann Bengel, a German scholar and leading Lutheran minister, was the first to propose two manuscript families in 1725: Asiatic (i.e., Byzantine) and African. Johann Selmer theorized three families: Alexandrian, Eastern (Byzantine) and Western. Johann Griesbach refined the previous scholars' classifications of the Greek manuscripts into three ancestral groups: Alexandrian, Byzantine and Western. He laid the foundation for all subsequent work on the Greek New Testament text. In the late 1800s, Dr. F.J.A. Hort classified the Greek New Testament manuscripts into four groups: Alexandrian, Neutral, Syrian (Byzantine) and Western.

Figure 5
Greek Handwriting Styles
in English



Uncial Script, 50-800 AD
text written in continuous capital letters



Cursive Style, 800-1600 AD
text written in connected or running lowercase letters, resembling handwriting

Abbreviations of Sacred Names (known as nomina sacra):

GD/gd=God; Sn/sn=Son

Where are the Witnesses?

Greek manuscripts are still grouped into four manuscript families, namely, Alexandrian, Byzantine, Caesarean and Western. Of these families, the Byzantine and Alexandrian are the most influential due to their extensive use in English Bible translation over the last 500 years.

Alexandrian (Egyptian) Text: This manuscript family generally circulated in the region of Alexandria, though elements are detected outside of Egypt in a few ancient versions and among the writings of the more scholarly Christians. Many scholars believe this text was a “refinement” of the Western text. The Alexandrian text essentially disappeared for centuries after 500 AD, only to be rediscovered again in the mid-1800s. The modern eclectic or critical Greek texts depend heavily on a minority of Alexandrian type manuscripts, due to their age. These include codices Sinaiticus, Vaticanus and related papyri (66, 75, etc.). In spite of their years, these manuscripts often disagree with one another and show significant signs of grammatical revision and the influence and refinement of Egyptian scribes. The Alexandrian text has served as the basis of most contemporary English New Testament translations since 1881.

Byzantine Text: This manuscript family obtained its primary name because it was the dominant form of the text copied by hand and used by the Greek-speaking church throughout much of the Byzantine Empire. It is also known as the Traditional Text because it was used and preserved by the Greek church from the time of the apostles until the era of movable type printing. Even today the Greek Orthodox Church has resisted scholarly efforts to revise its version of it. Yet another name for this text is the Majority Text because it is found in 90 percent of the nearly 5,500 existing Greek New Testament manuscripts and lectionaries. It is “characterized by an overall unity despite the presence of numerous variations” (Aland, *The Trinity Journal*, p. 131). Readings of this manuscript family are found in many of the early papyri and most later uncials (Alexandrinus and W) and minuscules.

The texts of the early printed editions of the Greek New Testament (i.e., Textus Receptus texts) are nearly identical to the common text of this manuscript family. These early editions closely match the Greek text underlying the King James Version of the New Testament (1611).

Textual scholar Hermann von Soden conducted one of the most expansive studies of the Byzantine Text to date. According to his analysis of the textual evidence, the Byzantine Text remained “intact throughout the whole period of perhaps 1,200 years. Only very sporadically do readings found in other text-types appear in one or another of the varieties” (von Soden, *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, 1. Teil, 2. Abt., p. 712).¹ The strongest period of Byzantine dominance ranged from 350-1516 AD. In addition, von Soden claimed that the Byzantine Text “is of the highest antiquity, and within transmission history was the dominant element among the steadily increasing mass [of manuscripts] from century to century” (Ibid.).

Caesarean Text: This text can be found primarily in the area of Caesarea in Palestine and most likely originated in Egypt (Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 1984 ed., p. 125). This family has close connections to the Alexandrian, Byzantine and Western texts. Codex Theta and a group of related minuscule manuscripts known as Family 1 are the prime witnesses of the Caesarean text (Bromiley, p. 819; Hills, p. 126).

Western Text: The evidence of the early papyri suggests that this manuscript family originated in the Eastern Roman Empire and was taken west to Rome (Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type & New Testament Textual Criticism*, pp. 70-76, 88). This text circulated primarily in North Africa, Italy, southern France and Egypt and was marked by

¹ The English wording provided in both citations from von Soden’s work is a translation and a reasonable representation of the original German.

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additions, long paraphrases and omissions. Codex Beza is the prime manuscript witness to the Western text.

Many scholars today refer to the Caesarean and Western families as “phantom” texts because of their brief existence and close affiliation with the other manuscript families (Aland, *The Text*, pp. 54-55, 66-67, 172).

The presence of “mixed texts” among the early papyri has forced many scholars who follow the theory of genealogy to rethink the existence of strict manuscript families. It is only possible to have a “mixed text” after, and not before, a recension or systematic revision of the text (Aland, “The Significance of the Papyri for New Testament Research,” *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, pp. 335-337). This concession on the part of scholars means that the dominant forms of the text previously mentioned (Alexandrian and Byzantine) existed before 200 AD. This overturns Westcott and Hort’s theory that the Byzantine Text was created in the fourth century by church scholars and serves no useful purpose in the study of the New Testament text. The implication of this development is that the Byzantine Text possesses an equal, if not greater, claim to the original form of the New Testament text than other manuscript families. In spite of this evidence, we have used the previously listed manuscript names for convenience.

Ancient Versions

Early translations from the Greek copies form an important source of evidence to the Greek New Testament text. Some of these versions include Old Latin, Jerome’s Latin Vulgate, Syriac Peshitta, Coptic (Egyptian), Gothic (German), Armenian and Ethiopic. Scholars use these translations in evaluating the text that non-Greek speaking readers used.

Old Latin: Old Latin is a collective term referring to a number of New Testament versions translated completely from the Greek, which circulated by 157 AD (Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 43). These versions served the practical worship needs of believers whose common language was Latin and who were generally unfamiliar with Greek, the dominant language of the second century. There are two general types of Old Latin manuscripts, reflecting the areas in which they circulated: African (North Africa) and European (Spain, France, Italy and Britain).

Latin Vulgate: As Latin began to replace the Greek language in the western portions of the Roman Empire in the third century AD, a need arose for a uniform Latin text for ecclesiastical purposes (Comfort, p. 168). To address this need, Damasus I authorized the famed scholar Jerome to revise the Gospels of the Old Latin Bible. The revision was completed about 383 AD. Oxford University scholar H.F.D. Sparks believed that in speaking of the New Testament, only the Gospels can be rightly called Jerome’s work. The remaining New Testament books were revised by “a person or persons unknown” over a period of years. Other historians contend that Jerome completed the entire New Testament before 390 AD (cf. Sparks, pp. 519-520, 522).

Syriac Peshitta: The Peshitta (meaning simple or plain) is the historic Bible of the Syrian church and one of the most ancient New Testament versions. The Syrian church had close contact with the apostles since Antioch was the center for Paul’s ministry (Acts 15:23). The Peshitta was probably translated from the Greek to serve the needs of the brethren in that region sometime in the second century AD (Hills, p. 119). Scholarship has been divided on its dating since the beginning of the twentieth century. (See Chapter Fourteen for more details.)

Where are the Witnesses?

Citations of Christian Writers

The writings of scholars of normative Christianity, commonly called the “Church Fathers,” offer textual critics some of the earliest extra-biblical evidence as to what might have been the readings of certain passages during the first three centuries after the writing of the autographs.

Anglican scholar John Burgon collected the largest index of these citations (86,489 total with 4,383 citations from 76 Christian authors whose writings have relevance to what the text was like before 400 AD). This collection consists of 16 thick volumes, housed in the British Museum. Burgon was a leading Anglican theologian and textual scholar of his time. He is most famous for his vigorous opposition to the Greek text and theory of Westcott and Hort published in 1881. He published over 50 works; the most famous are *The Revision Revised*, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels* and *The Causes of Corruption of the Traditional Text*, which have been used extensively in our study of the Greek text.

Lectionaries

There are approximately 2,300 lectionaries that exist today (Aland, *The Text*, p. 169). Lectionaries were collections of selected Scriptural passages arranged according to particular days and seasons of the liturgical year. These books contain prescribed readings from the gospels or epistles. Scholars use these to reconstruct a text based on their wording and liturgical usage within the early and medieval Greek church.

The Trail of Witnesses

The Bible is the most researched and best documented ancient book. Thousands of witnesses attest to the transmission of its texts throughout history, in contrast to other ancient books and works of fiction. In this chapter, we have surveyed the witnesses to the original writings penned by the biblical authors and shown how the various witnesses relate to one another. Each witness offers direct or indirect evidence about the state of the biblical texts in antiquity and through time. Witnesses are useful in determining the most reliable manuscripts of the original writings of the Bible.

Points to Remember

- 1) The original documents penned by biblical authors no longer exist. Most likely they were worn out through much use early on.
- 2) The primary witnesses to the sacred writings are the handwritten scribal copies.
- 3) The key to solving the debate of which texts comprise the pure words of God is the preservation of those copies.
- 4) Priests and Levites copied portions of the Hebrew Scriptures for over 2,800 years. Early Christian believers, Greek Orthodox monks and professional scribes protected and transcribed the Greek Scriptures for nearly 1,500 years.
- 5) Textual scholars and editors use three major groups of witnesses to establish the Hebrew or Greek texts used by translators: biblical manuscripts, ancient versions (translations) and extra-biblical writings.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THROUGH THE LENS OF SCRIPTURE

The Bible is the only true source of doctrinal authority for Christians. Its authority originates in its divine character; therefore, the subject of “inspiration” is of prime importance for Christians. If the texts of the Bible are not God-breathed, they cease to have authority for the Christian’s life. The Bible is also the best book for learning about its texts; it offers direct statements about its divine authorship, canonization and preservation. Some principles regarding these three subjects are examined in the following pages in order to avoid fundamental errors that have produced faulty conclusions concerning the canon (books) and words of the Bible.

The Bible Offers Proof That It Is God’s Word

While other Scriptures might immediately relate to this topic of study, only II Timothy 3:15-17 explicitly declares that the biblical texts are God-breathed. In addition, II Peter 1:19-21 encapsulates how it was written.

II Timothy 3:15-17

“And that from a child you have known the holy writings, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith, which *is* in Christ Jesus. All Scripture *is* God-breathed and *is* profitable for doctrine, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work.”

II Peter 1:19-21

“We also possess the confirmed prophetic Word, to which you do well to pay attention, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and *the* morning star arises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture originated as anyone’s own *private* interpretation; because prophecy was not brought at any time by human will, but the holy men of God spoke as they were moved by *the* Holy Spirit.”

Truths of Scripture’s Divine Authorship

Eight truths of the divine authorship of Scripture contained in the aforementioned passages that we discuss in this study are:

- 1) Every part of Scripture is God-breathed.
- 2) Only the biblical writings are God-breathed.
- 3) God is the real Author of Scripture.
- 4) The biblical authors were moved by the Holy Spirit to write the words of God.
- 5) Scripture is God’s revelation of truth.
- 6) The biblical authors reflected their own styles.
- 7) The history of the written Word of God closely followed that of oral prophecy.
- 8) All Scripture (Old and New Testaments) is profitable for Christians and serves a holy purpose.

Through the Lens of Scripture

Throughout our study, the word “inspiration” appears in quotation marks. The reason for this stylistic notation is because the word and its various forms do not adequately describe the divine character and quality of Scripture. (See Inspiration, Truth #3.) This character and quality is better defined as “God-breathed.” However, due to its popularity and to avoid confusion, we continue to use the term “inspiration” to describe the *entire* process by which Scripture became God-breathed; it is used interchangeably with the expression “divine authorship.”

Truth #1: Every Part of Scripture Is God-breathed

The first truth concerning “inspiration” is that every part of the biblical writings (letters, syllables and words) is God-breathed, each part no more or less than the other. Greek scholar Spiros Zodhiates explained that the English word “all” in II Timothy 3:16, which is translated from the Greek word *pasa*, means “every part of the whole and all of it together” (Zodhiates, “graphe,” *The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament*, p. 382). An amplified translation of this passage could read “*Every part of the whole and all of Scripture together is God-breathed*” (Ibid.).

“Inspiration” extends to the letters of the Hebrew and Greek texts, refuting the notion that only a general trustworthiness of the biblical texts is adequate. Both the details (letters, syllables and words) *and* substance (doctrines and truths) are vital in many instances to acquiring the authentic meaning of the original text.

The apostle Paul confirmed that divine authority extends to the grammatical forms of words. In his teaching on the covenant of promise in Galatians 3:16, he made the distinction between Abraham’s seed (Gk., *spermati*) and seeds (*spermasin*). The noun “seed,” whether in Hebrew, Greek or English, can be used in a singular, collective or plural sense. Paul’s argument was that in some Old Testament passages (Gen. 3:15, 22:18), seed refers to Jesus Christ, the chief representative of Abraham’s offspring. This conclusion is affirmed by Paul’s declaration a few verses later: “For you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

The Greek word endings *ti* and *sin* differentiate between one grammatical form of the word and another (singular and plural), effecting an accurate or a false teaching. The significance of this passage is well-known. Thus all who believe (Jew and Gentile alike) are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promises of the covenant confirmed by Christ (Rom. 15:8; II Cor. 1:19-20).

The late B.B. Warfield, former professor of theology at Princeton Theological Seminary and a leading scholar on the Bible’s divine authorship, wrote: “No doubt it is the grammatical form of the word which God is recorded as having spoken to Abraham that is in question. But Paul knows what grammatical form God employed in speaking to Abraham only as the Scriptures have transmitted it to him; and, as we have seen, in citing the words of God and words of Scripture he was **not** accustomed to make any distinction between them...**it is possible that what he [Paul] here witnesses to is rather the detailed trustworthiness of the Scriptural record** than its direct divinity—if we can separate two things which apparently were **not** separated in Paul’s mind” (Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, p. 844, bold added).

Jesus underscored the emphatic present tense of the Hebrew verb in Exodus 3:6 when defending the resurrection of the dead in his argument with the Sadducees, which is preserved for us in Matthew’s Gospel (Matt. 22:23ff). Near the end of this interchange, Jesus said, “Now concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt. 22:31-32). Again, the difference of a few letters in the Greek text would have altered the meaning of this passage.

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By focusing on the present tense “I am” and “God is,” Jesus emphasized the perpetual covenant and promises God established with all three patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). In order for Him ultimately to fulfill His promises to them, they “must rise and live again in the resurrection in order that He may be their God. This is what the Lord [Jesus] set out to prove (in v. 31) ‘concerning the resurrection’” (Bullinger, *The Companion Bible*, p. 1360). By doing so, Jesus silenced the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection.

Both Jesus and Paul showed an acute awareness of the minor details of the Hebrew and Greek texts. These details have a special purpose in God’s revelation of truth, and the authors of the Bible recorded them for both our edification and salvation.

Every Scripture Is Equally God-breathed

Some have erroneously considered certain biblical segments, such as the genealogies of the primitive, patriarchal and regal periods in I Chronicles (I Chr. 1-9) to be less a product of divine authorship than others like the Gospels. The differences between the various segments of Scripture are not a matter of “inspiration,” but of purpose.

The four Gospels, for example, provide us with a record of the words and actions of Jesus Christ that form the basis of salvation (Luke 1:4; John 20:30-31). According to scholar Norman Geisler, the book of Chronicles in comparison provides 1) a priestly religious history of Judah; 2) teachings of the faithfulness of God, the power of His Word and the essential role of worship in the life of God’s people; and 3) a record of the Davidic kings and their descendants through whom the Messiah would come (cf. Matt. 1) (Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament*, p. 149). Though less explicit, Chronicles also offers a typological view of the temple that points to Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God. When viewed in this light, it is clear that Chronicles is equally divine in nature and has a historical, doctrinal *and* Christological purpose that leads us to Matthew 1:1 and offers proof that God has fulfilled His promise of a Messiah.

The late John William Burgon, a textual scholar and Anglican theologian of the nineteenth century, best expressed this truism in his book *Inspiration and Interpretation*, which contains his sermons given to the undergraduate seminary students of Oriel College at Oxford University. One purpose for these sermons was to refute the heretical claims of the book entitled *Essays and Reviews*, which was written by seven authors, six of whom were from Burgon’s own denomination. Sermons three to five deal directly with the subject of the Bible’s “inspiration,” answering the claims of these critics who believed the Bible was not God-breathed in all its parts. In one sense, Burgon anticipated the biblical critics of the twentieth century (i.e., the infamous Jesus Seminar) who falsely claim that large segments of the Gospel narratives are partial or complete fiction.

Burgon wrote: “The Bible ... is the very utterance of the Eternal ... as if high Heaven were open, and we heard God speaking to us with human voice. Every book of it, is inspired alike; and is inspired entirely. **Inspiration is not a difference of degree, but of kind** [purpose]” (Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 76, emphasis added).

Later Burgon analyzed some of the details of the critics’ erroneous thinking on “inspiration”: “... there is absolutely no middle state between Inspiration and non-inspiration. If a writing be inspired, it is Divine: if it be not inspired, it is human. It is absurd to shirk the alternative. *Some* parts of the Bible, it is allowed, *are* inspired; other parts, it is contended, *are not*. Let it be conceded then, for the moment, that the catalogue of the Dukes of Edom [Gen. 36] is *not* an inspired writing; and let it be ejected from the Bible accordingly. We must by strict parity of reasoning, eject the xth [10th] chapter of Genesis, which enumerates the descendants of Japheth, of Ham, and of Shem, with the countries which they severally occupied,—that truly venerable record and outline of the

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primaeval [sic!] settlement of the nations! The ten Patriarchs before, and the ten after Noah: the many enumerations contained in the Book of Numbers: much of the two Books of Chronicles: together with the Genealogies of our Saviour as given by St. Matthew and St. Luke” (Ibid., pp. 96-97).

After spending the next few pages demonstrating how this erroneous logic could lead to the elimination of almost all biblical books containing any historical or moral elements, Burgon concluded his discourse: “You are requested to remember that when we call the Bible an inspired book....**The subject-matter indeed is different; but it is a confusion of thought to infer therefrom a different degree of Inspiration....**the Bible must stand or fall,—or rather, be received or rejected,—*as a whole*. A Divinity that over-ruled it, that those many Books of which it is composed should come to be spoken of collectively as if they were one Book....There is no disconnecting one Book from its fellows. There is no eliminating one chapter from the rest. There is no taking exception against one set of passages, or supposing that Inspiration has anywhere forgotten her office, or discharged it imperfectly. All the Books of the Bible must stand or fall together. ...And while you read the Bible, read it believing that you are reading an inspired Book:—not a Book inspired in parts only, but a Book inspired in *every* part:—not a Book unequally inspired, but all inspired equally:—not a Book generally inspired,—**the substance indeed given by the Spirit**, but the words left to the option of the writers; **but the words of it, as well as the matter of it, all—all given by God**” (Ibid., pp. 102, 111-112, 114-115, emphasis added).

Truth #2: Only the Biblical Writings Are God-breathed

Another truth of II Timothy 3:16 is that **only** the written texts, the details and substance of Scripture, are God-breathed, **not** the biblical writers. The Bible describes the prophets, apostles and their scribes as having been moved, driven or carried along by the Holy Spirit in such a way that what they wrote were the literal words of God. (See Inspiration, Truth #4.)

Both the Greek and English renderings of II Timothy 3:16 confirm this conclusion. Here the apostle Paul linked the idea of “inspiration” to the biblical writings with his use of the Greek word *graphe*. Translated “scripture” in English, the word *graphe* for a handwritten document comes from the verb *grapho*, which means “to write.” The English word “scripture” comes from the Latin word *scriptura* for the product of the act of writing (cf. *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, “scripture,” p. 1056). In the New Testament, *graphe* is used 51 times to refer *only* to the written texts of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. In most of these instances, it pertains to a passage or the entire collection of the surviving copies (apographs) of the Old Testament writings. Four passages distinctly refer to the original documents (autographs) and preserved writings of the apostles and their scribes (e.g., I Tim. 5:18; II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:19-21, 3:16).

In two passages, the Greek word *gramma(sin)(ta)* refers to the sacred writings of the Old Testament (John 5:47, II Tim. 3:15). Paul used the word *grammasin* to describe the written letters of his epistle to the Galatians (Gal. 6:11).

Dr. J.I. Packer, professor of theology at Regent College, further explained the connection between “inspiration” and the biblical texts: “Inspiration is a work of God terminating [ending], not in the men who were to write Scripture (as if, having given them an idea of what to say, God left them to themselves to find a way of saying it), but in **the actual written product. It is Scripture—*graphe*, the written text—that is God-breathed**. The essential idea here is that all Scripture has the same character as the prophets’ sermons had, both when preached and when written” (Comfort, *The Origin of the Bible*, p. 30, emphasis added).

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Biblical Writings Final Deposit of Revelation

The second truth of “inspiration” teaches us that the **final deposit** of God’s revelation of truth for mankind resides *not* in the ink, writing materials (papyrus and vellum) and handwriting, but in the words written by His holy servants in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.

Old Testament: A complete written revelation of God was not given prior to the Noachian Flood (Gen. 6-9), perhaps because the extended life spans of our earliest human ancestors allowed for God’s truth to be orally transferred among the few people who personally walked with God, such as Enoch and Noah (Gen. 5:24, 6:9). Part of God’s revelation had openly been displayed in the messianic messages of the constellations (i.e., *Mazzaroth*) from the beginning of the creation (cf. Job 38:31-32; Psa. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:19-20; Bullinger’s *The Witness of the Stars*).

In the postdiluvian era, God specifically chose Abraham with whom to establish His covenant of promise (Gen. 12, 15). God’s promises to Abraham were no doubt transmitted orally to his immediate offspring. With the limitation of human life spans after the Noachian Flood, apparently to about 120 years (Gen. 6:3), a more precise written revelation was needed of what *Jehovah*, the covenant God, required of and promised to future generations of Abraham’s descendants. After God delivered His people from bondage in Egypt as He had promised Abraham (Gen. 15:13-15), it became imperative that the new nation possess a legal and religious system and documents that reflected its divine calling (Ex. 19:4-6). God began the process by making a covenant with the Israelites and producing a written record of truth. He revealed Himself to His people through direct communication and the visions and dreams of His holy prophets (Num. 12:1-8; Heb. 1:1). Over time, these words were written down and sealed as a lasting testimony for God’s covenant people Israel.

Jesus’ discussion with the Jews in John 5 affirmed that the Hebrew Scriptures were the final deposit of revelation for the nations of Israel and Judah until the writing of the New Testament. Jesus stated: “Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you, even Moses, in whom you have hope. But if you believed Moses, you would have believed Me; for he wrote of Me. And if you do not believe his writings, how shall you believe My words?” (John 5:45-47).

How could Moses, who had been dead for nearly 1,500 years, accuse the Jews of their unbelief? The late Ernest L. Martin, a biblical historian and an early scholar of canonical studies, explained that it was common practice for people during the time of Jesus and the apostles to “consider that a letter sent to a person or a group (or even the bearer of the letter) [be] looked on as if the writer were *present* when the letter was read” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, p. 395).

The apostle Paul followed this same ancient custom, and his letters carried the same authority as if he were present. “I have previously told *you*, and I am telling you in advance the second time, as though I were present; but since I am absent now, I am writing to those who have continued to sin until now—and to all the rest—that if I come again, I will not spare” (II Cor. 13:2, cf. 13:10).

Though Moses’ writings had been copied for centuries, Jesus still considered them to be **trustworthy in all their declarations** and to carry the **same divine authority** as when they were first written. For Jesus, it was as if Moses was alive and personally accusing the Jews of their unbelief. Ironically, the Jews’ belief that Moses was a prophet of God (John 9:29) added weight to Jesus’ charge. Their refusal to heed Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 18:15, 19, pointing to Jesus as the anticipated Prophet, carried a penalty of divine judgment, which was executed over 40 years later when the Roman general Titus conquered Jerusalem and burned the temple to the ground. Jesus, the Jews and even Paul extended this same binding authority to other Old Testament writings on several

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occasions in their description of them as “law” (e.g., John 10:34-35, 12:34; I Cor. 14:21).

New Testament: The context of II Peter shows that the apostles and other New Testament writers were fully aware that their ministerial duties carried an implicit command to compose and compile an accurate testimony of their writings for the brethren before their deaths. Prior to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD, God undoubtedly revealed to the apostles that Christ would not return in their lifetimes. This is evident by comparing the tone, tenor and content of their earlier and later writings. Peter’s urgency to complete his writings is apparent from his statement in II Peter 1:15: “But I will make every effort *that* after my departure, you may always have a written remembrance of these things [the truth of v. 12], *in order* to practice *them* for yourselves.” Peter considered this task so important that he viewed failure to accomplish it as being negligent of his divine role as an apostle and a teacher of the gospel (II Pet. 1:12).

The apostle Paul earlier wrote to the church at Rome in 57 AD that his ministry carried the important responsibility of writing to the brethren. “So then, I have more boldly written to you, brethren, in part *as a way of* reminding you, because of the grace that was given to me by God, in order that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ unto the Gentiles, to perform the holy service of teaching the gospel of God; so that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by *the* Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:15-16; cf. Eph. 4:12).

This same attitude is also expressed, in varying degrees, by Luke, James, John and Jude in their writings (Luke 1:1-4; Jas. 1:19ff; I John 5:13; Jude 1:3, 5, 17; Rev. 1:1-3).

Within the first two decades of the church’s existence (ca. 50 AD), the epistle became one of the chief instruments for preaching and teaching. Paul directed his congregations and ministers (e.g., Timothy) to read and circulate his letters (Col 4:16; I Thes. 5:27; I Tim. 4:13). The epistolary form allowed Paul and the other apostles to instruct, edify, correct and comfort many brethren at one time without being on location. Paul exhorted the brethren at Thessalonica to “stand firm, and hold fast the traditions that you were taught, whether by word or by our epistle” (II Thes. 2:15). He also set his epistles as the standard by which brethren were to measure themselves and admonish others: “Now if anyone does not obey our word by this epistle, take notice of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be ashamed” (II Thes. 3:14).

Peter likewise sanctioned the **divine authority and character** of the New Testament writings in declaring “We also possess the confirmed prophetic Word, to which you do well to pay attention” (II Pet. 1:19). In this passage, “we” refers to Peter and the other surviving apostles.

As previously noted, the Greek word *graphe* is used in the New Testament to refer *only* to the written texts of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. That Peter had in mind the apostles’ written rather than oral declarations is evident in his use of the words “prophecy of Scripture” (Gk., *propheteia graphes*), meaning God-breathed writings (cf. Dunzweiler, “Are the Bibles in Our Possession Inspired?” p. 2). This same truth is developed further in his epistle where Peter explicitly placed the written commands (doctrines and teachings) of the apostles of Jesus Christ on the same level as the prophets’ words in the Old Testament writings (II Pet. 3:1-2) and equated Paul’s epistles as Scripture (II Pet. 3:16).

By compiling their sermons and teachings in written form, the apostles and New Testament authors were creating a permanent record of their words through which future brethren would believe in Christ (John 17:20).

Truth #3: God Is the Real Author of Scripture

The greatest truth taught by II Timothy 3:16 is the divine authorship of Scripture. In the Greek, this passage reads *Pasa graphē theopneustos*, meaning “All Scripture is

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God-breathed.” The word *theopneustos*, often translated “God-inspired,” is found only in this passage. What does this word actually mean?

Imperfect Definitions: The commonly translated English phrases “inspired of God,” “given by inspiration of God,” and their variations are derived from the Latin words *divinitus inspirata*. Considering that Latin was the dominant theological language of Western Europe during the early sixteenth century, and early translators were more familiar with the Latin than the Greek text of the New Testament, it is understandable why they embraced a Latinized rendering of the Greek word *theopneustos*. The Wycliffe (1382, 1395 AD) and Rhemish (1582) English versions of the Latin Vulgate, along with William Tyndale’s translation from the Greek (1526, 1534, 1535), no doubt exerted some influence on the entry of the words “inspired” and “inspiration” into the English language (cf. Bromiley, p. 840). For a detailed historical overview of the doctrine of “inspiration,” see *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* article in vol. 2, pp. 849-854.

Though not wholly inaccurate, these Latin-based words have obscured the real meaning of *theopneustos*. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* notes: “The Greek term has, however, nothing to say of *inspiring* or of *inspiration*: it speaks only of ‘aspiring’ or ‘aspiration.’ What it says of Scripture is, not that it is ‘breathed into by God’ or is the product of the divine ‘inbreathing’ into its human authors, but that it is breathed out by God, ‘God-breathed,’ the product of the creative breath of God. In a word, what is declared by this fundamental passage is simply that the Scriptures are a divine product, without any indication of how God has operated in producing them. No term could have been chosen, however, which would have more emphatically asserted the divine production of Scripture than that which is here employed [i.e., God-breathed]” (Bromiley, p. 840).

First-Century Usage: The Old Testament Scriptures represent the “breath of God” as the Holy Spirit or His almighty power (e.g., Job. 33:4; Psa. 33:6, 9). However, these examples do not match Paul’s usage of *theopneustos* in II Timothy 3:16, where **he linked the idea of the breath of God with the writings** (*graphe*) of the biblical authors. In this passage, the Greek word *theopneustos* is used as a predicate adjective, which means it modifies or describes the word “Scripture” (*graphe*). Thus, every part of Scripture possesses the quality of being God-breathed.

This first-century understanding is graphically portrayed in Jesus’ statement during His temptation by Satan: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word [utterance] that proceeds out of *the* mouth of God’ ” (Matt. 4:4). Jesus quoted this passage from Deuteronomy 8:3, which originally described how ancient Israel depended on God’s spoken command for its food (manna) in the wilderness (Ex. 16), meaning that it was God’s words that kept the people alive, not the bread. Matthew recorded that in the ensuing struggle with Satan, Jesus conquered His weakness and hunger from 40 days of fasting by appealing to the Old Testament writings for spiritual relief and nourishment, which is evident by His use of the clause “it is written.” In so doing, He sanctioned every part of the writings as the living, authoritative utterances of God.

The context of Hebrew 3-4 reveals that Paul, like Jesus, believed that every part of Scripture, including every example, principle and psalm, originated from the mouth of God. Near the end of chapter four, Paul described the written Word of God codified in the Hebrew Scriptures as “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of both soul and spirit, *and* of both *the* joints and marrow, and able to discern *the* thoughts and intents of *the* heart” (Heb. 4:12). Earlier, he quoted Psalm 95:7-11, exhorting his readers to hear God’s voice speaking through these words. Though Jesus’ and Paul’s references were to Old Testament writings, the same belief about the written words being the living, authoritative utterances of God was

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later transferred to the writings of the apostles. See the section entitled “Scriptures as the Written Oracles (Utterances) of God” for more details.

Scriptural Definition: Apart from the many unrelated, non-biblical and popular interpretations (e.g., “inspired” preaching) often associated with the English words “inspired” and “inspiration” (which first appeared as a part of the English language in the 1400s AD), the term “God-breathed” literally means that **every part of Scripture is the utterance (spoken word) of the living God set to writing**. Paul’s choice of the word God-breathed holds many implications for the biblical writings:

1) It is *only* possible for the biblical texts (letters, syllables and words) to possess this quality as a result of God’s direct intervention in the writing process. God is so identified with the writing of the Bible that *all* the words penned by its human authors are literally His words.

2) The words of Scripture possess sacred qualities (e.g., infallibility, authority, truth, etc.), whether they were first orally revealed and later recorded or were immediately written by an author receiving revelation under the influence of the Holy Spirit. All of the biblical writings are marked by a unity of thought and purpose throughout that reflects God’s mind.

3) The term “God-breathed” restricts these divine qualities to the original writings (autographs) penned by God’s servants in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Only these possess the infallible, inerrant and authoritative words and doctrines and truths given by God. Scribal copies (apographs) are God-breathed and possess the same divine qualities to the degree that they faithfully and accurately reflect the details and substance of the autographs.

4) “God-breathed” describes how the sacred quality of Scripture is distinct from that of all other non-biblical religious and secular writings.

5) Translations can **never** be considered God-breathed because they do not possess the *primary* divine authorship of the autographs and apographs! Only the **doctrines and truths** of the autographs and apographs transfer in the translation process. As such, translations are subject to error and correction because they express divine truths in words that were not originally God-breathed (i.e., English). When the doctrines and truths are translated accurately into other languages from the underlying texts, these “things” in the translation possess the divine authority and sacred qualities of the autographs (Turretin, *Institutio Theologicae Elencticae*, pp. 57, 125-126). See Figure 6.

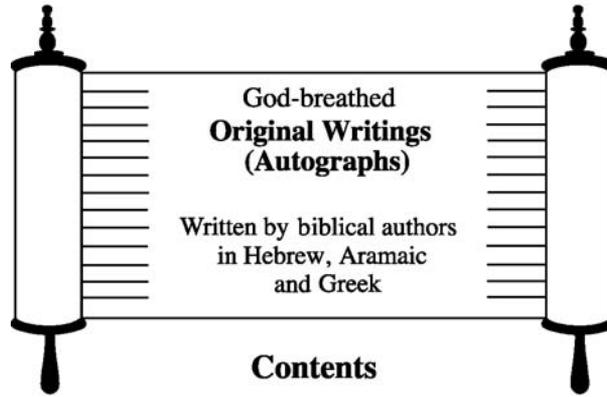
Can we know whether the Bible is imprinted with God’s “breath”? Did He guide its writing? There are at least four major discernible divine markers associated with God-breathed Scripture. These markers record the biblical authors’ conviction that the real author of their writings was God. The examples and references that follow constitute only a sampling for each category.

Signature #1: God Wrote Scripture by His Servants’ Hands

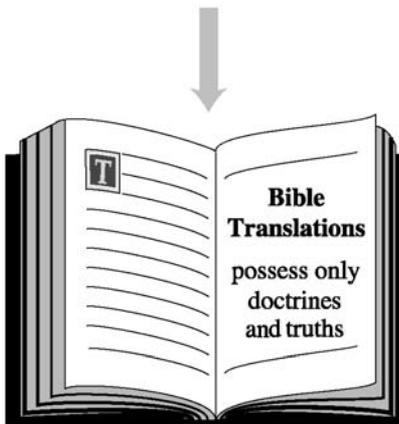
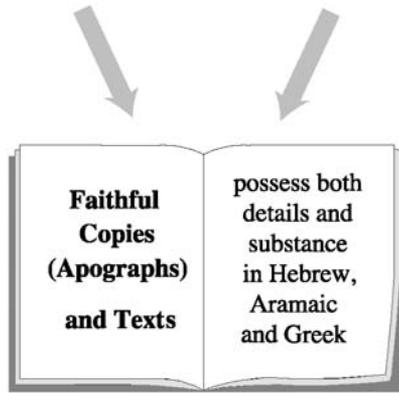
A true application of “God-breathed” in relationship to the Scriptures can be traced to Moses, the earliest known biblical writer. Exodus 17:14 reveals that God initiated the process of writing Scripture by instructing Moses to compose a short account of Israel’s deliverance from the Amalekites and His promise of future protection (Ex. 17:16). While this passage is the first time writing is mentioned in the Bible, it “clearly implies that it was not then employed for the first time but was so familiar that it was used for historic records” (Unger, “Writing,” *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, p. 1374). The 10 section headings in the book of Genesis that begin with the English word “generations” (Gen. 2:4, 5:1, 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 27, 25:12, 19, 36:1, 37:2) indicate that written narratives, histories or books of people and events existed, which Moses had ac-

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Figure 6
From Ancient Manuscripts
to Modern Translations



Details
Letters, Syllables
and Words + Substance
Doctrines and
Truths



Faithful Translations
accurately communicate in
English the doctrines and truths
as given by God

(poor copies, texts and translations do not)

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cess to when writing his account of Genesis (Nelson, *The King James Study Bible*, p. 9).

The book in which Moses placed his record of the Amalekite battle was likely the *Book of the Wars of the LORD* (Num. 21:14). This work probably contained collections of victory songs and writings about Israel's battles, including the song of praise the children of Israel sang after God defeated Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea (Ex. 15). Moses evidently used this book to chronicle Israel's other battles and to complete his books of Exodus and Numbers.

Moses later added these books to his complete work known as the Book of the Law, which eventually consisted of his five books (the Pentateuch). It formed the "supreme position of power and authority upon which the rest of the 22 books [original Hebrew numbering] of the Old Testament hinged" and contained God's revelation concerning subjects of spiritual, historical and cosmological importance (cf. Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, pp. 105-108). This collection of writings was later known by a variety of names pertaining to its authoritative nature: the Law, the Book of the Law, the law of Moses, the book of Moses, the book of the law of Moses, the book of the law of God and the book of the law of the LORD. Depending on the context, these phrases referred to either a part of or the entire collection of Moses' writings (II Chr. 23:18, Luke 24:44 and John 7:23).

Idiom Key to God's Authorship of Scripture: Though Moses wrote the entire Book of the Law, II Chronicles credits God with its authorship. Over 800 years after Moses had faithfully served as God's prophet to Israel, King Josiah reigned in Judah from 637-607 BC (cf. Franklin, *The Prophecy Series*, p. 4; this source serves as the basis for all dating). After cleansing the land of idolatrous practices, the king commenced a repair of the house of God (II Chr. 34:3-7).

In the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, Hilkiah the high priest found the Book of the Law amidst the temple debris. This book apparently had been "lost" for many years, possibly from the reign of the evil king Manasseh, Josiah's grandfather. For 57 years prior to Josiah's reign, the temple had been neglected and had fallen into disrepair. During that time, both Manasseh and later his son Amon, Josiah's father, did evil in the sight of the LORD. Manasseh built altars to the hosts of heaven in the courts of the temple. He even placed the carved image of Asherah, a pagan goddess, in the temple itself (II Ki. 21:2-7). The Book of the Law was perhaps hidden during this time by the Levites to prevent its destruction during the desecration of the temple for pagan worship. The Bible indicates that the book was still in use during the reign of Manasseh's father Hezekiah (II Chr. 30:22, 31:2-4).

The book of II Chronicles records the events surrounding the discovery of the Book of the Law: "... Hilkiah the priest found the book of the Law of the LORD written **by** [Heb., 'by the hand of'] Moses. And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, 'I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD.' And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan" (II Chr. 34:14-15). It is very possible that the Book of the Law mentioned here contained the autographs of Moses' writings. The discovery of this book became the basis of a revival of the Mosaic religion in the land of Judah during King Josiah's reign (cf. II Chr. 34:31-35:19).

Of particular note in the previous passages is the English word "by," translated from the Hebrew idiomatic phrase "by the hand of." Scholars have often ignored this idiom when translating the Hebrew text into English, thereby obscuring its meaning. Translated into Greek at a time when this phrase was understood in literary circles, the Septuagint properly renders this passage from the Hebrew, including the Greek word **χειρος** for hand. Biblical scholar E.W. Bullinger explained that this Hebrew figure of speech is known as *metonymy* and occurs when "one name or noun is used instead of an-

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other, to which it stands in ... relation.” In other words, the instrument, in this case the hand, represents the actions it performs. In contexts where the divine authorship of Scripture is the subject, Bullinger writes that “**there is an implied reference to [a testimony preserved in writing]**” or “the writing done by it [i.e., the hand] or hand-writing (sic)” (Bullinger, “Metonymy,” *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, pp. 538, 546-547, emphasis added).

Hence, this passage could be rendered as “a book of the law of the LORD by” or “preserved in the writing of” Moses. Our understanding of the English phrase “a book of the law of the LORD” is verified by its construct relationship in Hebrew, which depicts this book as a possession of the LORD. A construct relationship is defined as the joining together of two or more nouns functioning as a single unit within a sentence. In this series the final noun is in the absolute or lexicon form (i.e., LORD), while the preceding nouns (i.e., a book and the law) are in a construct or shortened form. Therefore, these construct nouns express a possessive relationship to those in the absolute form (Kelly, “Construct Relationship,” *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar*, pp. 58-63). Thus, the Book of the Law found by Hilkiah belonged to God, Who gave it to the Israelites for instruction and as a legal document that served as the basis of His covenant with them.

God’s perspective of Israel’s deliverance from Egyptian bondage and the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai is described in II Kings 17. As expected, this account credits God with writing the statutes, ordinances, laws and commandments: “But the LORD, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a outstretched arm, you shall fear Him, and you shall worship Him, and you shall do sacrifice to Him. And the statutes, and the ordinances, and the law, and the commandment, **which He** [the LORD] **wrote for you, you** shall observe to do forever. But you shall not fear other gods” (II Ki. 17:36-37).

How did God write the commandments, statutes, ordinances and laws? God literally wrote the words of the Ten Commandments on two tablets (tables) of stone with His own finger (Ex. 31:18, 32:15-16). The book of Nehemiah shows how God wrote the statutes, ordinances and laws. Shortly after the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, the Jews held a fast, publicly confessed their sins and read from the Book of the Law. As they fasted, the Levites stood up and praised God for His miraculous deliverance and mercy toward Israel throughout its history. In one segment of their prayer, they rehearsed the great events surrounding the giving of the Law: “And You [the LORD God, v. 13] came down on Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them just ordinances and laws of truth, good statutes and commandments. And You made known to them Your holy Sabbath and provided them commandments, statutes, and a law, **by the hand of Moses Your servant**” (Neh. 9:13-14).

Again, the Hebrew idiom “by the hand of” in Nehemiah portrays how the LORD’s words and thoughts became a part of the written records of the Book of the Law. Moses was the instrument through whom God spoke and wrote.

This same Hebrew idiom is repeated 13 additional times throughout the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers (e.g., Ex. 9:35, 35:29; Lev. 8:36, 10:11, 26:46; Num. 4:37, 45, 9:23, 10:13, 15:23, 16:40, 27:23, 36:13). All 13 passages refer to words, instructions or commands given by God and recorded by Moses in writing; four explicitly link God’s words to Moses’ writings:

“And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, neither would he let the children of Israel go, even as the LORD had spoken by Moses” (Ex. 9:35).

“And so that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them by the hand of Moses” (Lev. 10:11).

“These *are* those numbered of the families of the sons of Merari whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the word of the LORD by the hand of

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Moses” (Num. 4:45).

“*To be* a memorial to the children of Israel that no stranger who is not of the seed of Aaron may come near to offer incense before the LORD, so that he may not be as Korah and as his company—as the LORD said to him by the hand of Moses” (Num. 16:40).

These examples show that as God “breathed” His words, they were imparted to Moses’ mind by the power of the Holy Spirit. (See Inspiration, Truth #4.) In many cases, these words were first spoken by God, then communicated orally by Moses to the people and later transferred to vellum scrolls (e.g., Lev. 21:24, 24:23). In some instances God communicated His instructions to the Israelites in written form only (e.g., Ex. 34:27-28). This evidence confirms that Moses was the agent whom God used to write the Pentateuch, serving both as God’s spokesman and His scribe.

God also chose and set apart other men to serve as His spokesmen *and* scribes. The Hebrew idiom frequently associated with Moses’ writings is repeated at least 12 times throughout the Old Testament in relation to other prophets, illustrating that God often imparted His revelation to His people in written form (e.g., II Sam. 12:25; I Ki. 16:7, 12; II Ki. 14:25-27; II Ki. 10:10; II Chr. 23:18; II Chr. 36:15-16; Ezra 9:10-11; Neh. 9:30; Isa. 20:2-3; Jer. 37:2; Hag. 1:1, 2:1, 20; Zech. 7:12). This idiom is usually linked with prophets whose ministries span the spectrum of Israel’s history *and* who wrote Scripture. Hence, the writing of the Old Testament books closely paralleled prophetic speaking in ancient Israel, a pattern that is especially noticeable after Samuel established the schools of the prophets (ca. 1090 BC).

The prophet Zechariah’s words are of particular value. He used this idiom in reference to all the prophets prior to the Babylonian captivity whose writings comprise the books like Judges, Samuel and Kings: “And they made their hearts adamant stone against hearing the law and the words which the LORD of hosts has sent through [or by] His spirit, by [Heb., by the hand of] the former prophets. And therefore great wrath [i.e., captivity] came from the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 7:12, cf. 7:7).

Prophetic Schools Key to Writing: Other Old Testament books carry indirect markers of divine authorship. These writings are portrayed as eyewitness accounts, recording historical events that transpired under God’s providence (e.g., Ezra 1:1-2; Neh. 1:1-2:8; Esth. 4:14).

The Bible mentions 14 additional literary works, such as the books of *Jasher* and *Gad the Seer* (e.g. Josh. 10:13; II Sam. 1:18; I Chr. 29:29). Ezra used several of these works written by God’s prophets in composing the book of Chronicles (I Chr. 9:1, 29:29; II Chr. 9:29, 12:15, 13:22, 20:34, 24:27, 26:22, 33:19). These texts also served as source materials for other Old Testament books, such as Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Esther and Job. While each of these works was written by prophets under God’s guiding hand, they cannot be considered authoritative *today* because either they no longer exist *or* were not included in the final editing of the 22 Old Testament books (original Hebrew numbering).

From the days of Joshua to the high priest Eli, the Bible tells us “...the word of the LORD was precious in those days. *There was* no open vision” (I Sam. 3:1). Prophetic revelations from God were rare due to the rampant apostasy in Israel (Judg. 21:25). During the time period of the Judges, the priesthood had degenerated to such a state that it no longer served as God’s instrument in teaching His ways to Israel. Because of the sins of Eli’s sons, Phinehas and Hophni, God rejected Eli’s house from serving before Him in the tabernacle (I Sam. 2:12-36). The ceremonial service and duties had become mere ritual. Eli’s sons used their service at the tabernacle in Shiloh for personal gain; they even committed acts of debauchery and fornicated with prostitutes at the tabernacle door. God used a battle against the Philistines as the occasion to cut off Eli’s family from serving before Him as prophesied. Both Phinehas and Hophni were killed in battle as they carried the ark of the LORD before the troops. As a messenger relayed to the 98-year-old Eli the

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tragic news of his sons' deaths, the great slaughter of Israel's army and the capture of the ark of God, he fell off his seat, broke his neck and died (I Sam. 4).

After Samuel's birth and his dedication to the LORD by his mother Hannah, the state of prophetic revelation in Israel changed dramatically (cf. I Sam. 1, 3). As the last judge and the first prophet since Joshua's time, the Levite Samuel figures predominantly in the continuation of prophetic writing in Israel from the period of the Judges to the close of the Hebrew canon during the Medo-Persian rule of Judea.

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary conveys the nature of this momentous turn of events: "Under these circumstances a new moral power was evoked—the prophetic order. Samuel, himself a Levite, of the family of Kohath (1 Chron. 6:28), and almost certainly a priest, was the instrument used at once for effecting a reform in the priestly order (9:22) and for giving to the prophets a position of importance that they had never before held. Nevertheless, it is not to be supposed that Samuel created the prophetic order as a new thing before unknown. The germs ... of the prophetic ... order are found in the law as given to the Israelites by Moses (Deut. 13:1; 18:18, 20-21), but they were not yet developed because there was not yet the demand for them" (Unger, "Prophet," p. 1041).

The reforms instituted by Samuel became the vehicle through which God worked in ensuring that His revelation was written down in the Old Testament era. "Samuel took measures to make his work of restoration permanent as well as effective for the moment. For this purpose he instituted companies, or colleges, of prophets [cf. I Sam. 10:5-6]. One we find in his lifetime at Ramah (1 Sam. 19:19-20); others afterward at Bethel (2 Kings 2:3), Jericho (2:5), Gilgal (4:38), and elsewhere (6:1). Into them were gathered promising students, and there they were trained for the office that they were afterward destined to fulfill. So successful were these institutions that from the time of Samuel to the closing of the canon of the OT [Old Testament] there seems never to have been wanting an adequate supply of men to keep up the line of official prophets. Their chief subject of study was, no doubt, the law and its interpretation—oral, as distinct from symbolical, teaching being henceforward tacitly transferred from the priestly to the prophetic order. Subsidiary subjects of instruction were music and sacred poetry, both of which had been connected with prophecy [and writing] from the time of Moses (Ex. 15:20) and the Judges (Judg. 4:4; 5)" (Ibid.).

Beginning with Samuel's ministry, we find an increase in prophetic activity during which written records of God's revelation and historical events were kept. (See the previously cited scriptural references to the additional writings of the various seers and prophets.)

Successive generations of prophets like Elijah and Elisha, who trained at and likely presided over these prophetic schools (II Ki. 2, 4:38, 6:1-4), served as God's chosen spokespersons and scribes to record the events of their time (II Ki. 10:10; II Chr. 21:12). The father-son prophetic team of Hanani and Jehu probably belonged to the school of the prophets (II Chr. 19:2). Jehu chronicled the events that transpired during the reigns of several kings, and his writings form part of the book of Chronicles (II Chr. 20:34). Zechariah, a prophet who descended from the lineage of the famous priest and seer Iddo (Neh. 12:16; Zech. 1:1), wrote his book after the Babylonian captivity (520-519 BC). The prophetic writings were likely preserved and protected by the prophets until they turned them over to the Levites. After Ezra's final editing of the Old Testament in the fifth century BC, the entire canon (i.e., books) was committed to the Levitical scribes (Sopherim) for copying.

Writing in the New Testament: Paul's letters were, as a rule, written by an amanuensis or scribe (e.g., Rom. 16:22). On four occasions in reference to his own written salutation in his epistles, Paul preserved the idiom of the hand as a sign of their authenticity (I Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18; II Thes. 3:17). While 21 of the 27 New

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Testament books are classified as epistles, the word itself is used in 11 passages to indicate the intimate form of correspondence sent by the apostles, elders and brethren to each other. On more than 90 separate occasions the apostles and their scribes made reference to their writing of a letter, narration or account (treatise) that later became part of the New Testament (e.g., Rom. 15:15; I Cor. 14:37; I Tim. 5:18; II Pet. 3:1-2; II John 12; Jude 1:3; Rev. 1:1-3). In all these instances, Peter testified that the apostles and their scribes followed the same pattern as the holy prophets of ancient Israel in writing Scripture; they were all moved by the Holy Spirit, the “breath of God,” to record the words of God (II Pet. 1:20-21).

Signature #2: God’s Servants Professed to Speak and Write on God’s Behalf

The act of writing only tells part of the story of the Bible’s divine authorship. Bible researchers have counted more than 3,800 times that the writers of the Old Testament used various formulas to describe what they spoke and later wrote as the utterances of God (Connelly, *The Indestructible Book*, p. 191). An electronic Bible search program such as Online Bible can readily locate where variations of the following divine formulas appear throughout the writings of the Old Testament: “The word of the LORD came unto him, saying,” “Thus saith the LORD,” “The burden of the word of the LORD,” “The word of the LORD by,” “Hear the word of the LORD,” “Thus hath the LORD spoken unto me” and “Thus saith the LORD of hosts.”

Pentateuch/Joshua: The five books of Moses (Pentateuch) are unquestionably represented as the Word of God. In at least 65 instances, the book of Genesis uses clauses that bear witness to this fact, including “God said,” “God spake,” “the LORD said,” “the LORD God said,” “the LORD God commanded,” “the word of the LORD came,” and “the Angel of the LORD said.”

Moses recorded the LORD’s words and the events that transpired during Israel’s wilderness journey as the LORD commanded him (e.g., Ex. 17:14, 34:27, 32; Num. 33:1-2; Deut. 31:19, 22). An electronic Bible program searching the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy tallies at least 160 times that God communicated His will to ancient Israel through Moses. These instances are introduced with expressions like “And the LORD spake unto Moses.”

Moses was unique among the Old Testament authors and one of the few prophets in Israel to have seen the LORD God “face-to-face” and to have spoken with Him “mouth to mouth” as a man speaks with his friend (Ex. 33:1; Num. 12:8; Deut. 34:10). In contrast, God told Moses’ siblings (Aaron and Miriam) that He would make Himself known to future prophets in visions and dreams (Num. 12:6). Moses’ ministry became the foundation for all subsequent prophetic ministries and the standard by which they were judged (Deut. 18:18-22).

Moses’ successor, Joshua, also spoke face-to-face with God on occasion (e.g., Josh. 5:13-15). Whether at the tabernacle or elsewhere, conversations often commenced with the phrase “And the LORD said unto Joshua.” Joshua recorded in the Book of the Law all the LORD’s words and Israel’s military campaigns, which were conducted under God’s guiding hand (Josh. 24:26). The English word “Now” in Joshua 1:1 is actually translated from the Hebrew conjunction “And,” indicating that the book of Joshua is really a continuation of the Pentateuch and closely linked to Moses’ writings.

Other Prophets: Other Old Testament prophets professed to speak the words of the LORD in their prophetic forecasts and stern warnings, which called on both Israel and Gentile nations to repent (e.g., Isa. 6:8-9, 7:3, 8:1; Jer. 1:2-7, 2:1, 7:1, 11:1, 14:1; Ezek. 1:3, 2:1-7; Dan. 1:17, 2:19-23; Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Amos 1:1-3, 3:7; Obad. 1:1; Jon. 1:1; Mic. 1:1; Nah. 1:1; Hab. 1:1; Zeph. 1:1; Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1; Mal. 1:1).

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Israel's refusal to heed those God-breathed words, which the prophets received of the LORD in Spirit often through dreams or visions (cf. Num. 12:6; Neh. 9:30; Zech. 7:12), ultimately brought divine judgment in God's scattering its tribes throughout the nations. Only a portion of the tribes of Judah, Levi and Benjamin returned to settle in the areas of Judea and Galilee following the Babylonian captivity. The prophets' warnings have been recorded in the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures as a perpetual witness to Israel, Judah and other nations to repent and return to God for salvation through the Messiah Jesus.

The book of Isaiah offers one of the most graphic examples of the divine authorship of Scripture. Chapters 40-66 are written from God's perspective, presenting the reader with an image of God writing a letter to exhort His people: "Yet now hear, O Jacob My servant, and Israel, whom I have chosen;" (Isa. 44:1) and "Hearken to me, O Jacob and Israel, My called; I *am* He; I *am* the first, I also *am* the last." (Isa. 48:12).

King David attested to the divine authorship of his psalms, asserting that the LORD actually put His word in his tongue (II Sam. 23:1-2). In Psalm 45:1, the sons of Korah, the Levitical servants at the temple and the writers of many psalms, also claimed that their tongues were like the pens of skillful writers, indicating how God blessed and used their ability to write poetic songs for His glory. God gave David's son Solomon wisdom and understanding to compose 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs (I Ki. 4:29, 32; Psa. 72 title, 127 title; Prov. 1:1, 25:1; Eccl. 1:1, 12:9; S. of S. 1:1).

Gospels: The Bible records that in these last days God has spoken to us by His Son Jesus (Heb. 1:1). In the fall of 26 AD, Jesus, who was God manifested in the flesh, began His ministry as *the* Apostle and Messenger of God the Father (John 5:36-38, 43, 7:16, 8:42; Heb. 3:1). Throughout His ministry, Jesus professed to speak the words of the Father Who had sent him, revealing the Father's message to His apostles and those who heard Him (John 8:26-28, 42-43, 12:49-50, 14:10, 23-24, 17:8, 14). John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the Lord, testified of Jesus that "He Whom God has sent speaks the words of God; and God gives not the Spirit by measure *unto Him*" (John 3:34). And Jesus also told His disciples, "The words that I speak to you, *they* are spirit and *they* are life" (John 6:63).

The Online Bible lists at least 320 references from the Gospels that are marked by expressions such as "I say unto you," "And Jesus answered and said," "verily, verily (truly, truly)" and "He said unto them." These markers notify readers of instances when Jesus spoke with divine authority and introduced a spiritual truth to His apostles, the gathered crowds and others. An English New Testament that has red letter type, indicating the literal words of Jesus Christ, can be consulted for a complete inventory of Jesus' words.

Luke particularly expressed a conviction that his Gospel had spiritual import when he claimed that he had "accurately understood everything from the very first." Paul also held a high view of Luke's Gospel and assigned to it the same divine authority as the book of Deuteronomy (I Tim. 5:18; cf. Luke 10:7). The apostle John claimed that the purpose of his Gospel was to lead readers to "believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." John and various individuals alive at the time testified to its authenticity (John 21:24). Though unstated, it is logical to presume that Matthew and Mark held similar beliefs about their own Gospel writings, universally accepted as authentic by the early Church (cf. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3:24, 6:25).

Acts: In many respects, the book of Acts is equivalent to the Old Testament historical books (Judges, Samuel, Kings, etc.). Luke, its writer, gathered material from various sources to chronicle important events in early Church history. He was an eyewitness on many occasions to events that transpired on the apostle Paul's missionary travels. One unique marker of this book is its history of the spread of the gospel (i.e., Word of God) from Jerusalem to faraway places, such as Rome, through the work of the apostles and early disciples of Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 2 and 28).

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Following Jesus' ascension in 30 AD, Luke established that the message the apostles taught with boldness in the temple area and to the brethren was the Word of God (Acts 3-4). The apostles dedicated themselves to prayer and ministry of this same word (Acts 6:4). The Samaritans received the Word of God preached by the evangelist Philip (Acts 8:4-5, 14), as did Cornelius and his household from Peter (Acts 11:1). It was this same word that Paul preached both in the synagogues and elsewhere on his three missionary journeys (Acts 13:5, 7, 44, 46, 48, 49; 15:35, 36; 16:32; 17:13; 18:11; 19:10). Luke wrote that it spread rapidly and widely (Acts 12:24, 13:49, 19:20). He also reported that the preaching of the Word of God was so successful that many Jews living in Jerusalem and a great number Levitical priests became disciples of Jesus (Acts 6:7).

Pauline and Other Apostolic Works: God specifically chose Paul as an instrument for proclaiming His Word to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). He abode for a period of time in the wilderness of Arabia where Jesus personally revealed specific truths to him to enable him to accomplish his divine mission (Acts 26:16; Gal. 1:12, 17-18). Paul is considered the towering figure of early Christianity, and his books comprise over 50 percent of New Testament writings. It is from his published works that we often obtain a fuller understanding of the divine authorship of Scripture.

Written early in 50 AD by the apostle Paul, the book of I Thessalonians displays one of the most powerful examples of Paul's conviction that what he wrote was God-breathed. Paul began by praising the Thessalonians for their "work of faith" (I Thes. 1:3) and for having received the message he had preached not "as the word of men, but ... the word of God" (I Thes. 2:13). He repeated Jesus' words from Luke 10:16 in warning the brethren that whoever rejected his apostolic commands rejected the Father (I Thes. 4:8) and solemnly commanded the brethren by the Lord to read his epistle in the congregation (I Thes. 5:27). Paul made similar claims of divine sanction for his other epistles. To the Corinthians he wrote: "... Did the Word of God originate with you? Or did it come only to you *and no one else*? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write to you are commandments of the Lord" (I Cor. 14:36-37).

The apostle Paul opened almost all his epistles with a prescript of his divine calling and the divine authority with which he wrote, like the one in Romans: "Paul, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, a called apostle, set apart to preach the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1). In the four letters where this divine marker was omitted, Paul opened with a greeting that establishes a sacred tone: "Grace and peace *be* to you from God our Father and *the* Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:2; I Thes. 1:1; II Thes. 1:2; Philem. 1:3). Unlike Paul's other epistles, the book of Hebrews was closed with a divine postscript (Heb. 13:20-25). The reason for this adjustment is easily understood when one considers that many Jews to whom Paul wrote mistrusted him due to allegations that he was doing away with God's Law; they would never have read this epistle had he begun with his traditional opening, which included his name (cf. Acts 21-23).

James, Peter, John and Jude likewise claimed divine authority for the writing of their general epistles. In the book of Revelation, the apostle John specifically informs us that the visions, words and prophecies he recorded were the "revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave ... by his angel to His servant John" (Rev. 1:1). On 12 occasions, he recorded that a heavenly voice told him what and what not to write (Rev. 1:11, 19, 2:1, 8, 12, 3:1, 7, 14, 10:4, 14:13, 19:9, 21:5).

Textual and biblical scholar Edward F. Hills noted that it is not surprising then that "the apostle John clearly implies that it was the Holy Spirit that enabled him [and all the other apostles] to remember and record His Savior's words (John 14:26). These lofty claims of the New Testament writers the Holy Spirit took as soon as they were made and pressed home to the hearts of the faithful. Thus everywhere in the apostolic Church the New Testament books were revered as divine writings by all true believers, and soon this

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reverence grew, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, to a conscious recognition of these books as the New Testament canon of holy Scripture” (Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 1956 ed., pp. 49-50).

Signature #3: References to God (the Holy Spirit) Having Spoken Through His Servants’ Writings

References: Mark 7:6 (Isaiah), 7:10 (Moses); 12:36 (David); Acts 1:16 (David), 4:25-26 (David), 28:25-27 (Isaiah); Romans 9:25 (Hosea), 10:5 (Moses), 19-21 (Moses, Isaiah), 11:9 (David).

Signature #4: Statements That Equate Scripture as the Utterances of God and Vice Versa

Dr. Packer explained that “Old Testament statements, not made by God in their contexts, are quoted as utterances of God (Matt. 19:4ff; Heb. 3:7; Acts 13:34, citing Gen. 2:24; Psa. 95:7; Isa. 55:2 [actually verse 3] respectively). Also, Paul refers to God’s promise to Abraham and his threat to Pharaoh, both spoken long before the biblical record of them was written, as words which *Scripture* spoke to these two men (Gal. 3:8; Rom. 9:17 [also Gal. 4:30]), which shows how completely he equated the statements of Scripture with the utterance of God” (Comfort, p. 33).

Scripture as the Written Oracles (Utterances) of God

In their writings, Paul and Luke asserted that the Hebrew Scriptures were the written oracles of the living voice of God (Acts 7:38; Rom. 3:2; Heb. 5:12). In agreement with this first century mindset, Jesus and His apostles affirmed the divine authority of the Old Testament for Jews and early believers by referring to its writings on more than 70 occasions with the clauses “it is written” and “have you not read.” Warfield explained that the authority of the Old Testament “rests on its divinity and its divinity expresses itself in its trustworthiness; and the NT [New Testament] writers in all their use of it treat it as what they declare it to be—a God-breathed document, which because [it is] God-breathed, is through and through trustworthy in its assertions, authoritative in all its declarations, and down to its last particulars, the very word of God, His ‘oracles’” (Bromiley, p. 844).

The use of the expression “oracles” by the New Testament writers is significant and marks a historical progression in the formation of the canon of Scripture. Used about 50 times in the Greek Septuagint (LXX), Jamieson, Fausset and Brown explain that “[t]his remarkable expression (which the LXX use in Num. xxiv. 4, 16; Ps. xii. 6; xviii. 30), denoting ‘Divine communications’ in general ... is transferred to the sacred Scriptures, to express their oracular, divinely authoritative character” (Jamieson, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 3, p. 205).

It is no accident that Stephen spoke of Moses in his address before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:20-44). It indicates that the Jewish leaders at the time of Christ still held this ancient prophet in high esteem, although their veneration for him was insincere at best because they did not believe his words as recorded in the Hebrew texts in their possession (John 5:37-47).

During his discourse, Stephen rehearsed how Moses had received the “living oracles” (laws, commandments, statutes and judgments) from God on Mount Sinai for ancient Israel (Acts 7:38). Jamieson, Fausset and Brown add that “Stephen represents Moses as alike near *to the angel*, from whom he received all the institutions of the ancient econ-

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omy, and *to the people*, to whom he faithfully reported the living oracles as he received them....The reader will observe how, in bearing this high testimony to Moses, Stephen incidentally rebuts the main charge for which he was now on trial—that of disparaging Moses and the law ... he rises above himself ... to vindicate the ways of God against those who had all along misunderstood and sought to thwart them” (Ibid., vol. 3, p. 43).

The words “living oracles” indicates that for Stephen, Moses’ writings, after centuries of copying, still possessed **a living, divine authority as having come directly from the mouth of God** as opposed to the dead letter of Jewish unbelief (Acts 28:26-27; II Cor. 3:14-15). Stephen used this expression to impress upon the Jewish leaders that, like their ancient ancestors, they had hardened their hearts and rejected the living utterances (voice) of God as recorded by Moses and later the prophets under influence of the Holy Spirit (Neh. 9:30; Acts 7:39, 51; Heb. 3:8-19). The Bible confirms that this is exactly what occurred when ancient Israel violated their covenant with God (Ex. 19:5; Deut. 30:2, 8, 10, 20; Dan. 9:11-12). The Jews ultimately murdered Stephen for his bold remarks (Acts 7:57-60).

In his introduction to the book of Romans, Paul disclosed that salvation is a matter related to a person’s heart, not ancestry (Rom. 2:28-29). In spite of this truth, Paul explained that the Jewish people still possessed an advantage over non-Jews, namely, they were entrusted with the entirety of the *written utterances* of God penned by the Old Testament authors (Rom. 3:1-2). Paul’s remarks become even more relevant when we understand that the standard Old Testament scrolls were stored in the temple area since Ezra’s time. Scribes made official copies from these scrolls, which were then sent to the synagogues in the Diaspora. Paul insisted that Jewish unbelief did not invalidate the testimony of the Hebrew Scriptures as God’s living oracles (Rom. 3:3-4).

The readers of the book of Hebrews were generally Jews returning to Judaism, who could no longer see the substance of Christian doctrine in the Old Testament oracles (writings), through which they had by faith accepted Jesus as their Savior (Heb. 5:12). Paul wrote to his fellow Jews that at a time when they ought to have been teachers they instead needed to reestablish the beginning principles of the Christian faith. Later in the same epistle, he strongly equated their return to Judaism with a refusal to hear the voice of Jesus Christ from heaven as written by the apostle Paul (cf. Heb. 12:18-29, 13:22).

Usage Expanded: The gift of prophecy, both the foretelling and preaching of divine oracles, is listed immediately after the gift of apostleship and forms a part of the foundation of the Christian Church (I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20, 3:5, 4:11). While the expression “oracles of God” was restricted elsewhere to the Old Testament writings, Peter expanded its meaning to include the *spoken and written words* of the New Testament prophets, namely, the apostles (cf. Ibid., p. 614).

In his first epistle, Peter wrote: “*Let each one, according as he has received a gift from God, be using it to serve the others, as good stewards of the grace of God, which manifests itself in various ways. If anyone speaks, let it be as the words of God [“utterances of God”] ... so that in everything, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ*” (I Pet. 4:10-11). Biblical scholar E.W. Bullinger explained that a figure of speech known as an *ellipsis* occurs in this passage, and its insertion is necessary for proper interpretation. The preceding passage with the ellipsis supplied in brackets would be translated as follows: “If anyone speaks, *let it be as the words of God [require]*” (Bullinger, *Figures*, p. 32).

Based on this insight, Peter’s exhortation can be interpreted in two ways: 1) All persons who would speak in the Church assemblies were to a) let no corrupt communication come out of their mouths, b) supply only that which was good and needful for edification and c) provide grace to the hearers (Eph. 4:29); and 2) All persons who had been given a gift of “prophecy” must prophesy in accordance with the full revelation of God,

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which had *now* been entrusted to the apostles and consisted of the Old Testament writings, the Gospels and at the time most of the apostles' epistles.

Peter's injunction was similar to the one Paul gave to the church at Corinth for the regulation of prophecy (I Cor. 14:29ff). Prophets were still expected to yield to the apostles' teachings (I Cor. 14:36-38).

Peter's fullest application of the term "oracles" is implied in his second epistle (65-66 AD), written one to two years after his first epistle (63-64 AD). At this time, Peter insisted that it was the apostles of Jesus Christ who possessed the confirmed prophetic Word, to which true believers should attend (II Pet. 1:19). This was in contrast to the doctrine of false teachers whom Peter anticipated would begin to circulate among the brethren and lead them astray by stealthily introducing destructive heresies (II Pet. 2:1ff). In response to this looming crisis, Peter specifically identified Paul's epistles as Scripture, placing them, and the commandments (teachings) of the apostles, on an equal status with the existing oracles of God, the sacred Old Testament writings (II Pet. 3:1-2, 16).

Final Oracles Revealed: The expanded usage of the word "oracles" can be understood in its broadest terms by briefly surveying Peter's and Paul's earlier letters, almost all of which Peter had in his possession when he wrote his second epistle (II Pet. 3:15-16). The progression in the word's meaning can be observed in Peter's first epistle, where he wrote that though the promise of salvation had been revealed to the holy prophets of Israel by Christ through the Holy Spirit, they did not fully understand the grace about which they had prophesied (I Pet. 1:10-11). It was left to the New Testament apostles and prophets to announce the fulfillment of the written Old Testament prophecies concerning the grace and sufferings of Christ in their preaching of the gospel (I Pet. 1:12).

In First Corinthians, Paul described himself, his fellow apostles and other faithful ministers of Jesus Christ as stewards or dispensers of God's divine truth: "Let every man regard us as ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Beyond that, it is required of stewards that one be found faithful" (I Cor. 4:1-2). Gentile converts would clearly have understood that Paul was comparing the truth he offered to the false knowledge of the pagan mystery religions at Corinth, primarily the cult of Aphrodite located on the city's acropolis. In contrast to Paul's methods, the pagans concealed their religious mysteries from all except the fully initiated.

Paul used the expression "mysteries" (Gk., *mysterion*) in a general sense to refer to God's truth previously kept hidden until God decided to reveal it. Paul told the Ephesians, "You have heard of the ministry of the grace of God that was given to me for you; how He [God] made known to me by revelation the mystery (**even as I wrote briefly before, so that when you read *this*, you will be able to comprehend my understanding in the mystery of Christ**), which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by *the Spirit*" (Eph. 3:2-5; cf. Rom. 16:25-26; I Cor. 2:10, 12-13; Gal. 1:12).

Paul wanted everyone to know that God's simple wisdom pertaining to Jesus Christ crucified was a mystery and foolishness to the worldly wise (I Cor. 1:18-25; Eph. 6:19). The mystery of Christ, that both Jew and Gentile could share in the precious promises made to Abraham, was the core of Paul's teaching and ministry (Eph. 3:6-9; Col. 1:25-27, 2:2-3, 4:3).

Paul and the other apostles followed the example of Jesus, who frequently alluded to His "stewardship" of the divine words that the Father had committed to Him to preach to the multitudes and reveal to His true disciples (e.g., John 12:49-50, 17:8). Jesus told the apostles on one occasion, "To you *it* has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are without, all things are done in parables" (Mark 4:11). The prophets of ancient Israel also professed to deliver the burdens (Heb., oracles) or secret plans of God in their oral and written messages. The prophet Amos wrote,

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“Surely the Lord God will do nothing unless He reveals His secret unto His servants the prophets [spokesmen]. The lion hath roared—who will not fear? The Lord GOD hath spoken—who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:7-8).

While the context of the third chapter of Amos refers to the giving of divine prophecies to Israel, it can also be applied to the ministries of Jesus and His apostles. On the night that Jesus was betrayed, He told the apostles, “No longer do I call you servants because the servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because I have made known to you all *the* things that I have heard from My Father” (John 15:15). Although Jesus’ words reflect on His past ministry, the entire context of John 14-17 shows that His words held significance for the apostles’ future prophetic ministries. The fullness of Jesus’ revelation was confirmed by the apostles in their spoken messages, validated through the miracles and signs that followed them (Acts 2:43; Heb. 2:3-4) and affirmed in their writing of the New Testament. The Bible confirms that the apostles truly were faithful stewards in proclaiming God’s mysteries, specifically the Gospel message, entrusted to them by Christ (Luke 12:42ff).

Jesus said that when He returned to heaven He would send the Holy Spirit, which would teach them all things, bring to remembrance everything He had told them, lead them into all truth and disclose to them things to come as received from Him (John 14:26, 16:12-14). It is Jesus Christ then Who is the real author of the New Testament. Its words are God’s as spoken by His Son (Heb. 1:1) and revealed by the Holy Spirit to the New Testament authors before the close of the first century. It was to these oracles and God’s written utterances in the Old Testament that the primitive Christian Church and true disciples of Jesus Christ throughout all generations would make their appeal.

Points to Remember

- 1) The first fundamental truth of “inspiration” is that every part of Scripture—the letters, syllables and words—are equally God-breathed, whether historical, Christological or moral in nature.
- 2) Another truth of “inspiration” is that only the written texts are God-breathed or “inspired.”
- 3) The final deposit of God’s revelation is the writings of the Old and New Testament.
- 4) The biblical writings possess the same divine authority and character as the prophets’ and apostles’ sermons.
- 5) The word “God-breathed” literally means that every part of Scripture is the utterance (spoken word) of the living God set to writing.
- 6) It is only possible for the biblical texts to possess a God-breathed (divine) quality as a result of God’s direct intervention in the writing process.
- 7) The word “God-breathed” is restricted to the original writings and accurately and faithfully preserved scribal copies.
- 8) The sacred quality of the biblical texts separates them from that of all other writings and books.
- 9) Translations do not possess the *primary* divine authorship of the God-breathed autographs and apographs! Only the doctrines and truths are transferred in the translation process. All translations are subject to error and correction because they do not possess the original God-breathed words.
- 10) When the doctrines and truths are translated accurately into English from the underlying texts, these “things” possess the divine authority and other sacred qualities of the autographs.
- 11) Christians are to make their appeal only to the written oracles of God as found in the canonical Old and New Testament writings.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE HOLY SPIRIT, HUMAN AUTHORS AND THE VALUE OF SCRIPTURES

Is the Bible merely a collection of ancient writings penned by human authors whose only intent was to impart human wisdom or is it the infallible Word of God? What value does the Bible have for Christians today? In this chapter these vital questions are addressed in the five truths of “inspiration.”

Truth #4: The Biblical Authors Were Moved by the Holy Spirit to Write the Words of God

In his second epistle, the apostle Peter declared that what he and the other apostles wrote was of God; it was “the confirmed prophetic Word.” He insisted that their writings were not “cleverly concocted myths” originating from a private interpretation of Scripture or human will. Just as there were false prophets in ancient Israel, Peter explained that there would arise false teachers among the brethren who would stealthily introduce destructive heresies meant to lead them astray from the true revelation given by God to the apostles (II Pet. 2:1-22). Peter’s words mirror those of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who denounced the false prophets of their time as being men who spoke “a vision from their own heart, not out of the mouth of the LORD” and followed “their own spirit and have seen nothing!” (Jer. 23:16; Ezek. 13:2-3).

In contrast, Peter wrote that the holy men of God, including the prophets and the apostles, were moved by the *same* Holy Spirit to speak and to record the utterances of God: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture [i.e., God-breathed writings] originated as anyone’s own *private* interpretation; because prophecy was not brought at any time by human will, but the holy men of God spoke [and wrote] as they were moved [Gk., *pheromenoi*] by *the* Holy Spirit” (II Pet. 1:20-21). The fourth truth of “inspiration” reveals how the Holy Spirit moved the servants of God to write His words.

The Holy Spirit

Greek scholar Spiros Zodhiates explained that the present passive participle *pheromenoi* in II Peter 1:21 means that the holy men of God were “being driven or carried” along by the Holy Spirit in their speaking and writing (Zodhiates, “theopneustos,” and “phero,” *The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament*, pp. 729, 1439). Because the Holy Spirit and its characteristics are figuratively referred to as the wind in numerous passages (e.g., John 3:8; Acts 2:2-4), it is proper to state that the biblical writers were driven, carried or moved by the Holy Spirit as a sailboat is carried by the wind to record the very utterances of God—every word, syllable and letter. The holy men of God wrote nothing of their *own minds* but were directed by God’s Spirit to record the literal words of *God’s eternal mind*.

The Spirit of Man

In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, he referred to what he identified as the spirit of man: “For who among men understands the things of man, except *by* the spirit of man which *is* in him?” (I Cor. 2:11). In commenting on the spirit in man in this passage,

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scholar Albert Barnes noted that the “essential idea is, that no man can know another; that his thoughts and designs can only be known by himself, or by his own spirit; and that unless he chooses to reveal them to others, they cannot ascertain them. So of God. No man can penetrate his designs; and unless he [God] chooses to make them known by his Spirit, they must forever remain inscrutable to human view” (Barnes, *Notes on the Bible*, vol. 14, p. 77).

What is the spirit of man? The prophet Zechariah wrote that when God created Adam, He formed the spirit of man within him (Zech. 12:1). (See Appendix T, page 856, for additional details.) This spiritual element within human beings imparts reasoning power and intellect and gives them the capacity to think, speak, learn, write, plan, devise, create, build, control, teach, choose, worship, build character and experience emotions. Animals possess a different spirit (Eccl. 3:21), which allows for rudimentary thinking power and forms of communication.

Spiritual Understanding: Earlier in the same letter to the Corinthians, Paul quoted portions of Isaiah 64:4: “But according as it is written, ‘*The eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him*’ (I Cor. 2:9). A comparison of the Isaiah and Corinthian passages shows that the Corinthian passage contains an additional phrase, which is customarily translated into English as “have entered into *the heart of man.*” To obtain a proper understanding of this verse, biblical scholar E.W. Bullinger correctly translated its Greek clause and Hebrew idiom (heart of man) as follows: “*to come, or to enter into the thoughts, or the mind of man*” (Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, p. 629). This gives us a glimpse into how the prophets and apostles spoke and wrote the literal words of God. Subsequent verses in First Corinthians clarify that the revelation of God entered into or was imparted to Paul’s thoughts and mind by the Holy Spirit interacting with his spirit (I Cor. 2:10-15). This coincides with Paul’s explanation that he delighted in the law of God according to the inward man and served the law of God in his mind (Rom. 7:22, 25).

Two graphic portrayals of this truth from the Old Testament follow. Almost 2,000 years earlier, Elihu exhibited a clear awareness of the spirit of man. When none of his four elder contemporaries offered any wisdom to explain Job’s trials (Job 32:1-5), Elihu spoke, “I said, ‘The aged should speak, and the multitude of years should teach wisdom. But **there is a spirit in man** and the **inspiration** [Heb. “breath,” a type of the divine intellect imparted by the Holy Spirit] of the Almighty gives them understanding. Great men are not *always* wise; neither do the aged understand justice’ ” (Job 32:7-9). That Elihu had a spiritual dimension within mortal man in view, and not a figure of speech, is evident in a subsequent passage: “For I am full of the matter, the spirit within me constrains me” (Job 32:18).

The Hebrew word for “inspiration” in Job 32:8 is the same one used for “breath” in another passage in the following chapter, which reads: “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life” (Job 33:4). Both passages clearly refer to the work and power of the Holy Spirit in the process of “inspiration” and creation. In short, Elihu was asserting that God had given him “life,” so he could impart wisdom to Job (Jamieson, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 2, p. 79). God had specifically raised Elihu up to act as an arbiter between Him and Job in response to his (Job’s) many appeals for a mediator to resolve his dispute with God over his trial (Job 9:32-34, 13:3, 18-24, 33:6). It was God’s Spirit interacting with the spirit within Elihu that imparted to his mind the wisdom he shared with Job and his three friends (Job 32-37). Though acting on God’s behalf, Elihu explained to Job that he was still human; therefore, Job had no reason to fear his reproach and every obligation to heed God’s wisdom as transmitted through him (Job 33:1-2, 7).

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In the book of Proverbs, King Solomon also alluded to the divine gift of wisdom given to him by God's Spirit: "For the LORD gives wisdom; out of His mouth [referring to God's breath and His Spirit] *comes* knowledge and understanding" (Prov. 2:6).

Words of God Imparted

In his same letter to the congregation at Corinth, Paul described how the Holy Spirit affected his speech and preaching: "Which things [given graciously by God, v. 12] we also speak, not in words imparted by human wisdom, but in *words* imparted [i.e., taught] by *the* Holy Spirit, *in order to* communicate spiritual things by spiritual *means*" (I Cor. 2:13). Paul used the "we" in the emphatic position in the Greek to emphasize that God had communicated His wisdom, words and spiritual truths to His apostles and ministers, instead of to the self-proclaimed prophets of the Corinthian church (Nelson, *The King James Study Bible*, p. 1765).

In a protest to the Corinthians about their response to his earlier letter (I Cor. 5:9), Paul wrote: "Did the Word of God originate with you? Or did it come only to you *and no one else*? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write to you are commandments of the Lord" (I Cor. 14:37). How was Paul able to reckon that his writings were of the Lord since it had been nearly twenty years since Jesus last taught Paul during his three-year stay in Arabia (I Cor. 9:1; Gal. 1:17-18)? It was the Holy Spirit, whatever it received of Jesus (John 16:13-15), that disclosed to Paul's mind the words that he was to write.

At the end of the book of II Samuel, King David described God's unconditional covenant to him and his royal house. This account contains the king's last words before his death, including a reference to God's authorship of his psalms through the agency of His Spirit: "... David the son of Jesse ... and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said: 'The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word *was* on my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me' " (II Sam. 23:1-3). The apostle Peter underscored this truth in the book of Acts in relating how the Holy Spirit spoke prophetic utterances by the mouth of David, which he recorded in Psalm 41 concerning Judas, the guide for the temple guards and the officers who arrested Jesus (Acts 1:16).

On numerous occasions, God promised to "teach" other biblical writers, including Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, what to speak on His behalf (Ex. 4:11-16, 7:1-2; Isa. 6:5-8, 50:4, 51:16; Jer. 1:9; Ezek. 2:1-10, 3:10, 17). Jesus extended this promise of the Holy Spirit to the apostles, especially in times of persecution and distress (Luke 12:12).

The examples of Paul and David offer ample evidence that **in the same manner** God instructed or revealed to His servants what to speak, He also imparted to their minds through the agency of the Holy Spirit what to write. What was true for Paul and David must also then have been true for the other servants of God who wrote Scripture since they were all moved by the *same* Holy Spirit. This conclusion seems warranted if we believe that the books assigned to these writers accurately reflect their professions that they recorded God's words.

Commands to Write

How did the holy men of God know when to write? Robert Dunzweiler, a scholar at Biblical Theological Seminary, in discussing the elements of "inspiration" as portrayed in II Peter 1:21, wrote, "... this verse tells us that the initial impulse to set down such events [i.e., the when] and such interpretation of events in the history of revelation as God wished included [i.e., the what] both came from the Holy Spirit of God" (Dunzweiler, "Are the Bibles in Our Possession Inspired? Two Studies on the In-

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spiredness of the Apographs,” p. 2).

The Bible indicates there were two ways through which the biblical authors knew when and what to write: explicit commands and implicit commands.

Explicit Commands to Write: On several occasions, God directly commanded His servants to record His words, the visions He had given them or historical events as they transpired. These words were given face-to-face, by the hand of angelic beings or transmitted to their minds through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

For example, Moses received direct commands to record God’s words and to chronicle the events of Israel’s journey to Canaan (e.g., Ex. 17:14, 34:27, 32; Num. 33:1-2; Deut. 31:19, 22). God also gave detailed instructions to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Habakkuk and the apostle John about the words they were to write (cf. Isa. 8:1, 30:8; Jer. 30:2, 36:1-2, 27-28; Dan. 12:4; Hab. 2:2-4; Rev. 1:1, 11, 19, 2:1, 8, 12, 3:1, 7, 14, 10:4, 14:13, 19:9, 21:5).

Implicit Commands to Write: In lieu of a direct command, other servants of God were moved by the impulse of the Holy Spirit because their prophetic or ministerial duties carried an implicit obligation to write.

In the later half of the 1600s, Roman Catholic scholars tried to lessen the authority of the Greek texts printed by Protestant Reformers. These papal scholars asserted that the New Testament had been written in a haphazard manner and without divine command. To combat this, Genevan reformer Frances Turretin wrote a direct rebuttal. A portion that has relevance to our study follows: “A command may be implicit and general or explicit and special. Although all the sacred writers might not have had a special command to write ... yet they all had a general command to write, since persons at a distance and posterity can be taught only by writing [an allusion to Matt. 28:19-20; John 17:20 and Rom. 16:25-26]. Hence, preaching is sometimes said to be ‘in writing,’ at others ‘in deed’ and again ‘in word.’ Further, **immediate inspiration and the internal impulse of the Holy Spirit by which the writers were influenced was to them in place of a command.... A command is not more efficacious** [i.e., sufficient] **than the inspiration of the things to be written;** nor does a faithful ambassador ever depart from his instructions” (Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, p. 60, emphasis added).

As Turretin related, faithful writers (i.e., ambassadors) never departed from their instructions, whether given by special command or the impulse of the Holy Spirit. God specifically considered Moses a faithful servant (Num. 12:7; cf. Heb. 3:2). As previously noted, his ministry sets the standard for all other biblical prophets (Deut. 18:15, 18).

God intimately revealed Himself to Moses on at least 160 separately recorded occasions during Israel’s 40-year wilderness journey. During many of these exchanges, God spoke with Moses from a cloud or in similitude, meaning akin to bodily form (Num. 12:8). Before the construction of the tabernacle, God often conferred with Moses in a small structure known as the tent of meeting (cf. Ex. 33:8-11). Following the tabernacle’s construction, God regularly met with Moses from above the mercy seat within the Holy of Holies or at the tabernacle door (Ex. 25:22, 30:6; Lev. 1:1; Num. 1:1). “And when Moses had gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with Him [God], then he [Moses] heard the voice of One [the LORD] speaking to him [Moses] from the mercy-seat on the ark of testimony from between the two cherubim. And He [God] spoke to him [Moses]” (Num. 7:89).

These conversations are preserved in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy and marked with expressions like “And the LORD spake unto Moses.” The presence of these accounts in the Pentateuch is one proof that Moses’ ministry carried an implicit or general command to record God’s words to instruct the nation of Israel.

In other instances, Moses wrote in response to specific civil needs and national events, such as the ratification of God’s covenant with Israel. The Bible re-

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cords that God revealed to him additional details of the covenant's legal terms (judgments and instructions) based upon the framework of the Ten Commandments, which He had earlier disclosed directly to the people from the top of Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:5-24:2; Deut. 4:13-14). After Moses had recounted these conditions to the people and they accepted them (Ex. 24:3), Moses wrote these words in a book for the ratification ceremony the following day (Ex. 24:4). The details of the ceremony (pillars of stone, animal sacrifices, sprinkling of blood, reading of the terms, an oath and common meal) are consistent with the ancient customs of covenants of that time period. Written documents were often an essential part of these covenants, depending on their nature and the parties involved. In this case, the nation's enduring need for an accurate record of the covenant's detailed terms offers a sensible explanation for Moses' writing the book of the covenant.

The Holy Spirit brought to Moses' remembrance everything God had spoken to the prophet on the mount (cf. Isa. 63:11). This explains how Moses was able to recount accurately all the words of the LORD to the people before he committed them to writing as indicated in Exodus 24:4. This miracle obviously was repeated a second time when Moses wrote all these words in the book of the covenant. (See "Functions of the Holy Spirit" on page 256 for additional examples of how subsequent biblical authors also experienced this miracle.) Thus, the Holy Spirit was the *real* impetus behind Moses' decision to write the book of the covenant and to combine this record with others in compiling the book of Exodus.

The use of other completed writings by the biblical authors is well-known and is not contrary to the concept of the divine authorship of Scripture. Moses no doubt was directed by the Holy Spirit to locate the source materials (genealogical listings, narratives, etc.) needed to complete the Genesis and Exodus accounts of the earliest civilizations and lives of the patriarchs up to their captivity in Egypt. (See page 237 for more details.)

There are parallels between the ministry of Moses and that of others who wrote Scripture.

God subsequently warned and admonished succeeding generations of Israelites by His Spirit in His prophets to repent of their apostasy and to return to that covenant (Neh. 9:29-30; Zech. 7:12). The presence of these prophetic books in the Bible is one proof that the ministries of these same ancient prophets, like Moses, contained an implicit command to simultaneously record the LORD's words as a permanent testimony against the unfaithfulness of the nation and its descendants.

The apostles received face-to-face instructions from Jesus Christ, Who was God manifested in the flesh, similarly as Moses received directions from God in the tabernacle. These initial instructions pertained to their preaching, teaching and evangelistic outreach. The Bible indicates that there were many among the first disciples, probably including John Mark, who were early witnesses of Jesus' ministry (Mark 14:51-52; John 6:66; Acts 1:21-22). Luke claimed to possess an accurate understanding of the details of Jesus' life "from the very first," probably meaning from his (Luke's) personal conversion to Christianity (Luke 1:3). Since Luke had not been an eyewitness *and* a minister of the Word of God like the apostles, he consulted the most reliable narrative and eyewitness accounts in completing his Gospel of Jesus' life (Luke 1:1-4) and a historical supplement of the early Church known as *The Acts of the Apostles* (Acts 1:1). It is believed that both Mark and Luke wrote under the supervision of the apostles Peter and Paul, respectively. The presence of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the early New Testament canon and their universal acceptance by the early Church are indicators that their writers possessed unspoken commands to produce eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life and teachings to instruct, edify and exhort Christians (cf. Matt. 1:1, 28:19-20; Mark 1:1; Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30-31). "Many heretical gospels arose within the Church, but they

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never occupied a place alongside [these] canonical four” (Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, p. 604). Moreover, both John’s and Luke’s Gospels carry internal claims of their divine authority as reliable accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry (Luke 1:4; John 20:30-31).

The same Holy Spirit that moved Moses to write of the Prophet who was to come (Deut. 18:15-19; I Pet. 1:11) filled the mind of the apostle Peter with the understanding of how Jesus fulfilled this ancient prophecy (Acts 3:22-23). John was later moved to record these instances in his Gospel (John 1:45, 6:14, 7:40).

See “Biblical Writings Final Deposit of Revelation” on page 234 for additional evidence that the ministries of the New Testament writers carried implicit commands to write Scripture.

A review of the methods God used to communicate to His servants shows that they consistently remained the same throughout history in both the Old Testament and New Testament eras. In their book, *Interpreting The Scriptures*, authors Kevin Conner and Ken Malmin have identified 20 ways in which God has spoken to mankind, and in particular, to the biblical writers. (Appendix U, page 857, offers a listing with scriptural references.)

Promises of the Spirit

Promises: Because the apostles and other New Testament authors needed spiritual discernment to understand God’s truth (I Cor. 2:14), Jesus pledged to send the Holy Spirit to dwell in them after He had returned to the Father (Luke 24:49; John 14:17, 15:26). On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus made certain promises to the apostles that would accompany the receipt of the Holy Spirit and affect their ability to write the New Testament: “‘But *when the Comforter comes, even the Holy Spirit ... that one shall teach you all things, and shall bring to your remembrance everything that I have told you*’” (John 14:26). These promises directly affected the apostles’ capacity to witness of Jesus. “‘But when the Comforter has come, which I will send to you from the Father, *even the Spirit of the truth, which proceeds from the Father, that one shall bear witness of Me. Then you also shall bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning*’” (John 15:26-27). Jesus finally added, “I have yet many things to tell you, but you are not able to bear them now. However, when that one has come, *even the Spirit of the truth, it will lead you into all truth because it shall not speak from itself, but whatever it shall hear it shall speak. And it shall disclose to you the things to come. That one shall glorify Me because it shall disclose to you the things that it receives of Me. Everything that the Father has is Mine; for this reason, I said that it shall receive from Me and shall disclose these things to you*” (John 16:12-15).

The Helper: According to biblical scholar E.W. Bullinger, the Greek word *parakleetos*, translated as “Comforter” in English “meant in classical Greek merely called to one’s aid, assisting, especially in a court of justice. Hence a *legal advisor* or *helper*. But this falls short of the meaning it afterwards obtained: *viz.*, not only of helping another to do a thing, but to help him *by doing it for him*. It is used only in John of the Holy Spirit’s help (by Christ)” (Bullinger, *Figures*, p. 854). A similar form of the word is used by the apostle John in his First Epistle to refer to Jesus as the Christian’s Advocate with the Father—a role that only Jesus as high priest can fulfill on behalf of sinners (Heb. 4:14-16; I John 2:1-2).

A careful review of the usage of this Greek word in John’s Gospel and First Epistle reveals that Bullinger has accurately described its meaning. Only the Holy Spirit could enable the apostles to remember the words and works of Jesus (e.g., John 2:22, 12:16, 15:26-27), so they could preach the Gospel and testify effectively of Jesus. Without this spiritual understanding, the apostles, and those under their supervision, could not

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accurately record God's truth (Jesus' words) for future generations who would believe their words (John 17:17, 20).

Functions of the Holy Spirit: John 14-17 lists five functions that the Holy Spirit performed for the apostles that they were unable to do for themselves in their roles as authors of Scripture:

- 1) Teach them all things (what to speak and write).
- 2) Bring to remembrance everything Jesus had spoken to them.
- 3) Bear witness of Christ, so they could effectively bear witness of Him.
- 4) Lead them into all truth.
- 5) Disclose to them things to come (a foretelling of events, i.e., prophecy).

Biblical Examples: A graphic example of how the Holy Spirit stimulated the memory of the sacred writers to remember things that had long been forgotten is found in the book of Jeremiah. In the fourth year of Judah's King Jehoiakim, the LORD directed Jeremiah to record all the words that He had communicated to him during his ministry, which began 20 years earlier during the reign of King Josiah (Jer. 36:1-2). The Bible records that Jeremiah's secretary Baruch "wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD, which He had spoken unto him, upon a roll [scroll] of a book" (Jer. 36:4).

The miraculous nature of these events continued beyond the initial recording of Jeremiah's prophecies. After the wicked King Jehoiakim destroyed the autographs (original documents) of Jeremiah's prophecies, God instructed these two sacred authors to rewrite a second scroll and imparted to them additional prophetic warnings for the Gentile nations as found in chapters 25 and 45-51 of our present English Bibles (Jer. 36:27-32). Jeremiah prepared a special scroll of some of the added prophecies (chs. 50-51) to be read in Babylon by Baruch's brother Seraiah, the chief steward of Judah's king (Jer. 51:59-64). This reading served as a witness against Babylon and as a means of encouraging the Jews living in captivity there.

Baruch is first introduced in Jeremiah 36:4. He is mentioned earlier in Jeremiah 32:12; however, this account is not ordered chronologically in the Hebrew text. It actually occurred later in the tenth year of the reign of Zedekiah, Judah's last king. These details are significant for they prove that none of Jeremiah's prophecies had previously been recorded and refute the claims of naturalistic scholars who wish to deny the miraculous nature of these events.

In their commentary on this section of Scripture, Jamieson, Fausset and Brown remarked that "God so directed the sacred writers [Jeremiah and Baruch] that they should be able to remember all that otherwise they might have forgotten, thereby stereotyping for the Church of all ages the originally *spoken* 'words' of prophecy; God also, whilst not fettering the individual writer as to style, so superintended the choice of words and modes of expression that nothing should be in the original autograph which would not be suited for the exact revelation of His will, and nothing should be omitted which is necessary" (Jamieson, vol. 2, p. 128).

The series of events previously cited becomes even more noteworthy when one considers that the nation of Israel, comprised of the northern 10 tribes, had been in captivity and dispersion for more than 120 years by the time Jeremiah and Baruch recorded these prophecies. The initial writing and subsequent rewriting of the scrolls by Jeremiah and Baruch in 603-602 BC was intended for both a present testimony against Judah *and* a faraway future witness against Judah and Israel. This example demonstrates how God planned thousands of years in advance that a permanent testimony would be preserved for Israel, Judah and all the nations of the Earth.

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Witness of the Spirit

Fulfilled prophecies and archaeological discoveries are only a few ways of verifying the truthfulness and accuracy of the biblical accounts. Paul offered another in the book of Romans, where he devoted three chapters to explaining how it was possible for Israel, and ultimately the whole world, to be saved (Rom. 9-11). Notice Paul's simple declaration: "I speak the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my own conscience in [Gk., *en*, "resting in"] *the Holy Spirit bears witness with me*" (Rom. 9:1).

Two truisms emerge from Paul's declaration:

Precept #1: The evidence for the integrity and authenticity of the biblical documents begins with the personal testimony of their individual writers. How can we be certain that Paul and the other biblical writers were telling the truth? The implication of Paul's declaration is that the conscience can be trusted to bear a faithful testimony of a person's thoughts and actions *when* it is under the influence of (resting in) the Holy Spirit and the human heart, mind and actions are evaluated against the standards of God's Word (cf. Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23; Tit. 3:5; Heb. 4:12-13).

The spirit of man apparently unites the heart (feelings, attitudes and motives) and mind (center of thought, intellect and reasoning), providing human beings with a sense of being, self-consciousness or awareness. This makes it the likely catalyst for the internal "faculty" known as the conscience, which enables human beings to examine and bear witness to their own thoughts and actions (Rom. 2:15). The spirit of man also functions as the bridge between the human and divine, allowing the Holy Spirit to bear witness directly with a person's inner thoughts and intentions (Rom. 8:16). When people violate their consciences, they normally experience an automatic sense of guilt, unless their hearts, minds and consciences have been defiled or become reprobate with unbelief and sin (Rom. 1:28; I Tim. 4:2; Tit. 1:15-16). As a candle allows one to search a darkened room, the spirit of man allows God to search and to understand the *hidden* motives of the heart and the *secret* thoughts of the mind (I Chr. 28:9; Psa. 44:21; Prov. 16:2, 20:27; Jer. 17:10).

Therefore, according to Paul, the truthfulness of his statements could be confirmed by his conscience and by the Holy Spirit bearing witness to his personal motives and purposes for writing (as established in his heart and mind). This joint testimony fulfilled the requirement of the Law of God that the truth be established by at least two reliable witnesses (See Deut. 17:2-7; Heb. 10:28).

At a hearing before the Jewish Council, Paul testified that from the time of his conversion his life and ministry had been in harmony with God's will, and his conscience was clear before God and men (Acts 23:1). (See Acts 24:16; II Cor. 1:12; II Tim. 1:3 and Heb. 13:18 for occasions when Paul used similar language to describe his conduct and testimony.) Paul appealed to the witness of every believer's conscience before God that he had "personally renounced the hidden things of dishonest gain" and had not walked in cunning craftiness, nor handled the Word of God deceitfully (II Cor. 4:2). In facing false accusations about his apostleship, he called upon God the Father's testimony as confirmation of his ministry's authenticity (Rom. 1:9; II Cor. 11:31; Phil. 1:8; I Thes. 2:5). He finally extended the Father's witness to the writing of his epistles: "Now the things that I write to you, behold, before God, I am not lying" (Gal. 1:20).

Precept #2: The reliability of the biblical writings, including their details, is intricately tied to their authors' testimonies of their personal lives and witness for God. Are the accounts of their personal lives consistent with the events and customs of their day? Are these writers believable as real-life personalities? If the biblical authors were faithful in describing the intimate details of their personal lives and ministries, then it is reasonable to presume they were also trustworthy in writing other details (promises, prophecy, etc.) found in their accounts.

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The truthfulness of Paul's statements extended to *more* than his proclamation of the gospel. In the book of Romans, for example, Paul disclosed his deepest sorrow over Israel's unbelief (Rom. 9:2, 10:1). Paul's epistles present frank, detailed accounts of his sins, weaknesses, struggles, sufferings, prayers and emotional turmoil for the brethren (cf. Acts 8:1-4, 9:1-31, 13:1-28:31; Rom. 7:14-25; I Cor. 9:1-27; II Cor. 11:5-33, 12:7-9; Gal. 1:11-2:21; Phil. 3:1-11). There is no reason to doubt the accuracy of Paul's remarks on such personal issues; therefore, his statements in other segments of his epistles cannot be scornfully dismissed because of *alleged* contradictions.

The record of Moses' error at Kadesh (Num. 20:1-13), the episode of Elijah's perilous flight to save his life from the wicked queen Jezebel and subsequent depression (I Ki. 19) and the account of Peter's Judaizing at Antioch (Gal. 2:11-21) serve as reminders of the biblical writers' humanity and their commitment to truthful reporting, even at the expense of their own dignities. A careful examination of the personal testimonies and stated motives of the biblical authors reveals they are united in their witness: The entire collection of ancient biblical writings represents a faithful and reliable record of God's words and of the events that their authors witnessed.

Power and Signs of the Holy Spirit

Many of the biblical writers encountered long and difficult trials. A review of the accounts of the lives of prophets such as Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Paul shows that they suffered greatly at the hands of their fellow countrymen. Ironically, the books they authored contain some of the most profound expressions of God's love for the nation of Israel and all humankind. Such tribulations demanded that the biblical authors possess both the will and desire to complete their work. As noted previously, the Greek word *pheromenoi* in II Peter 1:21 conveys a sense of motion, of being "carried or borne along" by the Holy Spirit as a sailboat is borne along by the wind. In the Old Testament, the phrase "the hand of the LORD" represented the power of God's Spirit to supply the needed energy to His servants to complete their missions, sustain them through trials and persecutions or impart to them His words to communicate to His people (Bullinger, p. 880; Nelson, p. 1197; e.g., I Ki. 18:46; II Ki. 3:15; Ezek. 1:3, 3:14, 22, 8:1, 33:22).

The prophet Jeremiah described his disposition while under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit. Though the following segment was written as a lament of his inner turmoil after his persecution and release from prison, it displays his burning desire to communicate God's word (whether verbally or in writing) in spite of the physical obstacles: "But if I say, 'I will not mention Him [God], nor speak in His name any more,' then *His Word* was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding *it* in, and I could not stop" (Jer. 20:9, 10). Even though he was free from prison, Jeremiah's enemies endeavored to entrap him again. Yet, amid all these trials, Jeremiah was stirred to write, "But the LORD *is* with me like a mighty, awesome One. Therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not overcome me...." (Jer. 20:11).

The word "burden" is used on several occasions by Jeremiah to describe the sense of duty that accompanied the word imparted to him via the Spirit, essentially signifying the word God had entrusted to him to communicate (Jer. 23:33-37). "The Hebrew word translated burden can also mean 'oracle.' Coming from a root meaning to 'lift up,' it signifies that which God places upon the prophet's heart to hear" (Nelson, p. 1136). In describing God's word given to them as a burden, Isaiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zechariah and Malachi related how the Spirit of God compelled them to share through oral and written means God's warning of impending judgment for the nation's sins (Isa. 13:1; Nah. 1:1; Hab. 1:1; Zech. 9:1; Mal. 1:1). In contrast to the false prophets of his time (Mic. 2:6-11),

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Micah wrote that the Spirit of the LORD gave him power, judgment and might to fulfill his prophetic duty and to boldly declare God's word to the nation of Israel (Mic. 3:8).

At His ascension, Jesus again pledged to send the promise of the Father to the apostles. He commanded them to remain in Jerusalem until they had been clothed with the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5, 8). That promise was fulfilled 10 days later on Pentecost.

In the New Testament, Paul made reference to how God's Spirit empowered him to preach the Gospel and, by extension, complete the writing of God's Word: "Of which I became a servant, according to the administration of God that *was given to me* for you, *in order* to complete the word of God ... For this cause I also labor, striving according to His inner working power [of the Holy Spirit] which works in me" (Col. 1:25, 29; cf. I Cor. 2:1, 4; Eph. 3:7, 20).

Permanent Testimony: The Bible is the written record of the words God has spoken in the past by the prophets and in these last days by His Son Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1). In the book of Hebrews, Paul wrote that this revelation was confirmed to the brethren by those who heard Jesus (Heb. 2:3). This group included the original apostles who accompanied Jesus during His earthly ministry (Acts 1:21-26); it later contained the apostles Paul and Barnabas (Gal. 2:9).

Just as God performed miracles confirming the words and authority of His servants to ancient Israel (e.g., Num. 16-17), He also bore witness to the authenticity of the apostles' message through signs, wonders, miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 2:4). With the completion of the New Testament writings, the Bible indicates that some of the gifts and signs given to validate the apostles' spoken words ended. The final standard for believers and new converts became God's revelation permanently set in writing in the canonical Scriptures. Paul made reference to the **primary** cessation of tongues as a means of verifying new revelation apart from or **for the writing** of Scripture in his First Epistle to the Corinthians: "Love never fails. But whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail; whether *there be* languages, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part and prophecy in part; but when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part shall be set aside" (I Cor. 13:8-10).

John MacArthur, a biblical and Greek scholar, explained that there "may be a distinction made on how prophecy and knowledge come to an end, and how the gift of languages does. This is indicated by the Greek verb forms used. In the case of prophecy and knowledge, they are both said to 'be abolished' (in both cases the verb indicates that something will put an end to those functions). Verses 9, 10 indicate that what will abolish knowledge and prophecy is 'that which is perfect.' When that occurs, those gifts will be rendered inoperative. The 'perfect' is **not** the completion of the Scripture, since there is still operation of those two gifts and will be in the future kingdom (cf. Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17; Rev. 11:3). The Scriptures do not allow us to see 'face to face' or have perfect knowledge as God does (v. 12)...The perfect must be the eternal state, when we in glory see God face to face (Rev. 22:4) and have full knowledge....

"On the other hand, Paul uses a different word for the end of the gift of languages, thus indicating it will 'cease' by itself...It will not end by the coming of the 'perfect,' for it will already have ceased. The uniqueness of the gift of languages and its interpretations was, as all sign gifts [gifts as signs for unbelievers], to authenticate the message and messages of the gospel before the New Testament was completed (Heb. 2:3, 4)... 'Tongues' were also **not a sign to believers, but unbelievers** ... specifically those unbelieving Jews. Tongues also ceased [on the whole] because there was no need to verify the true messages of God once the Scripture was given" (MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, p. 1750, emphasis added).

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Truth #5: Scripture Is God's Revelation of Truth

The major differences in wording between the various modern critical Greek texts and English versions of the New Testament, and those of the Protestant Reformers, have needlessly raised doubts about the Bible's accuracy and trustworthiness. Many of these differences are related to the manuscripts upon which these texts and versions are based. Most modern Greek texts and versions of the New Testament are based largely upon the testimony of the earlier uncials (manuscripts with capital letters), while the later dated minuscules (those with lowercase letters) form the basis for those versions produced before the 1880s AD. How ought one view this textual dilemma?

When a number of readings of the modern critical or eclectic Greek texts used today for translating the New Testament are examined, it is apparent that some scholars have abandoned sound principles of textual criticism and followed faulty principles, blindly dismissing a large portion of the documentary evidence. Two glaring examples that display how the methods of naturalistic textual criticism have diminished the trustworthiness of the Bible follow.

Example #1: In the royal genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew, the Alexandrian text contains the erroneous reading of Asaph, a psalmist, instead of the true one of Asa, a king of Judah (Matt. 1:7-8). Instead of relinquishing their partiality for a few earlier uncials (e.g., Sinaiticus and Vaticanus) and their allies, the editors of the United Bible Societies (UBS) Greek New Testament (UBS3/4) wrongly argue that Matthew "may have derived material for the genealogy, not from the Old Testament directly, but from subsequent genealogical lists, in which the erroneous spelling occurred" (Metzger, *A Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament*, 2002 ed., p. 1). However, this same editorial committee has been unable to reproduce a solitary manuscript of the Septuagint (LXX) with the name Asaph in First Chronicles to corroborate its fallacious theory that Matthew obtained the erroneous reading from the LXX (Ibid., fn. 1). Furthermore, these editors incorrectly argue that Byzantine-era scribes tended to correct such blatant errors, thereby accounting for the prevalence of the Asa reading in later minuscule manuscripts (Ibid.). This assertion is based on their appeal to false assumptions about scribal habits in order to discredit the Byzantine reading of Asa (Robinson, "New Testament Textual Criticism: The Case for the Byzantine Priority," *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism*, par. 44, fn. 66). Thus, these modern scholars have incorrectly charged Matthew with error instead of faulting the ancient copyists or editors who either transmitted the erroneous reading to other manuscripts or changed the genuine reading.

Example #2: The writers of each of the Synoptic Gospels, in describing the events of the crucifixion, record that "there was darkness" (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). In a subsequent verse (Luke 23:45), Luke added the following clause to his account: "And the sun was darkened." In an article entitled "Re-Examining New Testament Textual-Critical Principles and Practices Used to Negate Inerrancy," textual scholar Dr. James Borland closely examined the error needlessly introduced into the Greek text of Luke 23:45 by modern editors. (The following material has been adapted from *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate*, pages 46-57.)

The Greek manuscripts essentially offer two competing readings in describing what happened to the sun on that solemn day. The Greek word *eskotisthe* has the earliest and widest support and is found in the Reformation Greek text (Textus Receptus), which is virtually identical with the Byzantine Text. This word means "darkened" and is the authentic reading for this passage. (For a review of this evidence, see pages 61-65 of *The Revision Revised* by textual scholar John William Burgon.)

The second word *eklipontos* is poorly supported among the documentary evidence. The major critical Greek texts (Westcott-Hort, Nestle-Aland and UBS) have fol-

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lowed some form of this second reading, advocating either the present tense *ekleipo* or aorist *eklipontos*. That this Greek word has historically *only* meant “eclipsed” when used in respect to the sun is well-known (Burgon, *The Revision Revised*, p. 65).

After examining the various printed texts, translations (including the New International Version) and differing scholarly views of Luke’s account of the crucifixion, Dr. Borland offered this summary: “Thus the textual-critical guidelines that tolerated and even promoted this ill-advised, poorly-attested reading [*eklipontos*] have given rise to numerous bold assertions of errors in the autographs. The reason for this is that a solar eclipse is impossible astronomically during the full moon of the Passover when sun and moon are 180 degrees apart in relation to the earth” (Letis, *The Majority Text*, p. 54).

When translators have adopted the reading of the critical texts, Borland explains their versions “... clearly teach that the words *tou heliou eklipontos* mean that the sun was eclipsed by the moon. When *ekleipo* is used in relation to the sun that is precisely what it indicates” (Ibid., p. 53). In order to conceal the error in adopting the critical reading, some scholars, like those who produced the Revised Standard Version, have cleverly translated the clause *tou heliou eklipontos* as “the sun’s light failed” (Revised Standard Version, p. 190). However, these same translators have exposed the inconsistency in their thinking by informing the reader in the margin that the clause actually means “the sun was eclipsed.”

By moving the unexplainable miracle of Luke 23:45 to the realm of a natural occurrence, the actions of scholars and translators have unwittingly questioned Luke’s credibility as a first century witness who accurately recorded the supernatural intervention of Almighty God in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Dr. Borland offered these comments on textual criticism that tolerates the adoption of such erroneous readings: “If we accept the inerrancy of the Scriptures and yet countenance a textual criticism that voids inerrancy, something is amiss—and I would suggest that it is not the Word of God that needs reconsideration but rather our principles of textual criticism. For too long, lower [textual] criticism has been guided by those who cared little about the inerrancy of the autographs. The time has come for a change. We must re-examine our premises, and divorce ourselves from a biased, narrow and settled view of the field. Unless we do, it will not be long before some in our own ranks will be singing the tune against inerrancy” (Letis, p. 57).

Standard of Evaluation

In an article cited previously, scholar Robert Dunzweiler wrote that “... either revelation has been truly (i.e., inerrantly, for truth by definition must exclude error) inscripturated [i.e., written], or human finiteness and fallibility have conditioned (at least to some degree) the inscripturation of revelation. If the latter is true, then either we need an absolute principle external to Scripture in order to distinguish divine truth from human error; or, lacking such a principle, we cannot know what is true and what is false, and thus cannot help being reduced to agnosticism or skepticism with regard to any absolute truth in Scripture” (Dunzweiler, p. 8).

Dunzweiler reviewed the two standards used historically to evaluate the truthfulness and accuracy of the biblical texts during their literary history, meaning during their writing and prior to their copying (for clarification, Dunzweiler has labeled the writing of Scripture as “inscripturation”). These standards include 1) the *kerygma* or “gospel” proclamation and 2) the judgment of critical scholarship (modern biblical and textual criticism). Dunzweiler rejected both standards for judging Scripture’s integrity. The gospel proclamation is an inappropriate criteria because it invalidates itself due to the fact that it was *a part* of the writing process. The downfall of using this method is evi-

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dent in Martin Luther's hasty criticism of several canonical books, such as James, because he thought they did not contain a clear gospel message. Critical scholarship, a product of The Enlightenment, is an inadequate standard because it was designed only to measure empirical evidence, not spiritual realities, such as the divine influence on the authorship of Scripture and preservation of the biblical texts (Ibid.). Furthermore, the accuracy of the autographs cannot be judged by the errors made by copyists and found in the surviving biblical manuscripts.

Dunzweiler concluded this section of his article with a solution to the dilemma of establishing a standard of evaluation: "This consideration prompts a necessary review of the basis[,] approach and method in discovering the true doctrine of inspiration. If we approach this question via the 'critical data of Scripture' [i.e., textual criticism] or via the 'phenomena of Scripture,' [i.e., the *kerygma*] it would appear unlikely that we could ever arrive at any confidence concerning the Bible as the Word of God. If on the other hand we approach this question via the witness of Scripture to itself, **we discover that with one voice the prophets, Christ and the apostles proclaim that God's revelation of truth has been truly inscripturated! The teaching of Scripture concerning its own inspiration must be permitted to speak.** What God has said concerning the nature and extent of the inscripturation of revelation must be taken as normative [i.e., the standard] in defining the true doctrine of inspiration. Only when we are armed with this doctrine are we equipped to undertake the task of attempting to resolve the problems presented by the 'critical data of Scripture'" (Ibid., bold added).

The Bible testifies to the accuracy of the autographs in its use of figures of speech and direct references to the Holy Spirit and to God, the real author of Scripture. What follows are some facts of Scripture, which address this particular topic and form the basis for the fifth truth of divine authorship.

Precept #1: The autographs reflect God's nature. Inasmuch as a book reflects the character of its writer, so Scripture reflects the attributes of its real author, God (Nelson, p. 1646). The Bible indicates that God is not like human beings; He is faultless, cannot lie and has no need to repent of falsehood and error (Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). The psalmist introduces us to a basic biblical principle: "For the Word of the LORD is upright [Heb., correct]; and all His works are *done* in faithfulness" (Psa. 33:4; cf. Psa. 111:7). Hence, God's work of producing Scripture was done in truth. To suggest that God revealed His Word in error would essentially make Him the author of a lie, which the Bible teaches is impossible (I John 2:21; Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2).

Dunzweiler noted that if "God could not help revealing error, then either He is *not omniscient* (i.e., He was ignorant of the fact that He was revealing error), or He is *not omnipotent* (i.e., He simply could not inerrantly communicate His thoughts and words to men). That God is omniscient is so clearly taught in Scripture that we must reject the alternative. To the alternative claim that God is not able inerrantly to communicate His thoughts to man, we must ask, 'What man is that who dares to presume to say what God can and cannot do, apart from revelation [as found in Scripture]?' It is clear in Scripture that there are some things which God cannot do, but His revelation of truth to man is never mentioned as one of them! ... Thus we must reject this alternative. If God, who created man's mind, can communicate one truth to man, then in principle there is no reason why He cannot communicate any finite of number of truths to man" (Dunzweiler, p. 8).

Since there is no other standard for judging the accuracy of what God has revealed, except the statements of Scripture, then **the assumptions that God deliberately revealed or could not help revealing error are false.** Dunzweiler explained, "There is no hint of such error in the teachings of the prophets, of Christ, or of the apostles. And there is no evidence that there were errors in revelation itself ... as originally communicated.... There is abundant evidence of errors of transcription [copying]; but what evi-

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dence is there of errors of revelation, especially since neither side of the question possesses the original manuscripts of Scripture! Thus we must reject the concept that God deliberately revealed error, on two counts (1) it is antithetical to His nature; and (2) there is no evidence to substantiate it” (Ibid.).

Precept #2: The accuracy of the autographs was unaffected by the biblical writers’ humanity. In discussing the biblical idea of the divine authorship of Scripture as it relates to its reliability, theologian Dr. J.I. Packer stated, “The fact that in inspiration God did not obliterate the personality, style, outlook and cultural conditioning of his penmen does not mean that his control of them was imperfect, or that they inevitably distorted the truth they had been given to convey in the process of writing it down” (Comfort, *The Origin of the Bible*, p. 35, emphasis added).

Balaam, son of Beor or Bosor, whom the Bible depicts as a false prophet and an opponent of ancient Israel (cf. Num. 31:16; II Pet. 2:1, 15; Jude 11) offers an example. Admittedly, Balaam was not a writer of Scripture. Yet, he was fully aware of God’s command to communicate faithfully the prophecies revealed to him concerning Israel (Num. 22:20, 35, 23:12, 26, 24:13). If it was impossible for Balaam, a false prophet, to corrupt the revelation given to him directly by the LORD or in vision via His Spirit (Num. 23:5, 16, 24:2-4, 16), how could the biblical authors, who were generally willing vessels in God’s hands by virtually all accounts, inaccurately transmit His revelation to the autographs? (See the book of Jonah for an example of a prophet and biblical writer who could not thwart the communication of God’s prophecy to Nineveh, nor its later “inscripturation.”)

Therefore, it is logical to conclude that God’s revelation, both in its oral form as spoken by His servants and in its written form (i.e., the Bible) as penned by the biblical authors, was accurately recorded because the Spirit of truth ensured that it was recorded in truth (John 16:13; II Pet. 1:20-21). To suggest otherwise would make the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, which proceeds from the Father, the agent of a lie—an utter impossibility.

The Purity of the Autographs

In spite of its human co-authors, the Bible reveals that all the words of God are pure: “The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O LORD, You shall preserve them from this generation for ever” (Psa. 12:6-7).

When properly translated, Psalm 12:6 affirms the complete trustworthiness of the biblical autographs, and verse seven holds relevance for the reliability of the biblical manuscripts down through time. In his book *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, Bullinger wrote, “It has been a great difficulty with many to think that the LORD’s words should require purifying, especially after the declaration in the first part of the verse, that they are ‘pure’” (Bullinger, *Figures*, p. 71). Bullinger commented that the presence of an ellipsis (a figure of speech that means there is something missing from most English translations of this passage from the Hebrew text) and the incorrect translation of the Hebrew word *eretz* (earth) have added to the passage’s interpretative difficulties. He further noted that the word *eretz* is generally understood by translators to mean “a crucible made of earth or clay.” Bullinger explained that this understanding is incorrect because the context would require that the Hebrew word *adamah* for ground, soil or clay be used, and not *eretz*, meaning the whole earth (Ibid.).

According to Bullinger, the difficulty of this verse disappears when the word *eretz* (earth) is properly translated with its preposition *lamed* (Hebrew letter “l”) and the ellipsis is supplied. Traditionally, this word has been translated as if it were in the genitive case, which depicts the furnace as belonging to or of the earth. Bullinger clarified

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that a *lamed* indicates the word earth is in the dative case (acting as an indirect object), requiring translators to render the phrase “to or pertaining to the earth” (Ibid.). The ellipsis is supplied by repeating the noun “words” from the beginning of the verse. After making these adjustments, Bullinger offered this fitting English translation of Psalm 12:6 from the Hebrew: “The words of the LORD are pure words, *as* silver tried in a furnace; [words] of the earth: (or pertaining to the earth), purified seven times.”

In biblical numerology, the number seven signifies perfection. Hence, the words found in the Bible had “to be perfectly purified” before they could be used as “‘the words of Jehovah’” (Bullinger, *Number in Scripture*, p. 169). In comparison to man’s often deceitful and impure statements, the precepts, words and promises of the LORD are pure and without dross (Psa. 12:2-4, 6; cf. Psa. 18:30, 19:7-11, 119:140; Prov. 30:5). The primary meaning of Psalm 12:6 is that only God’s promises (words) can offer comfort to the oppressed (Psa. 12:1, 5, 7-8). The entire context of Psalm 12:1-8 limits the interpretation of verse six to the words spoken by the holy men of God and penned by the biblical authors.

While the context of Psalm 12 refers to the giving of promises to the oppressed, it can be applied to the ministry of the apostles and their writing of the New Testament. Following His last Passover, Jesus petitioned the Father to **keep** (i.e., preserve) His apostles from the evil one, Satan (John 17:15). Yet, while they were in the world, Jesus asked the Father to “Sanctify them in Your truth; Your Word is the truth” (John 17:17). What was this word of truth? The answer is found in Jesus’ statements found earlier in His prayer: “For I have given them the words that You gave to Me” and “I have given them Your words” (John 17:8, 14). It was the words and teachings of Jesus “as an express communication from the Father, through the Faithful and True Witness [i.e., Jesus], [that] was that ‘word of truth’ through which He prays that they might be sanctified” (Jamieson, vol. 3, p. 452).

As Jamieson, Fausset and Brown noted, it was after Jesus ascended to heaven and the promised Holy Spirit was given on Pentecost that the “full sanctifying effect” of the Father’s word of truth was upon the apostles (Ibid.). That sanctification process enabled the apostles to complete the mission for which they had been set apart by the Father and sent into the world by Christ (John 17:9, 18). That work primarily consisted of preaching the Gospel of truth (Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5) and writing the New Testament, so that succeeding generations of believers might have a permanent, truthful record of Jesus’ words (cf. Matt. 28:19-20 and John 17:20). The Father’s words, revealed by His Son Jesus to the apostles, would of necessity have to have been recorded accurately by the apostles for Jesus’ previous prayer to have lasting validity. It is the perfectly purified words as found in the Old Testament and completed by the New Testament that have been given to the saints for salvation, edification and perfection.

Purification of Human Words: Bullinger continued his remarks on this passage by explaining that “the words in which *Jehovah* has been pleased to make His revelation, are not the words of angels (1 Cor. xiii.1), nor the ‘unspeakable words of Paradise’ (2 Cor. xii.4), but they were words pertaining to man in this world—human words—but refined and purified as silver” (Ibid., pp. 71-72). In revealing His Word, God purified human words for His purpose by giving some found in Scripture exalted meanings and others new definitions from their previous ones found in Classical Greek. He also coined some new words especially for use in the sacred texts. The Greek word *epiousios*, for example, which is rendered “daily,” is used only in the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:11 and Luke 11:3 (Bullinger, *Figures*, pp. 72-73).

The Need for Purity: The need for purity in communicating God’s revelation arose early in Israel’s religious life. Moses, a contemporary of Balaam, instructed the people that one condition for prophets who *presumed* to speak in God’s name was that they communicate *only* what God had commanded or imparted to them to speak (Deut.

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18:20-22; cf. Jer. 14:14-15). The penalty for a prophet in ancient Israel who falsely spoke a word in God's name was death. Another important requirement was that all new revelation had to conform to the content of existing oracles and prophecies (Deut. 13:1-5; cf. Gal. 1:8). At the height of Judah's apostasy, the prophet Jeremiah penned a severe denunciation of the lying prophets who led the people astray, stating that these prophets had spoken "a vision of their own heart" that was not of God (Jer. 23:9-32).

From the beginning, this injunction was transferred to the writing of Scripture. In the face of a confrontation with Korah, Dathan, Abiram and others over the priesthood and his divine appointment as Israel's human leader, Moses stated, "And Moses said, 'By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, *and that I have not done them from my own heart*' " (Num. 16:28). The context shows that Moses' statements referred collectively to all his works, including his writing of Scripture. The presence of the phrase "by the hand of Moses" in Numbers 16:40 reveals that the section designating Aaron and his lineage as priests (Num. 3:1-10) was written before this confrontation. It is apparent that it was to this section of Scripture that the rebels objected, fancying that Moses had composed it from his own imagination in order to acquire power for himself and his brother Aaron.

By the first century AD, this attitude toward the Hebrew Scriptures had become so ingrained in the psyche of the Palestinian Jews that the historian Josephus wrote, "... how firmly we have given credit to those books of our own nation, is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, or to make any change in them" (Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1:8:42).

Though the prophets of ancient Israel did not often understand the meaning of their messages or prophecies (Dan. 12:4, 8-9; Zech. 4:5; I Pet. 1:10-11), they accurately recorded what God had revealed to them. The testimonies of Jesus and the apostles were unanimous in claiming that the Hebrew Bible in all its details (every jot and tittle) was a faithful and authoritative record of God's revelation. (See page 246 for details.)

The apostles were mindful of the previous injunction for purity. To differentiate authentic apostolic instruction and writings from those of false teachers active in the first century, Peter boldly declared, "We also possess the confirmed prophetic Word ... no prophecy of Scripture [i.e., God-breathed writings] originated as anyone's own *private* interpretation" (II Pet. 1:19-20; see also 2:1). Peter's intent was to clarify to the brethren that the apostles had not spoken or written their own words, but only those they had faithfully received of God by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:21).

The Bible contains several prohibitions against altering the words of its texts (see Deut. 4:2, 12:32; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18-19). Two of these prohibitions carry warnings of penalties: "Every word of God *is* pure; ... Do not add to His words, lest He correct you and you be found a liar" (Prov. 30:5-6) and "... if anyone adds to these things, God shall add to him the plagues that are written in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of *the* book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from *the* book of life, and from the holy city, and from the things that are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18-19). There would be no need for these prohibitions if either God's communication of His revelation or the autographs contained errors. If this indeed were true, the words of the Bible would have been rejected by even their own adherents as mere fable soon after their initial writing because no one would have been able to differentiate truth from error.

Truth #6: The Biblical Writers Reflected Their Own Styles

The sixth truth of "inspiration" is largely self-evident: The biblical authors retained their own unique styles and free will during their writing of Scripture.

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary describes a "writer's characteristic manner of

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expression” as his *style*. “The sacred writers form no exception; each one maintains his individuality; and it is therefore perfectly proper to speak of the style of Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc. But apart from the style that is the expression of the mental and moral idiosyncrasies of the prophets there is a style that characterizes them as prophets. This arises from the method of prophetic revelation. When inspired [i.e., moved] of God their intellectual and emotional nature was quickened. They knew by intuition....They were in the region of spirit as contradistinguished from that of sense and time. At the same time they retained their personal characteristics and native susceptibility” (Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, pp. 1043-1044).

Packer summarized the biblical and historical evidence on this subject as follows: “The idea [of inspiration] is not of mechanical dictation, or automatic writing, or any process which involved the suspending of the action of the human writer’s mind. Such concepts of inspiration are found in the Talmud, Philo, and the Fathers [early Christian scholars], but not in the Bible. The divine direction and control under which the biblical authors wrote was not a physical or psychological force, and it did not detract from but rather heightened the freedom, spontaneity, and creativeness of their writing” (Comfort, p. 35). J.N.D. Kelly’s *Early Christian Doctrines*, pages 60-64, offers a survey of the ante-Nicene Christian teaching concerning “inspiration” and the state of the biblical authors while under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

That the Biblical writers retained possession of their minds and self-consciousness as they penned the utterances of God adds credibility to their testimonies. (See “Witness of the Spirit” on page 257.) For this reason, the personalities, intellects, abilities and cultural, educational and occupational backgrounds of the biblical authors came to the fore as they wrote their compositions. They borrowed heavily from the language of the time and the circumstances affecting the nations of Israel and Judah. The prophets of ancient Israel, for example, incorporated poetic imagery, as cultivated at the prophetic colleges founded by Samuel, in order to lead the hearts and consciences of the people to repentance (Unger, p. 1044; see also page 241 for details about Samuel’s prophetic institutions).

Likewise, in New Testament times, Paul’s style reflected his learning as a Pharisee, sitting at the feet of Gamaliel, the learned doctor of the Law (Acts 5:33, 22:3). The vocabulary and style of Luke are so refined that literary scholars have often compared his writings to those of other Classical Greek authors (Zodhiates, *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, p. 1261). Luke’s use of *Koiné* Greek reflected his precise technical training as a physician (Col. 4:14). John’s simple and easy-to-understand literary style was evidence of his “gentle, untutored, affectionate soul” and his knowledge of the Greek, and the sermons and epistles of Peter hold traces of the “impetuous earnestness of his noble yet faultless character” (Zodhiates, p. 1315; Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 2).

With this insight, it is possible to appreciate how the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke offer differing accounts of an event that occurred during the three and a half years of Christ’s ministry. What might seem like a conflict, error or discrepancy to some skeptics probably in reality is nothing more than a differing perspective. If one compares the three Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke with the fourth Gospel of the apostle John, this truth becomes even more self-evident.

Truth #7: The History of the Written Word of God Closely Followed That of Oral Prophecy

As previously noted, the subject of II Peter 1:20-21 pertains to written prophecy: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture [Gk., *propheteía graphes*, God-

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breathed writings] originated as anyone's own *private* interpretation; because prophecy was not brought at any time by human will, but the holy men of God spoke as they were moved by *the Holy Spirit*" (I Pet. 1:20-21).

One truth taught by these passages is that the *writings* of the apostles (and all biblical authors) possessed the same divine character and origin as their preaching. A closer examination of these and other passages in Second Peter reveals another important truth of the divine authorship of Scripture: "**But I will make every effort that after my departure** [i.e., death, v. 14], **you may always have a written remembrance** of these things [contained II Pet. 1:1-12], *in order* to practice *them* for yourselves" (II Peter 1:15). And again in chapter three, Peter wrote, "Now, beloved, I am writing this second epistle to you; **in both** [epistles], **I am stirring up your pure minds by causing you to remember**, *in order* for you to be mindful of the words that were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of the Lord and Savior, *spoken* by us, the apostles" (II Pet. 3:1-2).

As we examine the words in bold type in the previous passages against the backdrop of II Peter 1:19-21, a pattern emerges: The history of the writing of the New Testament books closely followed the lives and ministries of the apostles. When Peter wrote his Second Epistle in 65-66 AD, he had been a minister of Jesus Christ for more than 35 years. He realized his death was nearing, which is evident by his statements in II Peter 1:12-15. Thus, Peter and the apostles were preparing a permanent truthful record of the prophetic word they had received from the Lord Jesus and had preached to the brethren (I Pet. 1:25). The only way that Peter and the other apostles could stir up the brethren's memory of the truth, so they could practice these things for themselves after the apostles' deaths, was through a God-approved document. The authors of New Testament were following a pattern established by Moses, the prophets and the other writers of the Hebrew Bible. A review of this pattern, which comprises the seventh truth of "inspiration," follows.

Holy Men of God: The expression "holy men of God" found in II Peter 1:21 is essential to obtaining an accurate understanding of this seventh truth. The Greek language reveals that this term can refer to *any* human being called by God to speak on His behalf, without reference to gender. This understanding corresponds to the general New Testament use of the Greek word *anthropois*, a form of which the English word "men" is translated. (See Matt. 19:3, 5, 10 for one exception where the word *anthropos* is translated as "man" instead of "woman" or person. This shows the translation of this word is context driven.)

The Online Bible program lists 73 instances throughout the Bible where the term "man of God" refers to individuals who served as God's spokespersons. The Bible explicitly connects this expression with 13 people: Moses (Deut. 33:1), Samuel (I Sam. 9:6-10, 14), David (Neh. 12:24), Elijah (I Ki. 17:18), Elisha (II Ki. 4:7), Shemiah (II Chr. 11:2), Igdaliah (Jer. 35:4), Timothy (I Tim. 6:11), and five additional unnamed people (Judg. 13:6; I Sam. 2:27, I Ki. 13:1, 20:28; II Chr. 25:7). It is no coincidence that it was first applied to Moses and last to Timothy. It is apparent that Paul entrusted his final writings to Timothy and expected him to use them in proclaiming God's Word to the brethren at Ephesus, where he served as a minister (I Tim. 1:3; II Tim. 4:9, 11-13).

The use of the term "men of God" can be expanded to other biblical characters, such as Abraham, whom the Bible describes as a prophet (Gen. 20:7), and Huldah the prophetess, who communicated God's word to the emissaries sent by King Josiah (II Ki. 22:14ff). Though all the holy servants of God (prophets, prophetesses, apostles and the like) were obligated to speak for Him, only some were moved to preserve a written record for future generations. Therefore, we have confined our study to those servants of God whom He called to be writers of Scripture (cf. Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*,

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pp. 301-304). As such, there are about 40 men who can be classified as “holy men of God” as defined by II Peter 1:20-21.

Most of the biblical writers were prophets in the strictest sense of the word, in that they predicted future events (Deut. 18:22). Haggai and Zechariah were called of God to serve as prophets and labored among the people of Judah to lead them to repentance and to incite them to complete the second temple. Others, such as Joshua, Ezra and Nehemiah, were prophets in the sense that they spoke for God and interpreted His oracles (cf. Josh. chs. 1, 23-24; Ezra 9, Neh. 8:2-3, ch. 13). Moses is an example of a biblical author who belongs to both categories. Some of these writing prophets authored historical, poetic or prophetic books. Moses and Samuel are examples of men who wrote books belonging to the first category; David, the second; and Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, the third.

When God Spoke Through His Servants: The following passages provide key markers that allow us to examine history and ascertain when the trail of prophetic speaking began and ended. More importantly, these basic markers also allow us to pinpoint the general time period when the biblical authors wrote and “canonized” Scripture. This process occurred **over a period of 1,500 years.**

In his introduction to the book of Hebrews, the apostle Paul outlined how, when and through whom God spoke His words to mankind: “God, Who spoke to the fathers **at different times in the past and in many ways by the prophets, has spoken to us in these last days by His Son**, Whom He has appointed heir of all things, by Whom also He made the worlds” (Heb. 1:1-2).

The first section of Hebrews concludes with a warning to consider carefully the words of the Bible, especially those of the Greek New Testament Scriptures, which contain the complete revelation of salvation through Jesus Christ, the Son of God: “For this reason, it is imperative that we give much greater attention to the things *which* we have heard, lest at any time we should slip away. For if the word spoken by angels was *enforced* without fail, and every transgression and disobedience received just recompense, How shall we escape, *if we* have neglected so great a salvation; **which was first received when it was spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him**; God also bearing witness with *them* by both signs and wonders, and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will” (Heb. 2:1-4).

A Chronology of Prophetic Speaking

Period #1: Old Testament Era

God spoke directly to the fathers (the patriarchs, including Moses): When: Gen. 2:16–Ex. 3:4; Ex. 20. How: Spoke in similitude, vision and dreams to individuals from Adam onward and to the Israelites on Mount Sinai.

God spoke by His prophets to ancient Israel and Judah: When: From the call of Moses (Ex. 3:4) through the prophetic succession begun by Samuel, which ended with Malachi (Mal. 1:1). This authority lasted until John the Baptist (Luke 16:16). How: Face-to-face as in the case of Moses who served as mediator between God and the people, and through His Spirit (vision, etc.) in His prophets (Neh. 9:29-30; Zech. 7:12).

Period #2: New Testament Era

God spoke by John the Baptist to ancient Judah: When: From the beginning of John’s ministry in 25 AD (Luke 3:2) until his death (Matt. 4:12). How: In the spirit and power of Elijah, meaning the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:17, 76; 7:26).

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God spoke by His Son to ancient Judah: When: From the beginning of Jesus' ministry in 26 AD (Matt. 4:12; Mark 1:14-15) to His ascension in 30 AD (Acts 1:8). How: By direct revelation from the Spirit of the Father dwelling in Jesus (John 8:38, 12:49, 14:10).

God spoke by those who heard Jesus: When: 30–70 AD. How: By apostolic and prophetic testimony confirmed by miracles, wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit (Mark 16:17-20). The Holy Spirit revealed to the apostles things concerning Christ and led them into all truth (John 16:12-15). God also spoke to John in 95–96 AD on the Island of Patmos by His angel and the Holy Spirit (Rev. 1:1, 10).

(The previous chart has been adapted from a similar graphic portrayal by E.W. Bullinger, cf. *The Companion Bible*, App. 95).

Hebrew Scriptures

Moses was the first prophet of Israel and first writer of what is now known as the Old Testament (see page 237). He was a leader and prophet in ancient Israel during the 1400s BC. Malachi is traditionally considered to be the last prophet and biblical writer of the Hebrew Scriptures (Mal. 1:1). Three extra-biblical proofs attest to when prophetic speaking and writing ceased in Israel:

Proof #1: The Jewish historian Josephus was from one of the leading priestly families of his time. He is considered by many scholars to be a reliable witness to the general state of the Hebrew canon (authoritative list of books) during the inter-testamental period through the first century AD.

Writing about 90 AD, Josephus offers testimony that allows for an exact dating of the beginning and ending of prophecy and the writing of the Old Testament. The citation that follows is from his *Against Apion*, a work written to Greek readers in defense of the antiquity of the “Jewish” religion and culture: “For we have ... but only twenty-two books ... of them five belong to Moses ... but as to the time **from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes** [464-424 BC], king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of life. It is true, our history [a reference to noncanonical writings] hath been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former of our forefathers, because **there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time**; and how firmly we have given credit to those [canonical] books of our nation, is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them; but it becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their very birth, to esteem those books to contain divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them” (Josephus, 1.8.38-42, emphasis added).

The writings of Josephus have come under closer scrutiny and even ridicule in recent decades in the ongoing debate over the first-century Hebrew canon. In an essay entitled “Josephus and His Twenty-Two Book Canon,” York University professor of humanities Steven Mason reviewed Josephus' writings (*The Antiquities of the Jews* and *Against Apion*) for the scope of his canon and the credibility of his statements. Mason concluded that Josephus' “use of scriptural materials in *Antiquities* agrees by and large with the summary statement in *Against Apion*: he really did believe at some deep level that uniquely inspired ‘prophets’ wrote the records in a bygone age. Although much is omitted from his biblical paraphrase [in *Antiquities*], what we have represents the heart

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of the traditional Hebrew and Greek canons; he seems aware, without saying as much, that books like 1 and 2 Maccabees are later and separate....the circumstantial evidence of Josephus's own use of the Bible in the *Antiquities* does not mean what it might otherwise have seemed to mean: it does not, after all, imply an open canon. Indeed, once we know *Against Apion*, we can go back to *Antiquities* and discover that Josephus really does believe that the succession of prophets has ceased, and we can discern a seam after the 'records' have been exhausted. *Against Apion* was written as a deliberate sequel to *Antiquities*, so it is unlikely that Josephus is aware of any substantial conflict between the two. This means that his willingness to alter the biblical text in manifold ways proves nothing about his formal view of canon. His example removes the force from appeals to circumstantial evidence as proof that the Dead Sea Scrolls' authors or Philo or Ben Sira [Sirach] had an open canon" (McDonald, *The Canon Debate*, pp. 125-126).

Admittedly, the writings of Josephus do not give a detailed account of the closing of the canon. He simply assumes that from birth all Jews esteemed the Hebrew Scripture as divine. Josephus' testimony is consistent with "most traditional views" of the early Hebrew canon and cannot be taken to support any theory of an open canon (Ibid., p. 127). Although Mason's research shows it is impossible to clearly determine the internal shape of the first-century Hebrew Bible from Josephus' statements, it does demonstrate that Josephus' testimony as it relates to the dating of the writing and close of the Hebrew canon remains unshaken.

Proof #2: Consistent with Josephus' testimony, the Jews of the inter-testamental period recognized that prophecy had ceased in Judah. Following the temple's desecration in 167 BC by the Seleucid king of Syria, Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 BC), the writer of the apocryphal history *First Maccabees* states that the Jews cleansed the temple and set aside the polluted stones of the altar "until there should come a prophet to shew what should be done with them" (*I Maccabees* 4:46).

Proof #3: In writing of Jonathan's succession as head of the Hasmonean dynasty and of the ensuing turmoil in Palestine, the writer of *First Maccabees* once again states, "So was there great affliction in Israel [161-158 BC], the like whereof was not since the time that a prophet was seen among them" (*I Maccabees* 9:27).

The Facts Refute an Open Canon: The famous Dutch rationalist philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677 AD) was apparently the first to theorize the selection of the sacred Old Testament books by a pharisaical council (McDonald, p. 159). In 1871 the German historian and biblical scholar Henrich Graetz proposed that a rabbinical synod held at Jamnia (or Yavneh), located on the Mediterranean coast, closed the Hebrew canon about 90 AD (Ibid., p. 146). Versions of Graetz's theory have become widely accepted by modern scholars over the years and have led to a wholesale rejection of the traditional description of the canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures by Ezra and the Great Assembly. In the process, these scholars have largely ignored the biblical clues pointing to Ezra's role in shaping the Hebrew text and canon.

Therefore, many scholars now blindly believe that the Hebrew canon was settled at rabbinical synods held in 90 and 118 AD in Jamnia. Ironically, the only official discussions of the canonicity of specific Old Testament books are preserved in the tractates (*Yadaim* and *Shabbath*) of the Mishnah (ca. 200 AD). According to rabbinical discussions found there, three or possibly four Old Testament books (e.g., Esther, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs and Song of Solomon) were open to dispute due to alleged internal contradictions (e.g., Prov. 26:4-5) or, in the case of Esther, that the name of God was not found in it (Bromiley, pp. 598-599). However, previously the books of Esther, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon were part of the *Megillot*, the five books read by the priests to Jews as part of the holy day liturgy at the temple in Jerusalem. Dr. Ernest L. Martin, biblical historian and scholar in canonical studies, cogently observed: "Since the official priests

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were ordered to read these books ... no one suspected that they were anything but canonical. Indeed, most criticism concerning the canonicity of these five books came after the Temple services ceased in 70 A.D. when the books were no longer being read at regular intervals” (Martin, p. 164).

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia offered this evaluation of the tradition of these two councils and rabbinical doubts surrounding these books: “... it is far from certain that there ever were such ‘councils’ in the strictest sense, and very little is known about the actual occasions of meeting. While Jamnia became a center of Jewish study and learning under Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai after A.D. 70, **there is nothing to indicate that anything formal or binding was decided in connection with the OT [Old Testament] canon**, even though certain books such as Esther, Canticles, and Ecclesiastes may have been discussed in this regard” (Bromiley, pp. 598-599, emphasis added).

In addition, Harding University professor emeritus Jack P. Lewis’ essay, entitled “Jamnia Revisited,” re-examined the scholarly arguments and historical data surrounding the Jamnian theory of canonization (McDonald, pp. 146-162). Lewis soundly exposed the fallacy of the Jamnian hypothesis and confirmed the findings presented thus far, that is, no reference to a synod exists in the Jewish sources used to support it, and it is impossible to know what effect the rabbinical scholars at Jamnia had on the formation of the Hebrew text and its canon. As a result of Lewis’ work, modern scholarship has essentially been stripped of a definitive substitute for explaining the formation of the Hebrew Old Testament canon and text.

Thus, scholars have appealed to the Dead Sea Scrolls for evidence of an open Hebrew canon. Lawrence Schiffman, professor of Hebrew and Judaic studies at New York University, served as part of a group of scholars that studied the Dead Sea Scrolls. In his book *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Schiffman evaluated the scholarly claims for such conventions against the evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls: “... the textual evidence does not support that claim... Because mishnaic Judaism [ca. 70-200 AD] had already inherited a tradition, predating the Yavnean period [ca. 70-150 AD] and ordaining which books were part of the biblical canon, the Rabbis at Yavneh had only to make a few final rulings to complete the corpus. And even for this rather limited agenda **there is no evidence that any such meeting ever took place at Yavneh**” (Schiffman, p. 162, emphasis added).

The Dead Sea Scrolls can only provide information about the biblical canon during the late Hasmonean and Herodian periods (ca. 152 BC onward). Professor Schiffman commented “... despite certain differences in biblical books ... **nothing in the Qumran corpus suggests that the contents of canonical books had not yet been fixed**. Rather, by this time, the books constituting the Bible were fixed and closed” (Schiffman, pp. 162, 169, emphasis added).

Roland K. Harrison, professor of Old Testament studies, also clarified that the evidence reflects a canon inherited from earlier generations: “The evidence from Qumran shows clearly that no canonical OT [Old Testament] composition could have been compiled later than the Persian period [333 BC], regardless of when it was deemed canonical” (Bromiley, p. 599). This evidence refutes the liberal scholarly notion that the book of Daniel was written ca. 165 BC.

The authors of the New Testament quote from every Old Testament book except Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Ezra, Nehemiah, Obadiah, Nahum and Zephaniah (Ibid., p. 597). According to Professor Harrison, the difficulties surrounding these books are removed when one considers that the “Twelve Minor Prophets were always treated by the Jews *en bloc* as one canonical work; hence if one of the twelve was quoted all were recognized” (Ibid.). The fact that Chronicles (II Chr. 24:20ff) is quoted in Matthew

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23:35 and Luke 11:51 “presupposes also the canonicity of Ezra-Nehemiah, as originally these books were one with Chronicles, though they may possibly have already been divided in Jesus’ day. As for Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Canticles [Song of Solomon], it is easy to see why they are not quoted: they probably failed to furnish NT [New Testament] writers material for quotation. The NT writers simply had no occasion to make citations from them. What is much more noteworthy is that they never quote from the apocryphal books, though they show an acquaintance with them....Everything depends upon the manner in which the quotation is made. In no case is an apocryphal book cited by NT authors as Scripture, or as the work of the Holy Spirit. As a witness, therefore, the NT is of paramount importance. For, though it nowhere tells us the exact number of books contained in the OT canon, it gives abundant evidence of the existence already in the 1st cent. A.D. of a definite and fixed canon” (Ibid.).

Many of the apocryphal books were read by Jews everywhere. Rabbis explicitly had to prohibit the reading of the apocryphal book *The Wisdom of Jesus, Ben Sirach*, also known as *Ecclesiasticus* (dated 180 BC), which indicates that it had become popular among many Jews, apparently for its pearls of wisdom and its emphasis on the Law (Ibid., p. 167). The popularity of this book is understandable when one considers that it was at a time when many Jews, including many priests, in Palestine began embracing Hellenism (Greek language, culture and lifestyle) and rejecting the Mosaic customs (cf. *II Maccabees* 4:13-15).

Yet, none of these apocryphal works **ever** became a part of the Hebrew canon in Palestine. The **only** Palestinian Jews who did not recognize the traditional Hebrew canon were of the renegade sect that lived in Samaria. (They acknowledged only the first five books of Moses). The Old Testament apocryphal books, written during the inter-testamental period, were rejected by official Judaism as part of the Hebrew Scriptures.

What about the Jews of Alexandria, Egypt? After reviewing the evidence for an expanded canon among the Alexandrian Jews, Professor Harrison offered these conclusions: “the LXX [Septuagint] version as we know it from the Christian MSS [uncial manuscripts, dated 300s AD] extant is by no means a sufficient proof that Alexandrians [Jews] possessed a ‘larger’ canon which included the Apocrypha ... Philo’s testimony is negative, in that he witnesses against the apocryphal books as an integral part of Holy Scripture” (Bromiley, p. 599).

Jesus Himself offered no indication that any part of the Hebrew Scriptures was missing or in dispute. He affirmed that both its traditional tripartite canonical form (Moses, Prophets and Psalms) and its text were quite settled in stating “one jot or tittle shall in no way pass” from it (Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 24:27, 44).

These facts more accurately represent the state of the Hebrew canon during the Second Temple period (539 BC-70 AD). (For a concise overview of the historical and textual evidence, see *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, pp. 591-601).

Proposed Dating for the Old Testament: Josephus’ statements in *Against Apion* clearly link the prophets’ ministries to the writing of the Old Testament books. For Josephus, prophetic speaking ceased in Israel with the reign of the Persian King Artaxerxes (464-424 BC). The historical evidence, including the testimony of an apocryphal book, confirms that the recognized era of prophecy began in Israel with Moses in ca. 1486 BC and ended with Malachi somewhere before 424 BC. Granted, allusions to open prophecy exist in the book of *Sirach* (*Sirach* 24:33). However, the testimony from the apocryphal book of *Maccabees* counters these statements and confirms Josephus’ testimony that no prophets appeared in Judah between 424 to 158 BC, about 150 years before Jesus’ birth.

From these sources, we can conclude that a 445-year period of prophetic silence reigned from the time Malachi wrote his book until the advent of John the Baptist in 25

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AD. Although this period has often been described as “silent” in regard to its prophetic significance, it was bursting with activity vital to the state of the Hebrew text, the coming of Jesus Christ and the proclamation of the gospel. An honest evaluation of the textual evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls shows that a fixed canon was commonly accepted among the Jews of Palestine during the inter-testamental period. Josephus expressed the one Jewish standard: Only those books and their contents that had been written in Hebrew and Aramaic before 424 BC were included in the Old Testament canon.

The time frame above closely parallels the traditional dating of the Old Testament books and the sealing of the Hebrew canon under Ezra, Nehemiah and the Great Assembly from 515 to ca. 400 BC. This dating bars the door to the entry of any apocryphal books into the Hebrew canon. Almost all of the apocryphal works were written after 200 BC, paralleling the rise of Hellenism (the spread of Greek language, culture and art) in Palestine.

While the Jewish people readily recognized John the Baptist as a prophet of God, their leaders generally refused to heed his call to repentance (Matt. 21:26; Luke 3:15, 20:1-8; John 1:19-28). For nearly 45 years, the Jewish leaders stubbornly resisted the preaching efforts of John, Jesus, the apostles and other servants of God like Stephen. Their unbelief ironically functioned as a safeguard of the Hebrew Scriptures in that it focused the Jewish people’s attention on preserving the Old Testament text from outside forces, especially Christian, no matter what the risk. In this sense, they did fulfill the statement of the apostle Paul, “in that they were entrusted with the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2). The unbelief of the Jews, the Levitical scribes in particular, did not nullify the promise of God to preserve His Word in the Hebrew Bible.

Greek Scriptures

The revelation given to the holy apostles and New Testament era prophets laid the foundation for the early Church (Eph. 2:20, 3:5). The trail of witnesses reveals that the New Testament period of prophecy rightfully began with John the Baptist in 25-26 AD, and ended with the apostle John in ca. 96 AD. (See Inspiration, Truth #8.) Two proofs are offered for a general dating of oral and written prophecy during New Testament times:

Proof #1: While some might consider John the Baptist a part of the Old Testament era of prophecy, we have included him with the New Testament era because he came speaking in the spirit and power of Elijah to preach repentance and prepare a people to receive the Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel (Luke 1:17); and he was the object of a prophecy given by Malachi, the last recognized prophet of ancient Israel (Mal. 3:1). Jesus proclaimed, “The Law and the Prophets *were* until John; from that time the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone zealously strives to enter it” (Luke 16:16). Hence, John the Baptist serves as a transition between the administration of the Law and the Prophets and the gospel of the kingdom and grace.

Prior to 26 AD, the truth about Jesus and His kingdom was contained in the Old Testament types and shadows and in the writings of the prophets (cf. Heb. 10:1; I Pet. 1:10-12). Following John the Baptist’s imprisonment and death by the hand of King Herod, Jesus boldly proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 4:12-17; Mark 1:14). After Jesus’ ministry, His apostles preached the fullness of the gospel of the kingdom and grace, thus fully establishing the New Testament prophetic era (Acts 20:24-25, 28:23, 30-31).

Proof #2: Internal clues within the book of Revelation indicate that it was the final New Testament book to be written. External clues to its dating are found in the writings of the early church historian Eusebius, who quoted from the writings of Irenaeus, Tertullian

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and Polycrates. All three men lived within a century of John's death. Polycrates was a disciple of Polycarp (a disciple of the apostle John) and Irenaeus was a pupil of Polycarp.

Eusebius noted that John was condemned to the Island of Patmos, a Roman penal colony about 35 miles off the coast of Asia Minor, in the fifteenth year of the Roman Emperor Domitian (95 AD) (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3:18). The apostle John wrote that he was on Patmos for "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:1-3, 9). During his stay on Patmos, he wrote the revelation God gave to him through visions, pertaining to the days immediately following John's life and continuing until after the return of Jesus Christ.

The Roman Emperor Nerva released John from Patmos in 96 AD following the murder of Domitian, as part of a reparation program decreed by the Roman senate for the atrocities Domitian committed. After his release, John returned to Ephesus with his testimony of the visions, which the glorified Jesus Christ commanded him to write (Rev. 1:11, 22:18). John's Revelation offered answers to the questions circulating for more than 30 years in the apostolic Christian Church as to when and how the second coming of Jesus would take place. *Apocalypse*, the Greek name for this book, served as the capstone to the New Testament era of prophecy.

Eusebius recorded that John lived until the time of Emperor Trajan (98-117 AD). Prior to his death around 98-99 AD or thereabouts, John, along with the apostle Philip and other brethren, apparently collected and sealed the New Testament writings (Ibid., 3:20, 23, 31; 5:24).

A comparison of Genesis and Revelation reveals that they are perfect bookends. Bullinger noted 30 parallels between the contents of these two books, demonstrating how they compliment each other (cf. Bullinger, App. 3). The subject matter of the book of Genesis indicates that it is a book of beginnings. The latter is a book of end time events. The prohibitions in Revelation 22 against altering the text strongly indicate that this book marked the close of what became known as the New Testament (Rev. 22:18-19). Similar injunctions marked Moses' sealing of the Book of the Law, which included the book of Genesis (Deut. 4:2, 12:32).

Proposed Dating for the New Testament: The internal and extra-biblical evidence places the general period of prophetic speaking and revelation in the first century from 25-96 AD. This time period closely parallels a more accurate dating of the writing and canonization of the New Testament books by the apostles and other New Testament writers (see Chapters Three through Seven).

Truth about Canonization

In recent decades, a great deal of confusion has arisen over which of the 27 books of New Testament constitute Scripture. The difficulties surrounding the New Testament canon are easily resolved when one understands the true meaning of "canonization."

In biblical criticism, the term "canon" refers to a collection of authoritative biblical books that met the standard of ancient "canonizers," who regarded them as God-breathed. The process by which these Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek books became authoritative for Jews and Christians is known as canonization. The English word "canon" originated from the Greek word *kanon*, which was likely derived from the Hebrew word *qaneh*, meaning reed or cane. Essentially, *kanon* denoted any rule or standard of measurement, such as a plumb line for the construction of a building.

The apostle Paul is the only New Testament writer to use this Greek word. The most important verse is found in the book of Galatians: "And as many as walk according to this rule [Gk., *kanon*], peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16; cf. Phil. 3:16). The context reveals that the guiding rule in matters of

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salvation were the words Paul had preached to the brethren in Galatia (vv. 14-15). Paul later used *kanon* to refer to the “limits of the responsibility in gospel service as measured and appointed by God” (II Cor. 10:13-16; Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*, p. 900).

Near the end of his life, the apostle Paul wrote a second epistle to Timothy to encourage him in the work of his ministry. Paul warned him to deal wisely with false teachers and to stand firm for the testimony of Jesus Christ. Timothy was to commit to faithful men the truth Paul had given him so that the tradition and doctrine of the early Church could be passed along (II Tim. 2:2). Part of that tradition included the words of the apostles that had now been set to writing. The context of II Timothy 4:1-5 clearly links preaching, convicting, rebuking and encouraging to the standard given in *the* God-breathed writings (Gk., *graphe*), as noted earlier in II Timothy 3:16-17.

In summary, the word “canon” simply refers to the standard given in Scripture by which Christians are to measure themselves. That standard (writing) was sealed by each biblical writer before his death (cf. Deut. 31:9, 24-26; II Pet. 1:12-15). Those who refused to live by that standard would eventually lose the knowledge of it.

Dating of Apocrypha

The books that comprise the Old Testament wisdom, historical and romance apocryphal literature were written generally from 200 BC to 100 AD (Bromiley, p. 165). Archaeological, paleographic (study of ancient writings) and carbon-14 tests have established that the scrolls of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphic writings found among the Qumran community fit within this traditional timeframe (Schiffman, pp. 32-33, 181-195). The names of books that belong to the Old Testament apocrypha are listed in the Glossary of Terms.

Over 100 different works belong to the New Testament apocrypha (see Glossary for a partial listing). It is “doubtful whether one of them appeared before the second century of our era [100 AD]” (Unger, p. 86). The earliest verifiable noncanonical work associated with the New Testament was I Clement, written about 95 AD to the brethren of Corinth from those at Rome (Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 48). Even if we grant that the apocryphal *Epistle of Barnabas* was written before the turn of the first century, the English editors of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* explain that “the numerous inaccuracies ... with respect to Mosaic enactments and observances—the absurd and trifling interpretations of Scripture ... and the many silly vaunts of superior knowledge [i.e., Gnosticism] in which its writer indulges” would deter anyone from considering this the authentic work of Barnabas, Paul’s fellow apostle and missionary to the Gentiles (Roberts, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, p. 251). It was only in the second century that Christian scholars, like Clement of Alexandria, began to consider it authentic (Ibid.).

As noted earlier, the writing and sealing of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures closely followed prophetic speaking in both ancient Israel and the days of the apostles. This truth is clearly revealed in II Peter 1:15, 19-21, 3:1-2. All the evidence shows that the apocryphal and pseudepigraphic works never gained entrance into the official authoritative Hebrew or Greek canons until after the first century AD. Thus God ordained that the official canon of the Bible be limited to the 66 books (Genesis through Revelation) of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures as found in most English Bibles today.

Truth #8: All Scripture (Old and New Testaments) Is Profitable for Christians and Serves a Holy Purpose

In II Timothy 3:15-16, the apostle Paul contrasted “the sacred writings” (Gk., *tá hierá grammata*) with “All Scripture” (Gk., *pasa graphe*). Paul used the literary device

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of contrast to reveal to Timothy a deeper truth about what constituted God-breathed writings.

The correct rendering of the words *tá hierá grammata* is important to the interpretation of these passages.

The Greek definite article *tá* (“the” in English) is either in dispute or missing from modern critical texts of the Greek New Testament. Because of this omission, some scholars have wrongly assumed that this phrase relates to sacred learning acquired through rabbinical exegetical methods (Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, pp. 315-316). The use of the word *grammata* in another passage with respect to Jesus Christ offers clarification.

As Jesus was teaching in the middle of the Feast of Tabernacles, the Jews were amazed, saying, “How does this man know letters [Gk., *grammata*], not having been schooled?” (John 7:15). As the late Marvin Vincent, professor of sacred literature at Union Theological Seminary, explained, “That a Jew should know the Scriptures was not strange. The wonder lay in the exegetical skill of one who had not been trained by the literary methods of the time” (Ibid., p. 316). The latest literary methods of Jesus’ time were taught in the rabbinical schools in Jerusalem. Jesus had not been “schooled” in a rabbinical institution as the apostle Paul had, being instructed by Gamaliel, the famed pharisaical teacher of the Law (Acts 22:3).

A further source of clarification for *tá hierá grammata* can be found in the historical usage of this expression among Greek-speaking Jews of that era. Both Philo and Josephus used this expression to refer to the Hebrew Scriptures (cf. Josephus, *Antiquities*, Pref. 3, 4; 10.10.4; Philo, *On Rewards*, sec. 14; *On the Embassy*, sec. 29).

The proofs above show that Paul’s encouragement to Timothy to “**continue in the things you did learn** ... knowing **from whom** you have learned *them*,” means that *tá hierá grammata* could only refer to the sacred writings of the Hebrew Scriptures, *not* rabbinical learning. Timothy’s father was a Greek, which is evident in that Timothy was not circumcised (Acts 16:1, 3). As such, it was left to his mother and grandmother to teach him the proper interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Both his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois were Christians, in whom the Holy Spirit dwelt (II Tim. 1:5). As a result, they were able to impart to Timothy a true understanding of the allusions and references to Jesus in the Hebrew Scriptures. This understanding would lead Timothy to salvation and to his calling later in life.

Equally important to the understanding of these passages is the correct interpretation of the phrase *pasa graphe*, “All Scripture.”

In II Timothy 3:16, Paul did not insert a Greek definite article before *graphe*, “Scripture.” Jamieson, Fausset and Brown explain how its absence affects the interpretation of this passage. “One reason for the Greek article not being before ‘Scripture,’ may be that, if it had, it *might* have seemed to limit ‘Scripture’ to the *hiera grammata*, ‘Holy Scriptures’ (v. 15) of the Old Testament, whereas the assertion is general” (Jamieson, vol. 3, p. 511).

Paul likewise did not include the verb “is” in the Greek text in verse 16. Its absence “marks that not only the Scripture *then* existing, but what was *still to be written till the canon should be completed*, is included as *God-inspired*” (Ibid.). When Paul wrote his Second Epistle to Timothy in 67 AD, his letters were already recognized as “Scripture” by Peter as indicated in Peter’s Second Epistle, written a year or two before Paul’s second letter to Timothy (II Pet. 3:15-16). In addition, nearly all of the New Testament books had been written, edited and sealed by this time. (See Chapter Four on page 72 for more details on when the New Testament books were written.)

When Paul wrote to Timothy that “all Scripture” was God-breathed, he evidently had in mind the Hebrew scrolls of the Old Testament in the synagogues and in private

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use in some Jewish homes, along with the autographs of almost all his books stored safely at Troas on the western coast of Asia Minor (II Tim. 3:15, 4:13). Paul informed Timothy that Scripture was profitable for: 1) making one wise unto salvation, 2) doctrine, 3) reproof, 4) correction and 5) instruction in righteousness (II Tim. 3:15-16). Everything—the narratives, histories, prophecies, parables, phrases, clauses, words and figures of speech—found in the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures was profitable for Timothy in his work as a minister. By adhering to the God-breathed Scripture as the standard, he would be fully equipped to fulfill his divine calling (II Tim. 3:17).

With this background, Paul's subsequent charge to Timothy to "preach the word" takes on greater significance. The New Testament books set apart by the apostles before 100 AD constituted God's complete, authoritative and prophetic revelation. As previously noted, Ezra, Nehemiah and the Great Assembly (with guidance from the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi) completed this process for the Hebrew Scriptures sometime before 424 BC. Timothy was to instruct and encourage faithful believers from every God-breathed writing and rebuke those who refused to hold to the standard of sound words the apostles had preached, which had now been set to writing (II Tim. 1:13; 4:2). Public reading of Scripture was intended to stem the rising tide of apostasy (II Tim. 4:3-4).

Law and Prophets Fulfilled

Jesus' life, death and resurrection literally fulfilled hundreds of Old Testament prophecies (cf. Luke 24:25-26, 44-46; I Pet. 1:10-12). Jesus also came as the spiritual lawgiver to amplify and magnify the commandments and laws of God, as prophesied by Isaiah, "The LORD is well pleased for His righteousness sake; He will magnify the Law and make *it* glorious" (Isa. 42:21). As the spiritual lawgiver, Jesus fulfilled the Law of God by revealing its complete spiritual meaning and intent in much the same manner as Moses expounded the Law for ancient Israel (cf. Matt. 5-7). While the Old Testament writings contain moral teachings as well, the writings of the Gospels and the New Testament epistles more vividly reflect the spiritual intent and application of the Law of God. For more on how Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets, see Appendix E, page 729.

Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill [Gk., *pleeroo*, meaning to complete or make full]," found their **ultimate** fulfillment in the writing of the New Testament. While on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-13), Peter, James and John saw Jesus in a vision talking with Moses and Elijah, who represented both aspects of the Old Testament—the Law and the Prophets, respectively. Suddenly the three were covered with a cloud, from which a voice came and said, "This is My Son, the Beloved, in Whom I delight. Listen to Him" (Matt. 17:5). These words clearly transferred the authority and revelation of God from the Law and Prophets to Jesus and His apostles.

When we consider the historical significance of passages like II Timothy 3:15-17, 4:6-8, 11-13 and II Peter 1:12-21, 3:1-2, 16 to the writing of Scripture, it becomes apparent that the apostles and the other New Testament writers were the very agents through whom Jesus was fulfilling the Old Testament Law and Prophets. This conclusion is bolstered by the apostle Paul's description of his ministry: "Of which I became a servant, according to the administration of God that *was* given to me for you, *in order* to complete [Gk., *pleeroo* as found in Matt. 5:17] the Word of God" (Col. 1:25). While the word "complete" in this passage primarily refers to Paul's preaching of the gospel (Col. 1:23), it can be expanded to his writing of Scripture, a duty which Paul describes was part of his ministry (Rom. 15:15).

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The Confirmed Prophetic Word

About three years after Paul sent his letter to Colosse, Peter wrote: “We also possess the confirmed prophetic Word, to which you do well to pay attention, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and *the* morning star arises in your hearts; Knowing this first, that any prophecy of Scripture [Gk., *propheteía graphes*, God-breathed writings] did not originate of one’s own *private* interpretation; prophecy was not brought at any time by human will, but the holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (II Pet. 1:19-21).

Two meanings can legitimately be derived from Peter’s remarks.

The Light of Revelation: As we consider the English translation of II Peter 1:19, it is evident that the apostle used a figure of speech known as simile, which compares two unlike things and is often introduced with “like” or “as.” Peter employed this literary device to convey a deeper spiritual truth to his readers. Contained in Peter’s references to light, the dawn and the morning star is a historical outline of the New Testament era of prophecy.

The light shining in the darkness could refer to the ministry of John the Baptist. The apostle John described him as “a burning and shining light” in whose light the Jews were willing to rejoice for a time (John 5:35). Even King Herod heard him gladly, until his wife used deceptive tactics to have John killed (cf. Mark 6:14-29). The Word of God revealed to John in the wilderness was to preach the baptism of repentance and remission of sins to prepare the Jewish people to meet their LORD, a fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah 40 (Luke 3:2-6). Hence, John’s preaching was like a light shining into ancient Judah’s spiritual darkness (Luke 1:79).

The events on the Mount of Transfiguration left an imprint on Peter’s memory. As Peter recounted the events surrounding that day in his Second Epistle, it is evident that the glory and majesty he witnessed confirmed for him that Jesus was the morning star, the Sun of righteousness spoken of by the prophet Malachi (Mal. 4:2; Rev. 2:28, 22:16). The revelation and ministry of Jesus Christ was a type of a new day dawning. For even Jesus declared, “I have come *as* a light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness” (John 12:46; cf. John 8:12, 9:5). And Matthew records, “The people who were sitting in darkness have seen a great light; and to those who were sitting in the realm and shadow of death, light has sprung up” (Matt. 4:14-16). Jesus was that great Light and His ministry to the people of Galilee and his preaching of the gospel was one fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecies (Isa. 9:1-2; John 1:4-9). By extension, the ministry of the apostle Paul, who preached the gospel of Christ, was a light unto the Gentiles (Acts 13:47-48; Gal. 3:16).

It was the gospel declaration, the present truth contained in the apostles’ preaching and their God-breathed writings (II Pet. 1:12), that God the Father and Jesus Christ used to shine into the hearts of the early believers (II Cor. 4:4, 6). The glorious light of the gospel, along with the work of the Holy Spirit, was able to make sinful humans fruitful through conversion to the point of growing into the fullness of God’s love (II Pet. 1:3-8). In contrast, those who refused to accept the truth (light) of the gospel, including the false teachers of Peter’s day, chose to remain in their blindness and sin (John 3:19-21; II Cor. 4:1-3; II Pet. 1:9; 2:1ff).

When Peter wrote his Second Epistle in 65-66 AD, the early Church possessed nearly all of the New Testament writings. The writings of the apostles, especially those of Paul, clearly explained more fully the gospel and God’s magnificent mercy in bringing all humans—Jew and Gentile alike—into fellowship with Him through Jesus Christ, Who confirmed the promises made to Abraham (Rom. 15:8-13; Eph. 2:11-3:21; Col 1:24-29).

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The Light of the Written Word: With this understanding, the significance of Peter's words in II Peter 1:19-21 cannot be overstated. To confirm the authenticity and authority of the apostles' writings, Peter recited the miraculous vision he, James and John witnessed on the Mount of Transfiguration. He referred to the voice that they heard, which had instructed them to hear Jesus' words (II Pet. 1:16-18). This was Peter's way of refuting the critics of his day who denied the trustworthiness of the apostles' writings as the authoritative revelation of God.

Biblical scholar Dr. D.A. Waite explained that the writings of the New Testament authors were a direct fulfillment of Jesus' words in John 14-16 (Waite, *Defending the King James Bible*, pp. 11-12). The following chart highlights Dr. Waite's description of the parallels between Jesus' words and His authorship of the various New Testament books via the agency of the Holy Spirit:

Jesus' Words

John 14:26: "everything that I have told you"

John 15:27: "you also shall bear witness"

John 16:13: "lead you into all truth"

John 16:13: "it shall disclose to you the things to come"

New Testament Book(s)

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

Acts of the Apostles

Pauline and General Epistles

Revelation

As Paul would later do in his Second Epistle to Timothy, Peter now encouraged his readers to consider the New Testament writings on an equal footing with the Hebrew Scriptures: "Now, beloved, I am writing this second epistle to you; in *both*, I am stirring up your pure minds by causing you to remember, *in order* for you to be mindful of the words that were spoken by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of the Lord and Savior, *spoken* by us, the apostles" (II Pet. 3:1-2).

Hence, the writings of Peter and the other New Testament authors had become the final witness for succeeding generations and the only means of instructing future brethren who would believe on Jesus through their words (Matt. 28:20; John 17:20). To reject the combined testimony of the prophets' and apostles' God-breathed writings meant that one rejected Christ's words, which He had received directly from the Father. Ultimately, this led to a rejection of God the Father (John 12:48-50). Jesus referred to this truism in his instructions to the seventy, whom he appointed to preach the word in every city as a herald of His ministry, "The one who hears you hears Me; and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and the one who rejects Me rejects Him Who sent Me" (Luke 10:16).

For true believers, II Peter 1:19 is an admonition to pay attention to the *entire* prophetic word until the return of Jesus Christ. Christians are encouraged to view the Word of God as a light for their walk in this spiritually dark world. This conviction was expressed by King David who described God's Word as "...a lamp [or candle] to my feet and a light to my path" (Psa. 119:105). In order for God's Word to be effective, Christians must hide it in their hearts, allowing it to judge their innermost thoughts and intentions (Heb. 4:12-13). Again, as David wrote, "Your word I have laid up in my heart, so that I might not sin against You" (Psa. 119:11). Though this passage has direct reference to the Law of God, its application can be expanded to all Scripture. This principle was echoed by Jesus Who told Nicodemus, "But the one who practices the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be manifested, that they have been accomplished by *the power of God*" (John 3:21). Only Scripture, *especially* the words of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit can truly direct a Christian's path.

Revelation No Longer Given for Scripture: There was one aspect of the prophetic word that was incomplete, that of the *foretelling* of the return of Jesus Christ and

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the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth. The apostles earnestly longed to know when this event would occur (Acts 1:6). Even Peter did not fully understand when Jesus' return would occur. He cautioned the brethren not to give credence to the claims of mockers of God's Word who would scornfully ask, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the forefathers died, everything has remained the same as from *the* beginning of creation" (II Pet. 3:3-4). Peter reassured the brethren by focusing their attention on God's merciful love for all human beings: "The Lord Jesus is not delaying the promise *of His coming*, as some in their own minds reckon delay; rather, He is long-suffering towards us, not desiring that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9).

It would take another 30 years before the complete plan of God would be revealed and recorded in the book of Revelation. After the deaths of Peter and Paul in the late 60s AD, there is no record that God gave new revelation for the writing of Scripture to the surviving apostles until John's visions on the remote Island of Patmos. Only John was chosen to see in vision the prophetic events leading to Jesus' second coming. This 30-year gap in time between open prophetic revelation offers a plausible reason why many Christians in the eastern Roman Empire were reluctant to accept this book at first.

The visions of Revelation were a final fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy that some would not die until they saw the Son of man with his angels coming in His kingdom (Matt. 16:26-27; John 21:21-23). With the writing of the book of Revelation, the word of God had now been confirmed by the hand of Jesus Christ to the apostle John (Rev. 1:1). A new day had dawned as recorded in this final book of the Greek canon: Christians now possessed the complete understanding of God's love in the light of the gospel and the fully confirmed word of prophecy.

Since 96 AD, another period of silence in the giving of revelation for the writing of Scripture has reigned. This quiet will be broken as Psalm 50 and Revelation chapters 11 and 14 reveal. Just before the return of Jesus Christ, the Bible records that God will speak supernaturally to this world through His two witnesses and the three angels' messages (Rev. 11, 14). He will come first to judge Israel and then all peoples of the earth, leading them to repentance and offering them salvation. Until that time, God has given us a most precious gift—His God-breathed word, preserved in writing.

Points to Remember

- 1) The biblical writers were driven, carried or moved by the Holy Spirit—as a sailboat is carried by the wind—to record the very utterances of God.
- 2) Writing was the best safeguard against the uncertainties of oral tradition and the corruption of false ministers.
- 3) In the same manner that God instructed His servants what to speak, He also imparted to the biblical authors' minds through the agency of the Holy Spirit the words to write.
- 4) There were two ways that the biblical authors knew when and what to write: explicit commands and implicit commands (impulse of the Holy Spirit).
- 5) There are five functions that the Holy Spirit performed for the apostles that they were unable to do for themselves in their roles as authors of Scripture: teach them all things (as what to speak and write); bring to remembrance everything Jesus had spoken to them; bear witness of Christ, so they could effectively bear witness of Him; lead them into all truth; and disclose to them things to come.
- 6) The conscience can be trusted to bear a faithful testimony of a person's thoughts and actions *when* it is under the influence of (resting in) the Holy Spirit and the human heart, mind and actions are evaluated against the standards of God's Word.

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- 7) The truthfulness of the biblical writers' statements is confirmed by their consciences and the Holy Spirit bearing joint witness to their personal motives and purposes for writing.
- 8) The reliability of the biblical writings, including their details, is intricately tied to their authors' testimonies of their personal lives and witness for God.
- 9) Just as God performed miracles to confirm the words and authority of His servants to ancient Israel, He also bore witness to the authenticity of the apostles' message through signs, wonders, miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- 10) Scripture became the standard by which all prophetic messages were to be evaluated.
- 11) Most modern Greek texts and versions of the New Testament are based largely upon the testimony of the earlier uncials (manuscripts with capital letters), while the later dated minuscules (those with lowercase letters) form the basis for those produced before the 1880s AD.
- 12) When a number of readings of the modern critical or eclectic Greek texts used today for translating the New Testament are examined, it is apparent that some scholars have intentionally abandoned sound principles of textual criticism.
- 13) Critical scholarship is an inadequate standard for evaluating the accuracy of Scripture because it was designed only to measure empirical evidence, not spiritual realities.
- 14) The accuracy of the autographs cannot be judged by the errors made by copyists found in the surviving biblical manuscripts.
- 15) In revealing His Word, God purified human words for His purpose by giving some found in Scripture exalted meanings and others new definitions than those found in Classical Greek.
- 16) There would be no need for the prohibitions against altering God's Word if either God's communication of His revelation or the autographs contained errors.
- 17) The biblical authors retained their own unique styles and free will during their writing of Scripture.
- 18) "Inspiration" was not of mechanical dictation, or automatic writing, or any process which involved the suspending of the action of the biblical writer's mind.
- 19) What might seem like a conflict, error or discrepancy in the biblical accounts to skeptics probably is nothing more than one writer's perspective of a particular event.
- 20) The history of the written word of God closely followed that of prophetic speaking in both ancient Israel and the time of the apostles.
- 21) Though all the holy servants of God (prophets, prophetesses, apostles and the like) were bound to preach, only some (including their scribes or secretaries) were moved to preserve a written record for future generations.
- 22) The basic markers described in the book of Hebrews allow us to pinpoint the general time period when the Biblical authors wrote and sealed the Scriptures: 1486-424 BC for the Hebrew OT Scriptures and 26-98 AD for the Greek NT Scriptures.
- 23) Since the Old and New Testament apocryphal works were written outside of the historical and prophetic time frames, we can conclude that the original canon of the Bible excluded them.
- 24) In II Timothy 3:15-17, Paul was exhorting Timothy to recognize those apostolic writings, which had been set apart as Scripture, on the same level as God's revelation found in the Hebrew Scriptures.
- 25) Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17 found their ultimate fulfillment in the writing of the New Testament. The apostles and the other New Testament writers were the very agents through whom Jesus was fulfilling the Old Testament Law and Prophets.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A SCRIPTURAL VIEW OF PRESERVATION

The writing of Scripture was truly a miracle. The testimony of the biblical authors is united in claiming that God’s revelation to humankind was recorded without error in the original documents (autographs). On the other hand, the handwritten scribal copies (apographs) exhibit signs of scribal errors. Other manuscripts show symptoms of heretical tampering, and a few show the edits of copyists with noble intent.

Has God promised to preserve the original God-breathed texts throughout history? If so, does this preservation extend to the letters, syllables and words of the manuscripts or merely to the basic thoughts and truths of the Bible? How can we bridge the gap between the autographs and surviving manuscripts? Do the texts of the surviving manuscripts represent the *ipsisima verba*—that is, the “very words” of God?

Answers to these questions vary, depending on a person’s view of history and the textual data. Various scholarly theories have been devised to reconcile the textual evidence collected by researchers over the centuries with the statements of the Bible. These theories have influenced the production of the Hebrew and Greek texts used for translating purposes. For this reason, it is crucial to accurately understand the subject of preservation.

God Has Preserved His Word as Promised

The Bible offers many statements that relate to the preservation of God’s revelation recorded in the autographs. From these statements and the clear facts of the textual data, five major truths have been established:

- 1) God gave general promises of preservation.
- 2) God’s focus was on the apographs (copies) of the autographs (originals).
- 3) God preserved His Word as promised.
- 4) Faithful apographs are God-breathed, authoritative, infallible and trustworthy.
- 5) The accuracy of faithful handwritten apographs can be verified.

The adjectives “providential,” “divine” and “biblical” have been used by various scholars to describe the process by which God preserved His Word. This process is better defined as “scriptural preservation” because the written word was Paul’s emphasis in II Timothy 3:16. This expression has been adopted in this study, except in direct citations.

Truth #1: God Gave General Promises of Preservation

There are many passages that are commonly used to confirm or to deny the doctrine of scriptural preservation. Many ministers and scholars have selected only portions of these passages in order to support their positions, instead of searching for what they actually prove. The following is an in-depth examination of the major biblical proofs and their contexts.

Passage #1: “Now know that there shall fall to the earth nothing of the **word** of the LORD, which the LORD spoke concerning the house of Ahab, for the LORD has done

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that which He spoke by [Heb., by the hand of] His servant Elijah” (II Ki. 10:10).

Comments: These remarks were made by King Jehu, God’s chief agent in bringing about the fulfillment of His prophecies of the destruction of Jezebel and Ahab’s royal dynasty (cf. I Ki. 19:17, 21:17-24; II Ki. 9:30-10:11). The proper meaning of the idiomatic expression “there shall fall unto the earth nothing” is that biblical prophecy shall be fulfilled, nothing of the LORD’s words shall fail (cf. Isa. 46:9-10). To understand this passage’s relevance to the preservation of the sacred texts, it is important to realize that it had been about 12-15 years since God had given these prophecies to Elijah, and his ministry in Israel had ended (II Ki. 2). The Bible reveals that Elijah privately communicated these warnings to Ahab while in the king’s vineyard (I Ki. 21:18-29). The presence of the idiom “by the hand of” in this verse confirms that Elijah had compiled a written record of them before his ministry ended. These facts indicate that the unnamed writer of Jehu’s words (cf. II Ki. 10:34) had access to the original document of Elijah’s prophecies (likely preserved by other prophets) in order to verify that they had been written at the time professed. Hence, Jehu’s remarks serve as one sign confirming the authenticity of Elijah’s ministry (cf. Deut. 18:20-22). This same practice was repeated more than a century later by Isaiah (cf. Isaiah 8:1-4).

Passage #2: “The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O LORD; You shall preserve them from this generation forever” (Psa. 12:6-7).

Comments: We have already examined these passages for their relevance to the divine authorship of Scripture. (See Inspiration, Truth #5 on page 263.)

Do these passages have relevance to the preservation of the biblical texts? Proponents of preservation often cite Psalm 12:7 as *the* major proof to support their position, claiming that the words “keep them” and “preserve them” in this verse refer to the “words of the Lord” in the previous verse. Opponents argue that the words in verse seven refer to the “poor” and “needy” in verse five, based upon the customary agreement between Hebrew pronouns and their antecedents in respect to their gender and number. (The Hebrew pronouns “them” in verse seven and the Hebrew nouns “poor” and “needy” in verse five are all masculine in gender and plural in number. The Hebrew nouns for “words” in verse six are feminine in gender and plural in number.)

Scholar Doug Kutilek has written an essay that examines the Hebrew grammar, context of this psalm in light of the rest of the book of Psalms, and the ancient and modern commentaries and translations of these verses. He concluded, “Based on clear evidence from grammar and context and confirmed by the best Biblical expositors, it can only be concluded that Psalms 12:6-7 has nothing at all to do with the preservation of God’s Word. It says nothing for or against it. It does not speak to the issue at all. It is, therefore, wholly irrelevant to the discussion and must not be appealed to as a proof text regarding Bible preservation” (Kutilek, “Why Psalm 12:6-7 Is Not a Promise of the Infallible Preservation of Scripture,” p. 4, www.kjvonly.org).

Ironically, Kutilek admits that exceptions to the principle of agreement between Hebrew pronouns and their antecedents do exist (see Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar, 135 o). For this reason, a few well-known commentators have concluded that verse seven refers to the “words of the LORD.” Because the “Book of Psalms is exceptionally regular [uniform] on the matter of gender agreement” between pronouns and their antecedents, the exegete is cautioned against violating the principles of Hebrew grammar in this instance (Ibid., p. 1).

On the surface, it seems that Psalm 12:7 has no direct value for scriptural preservation. However, the promises of preservation made in this psalm to persecuted saints (Psa. 12:1, 3, 5, 7) extend beyond “this generation forever.” It follows that in order for

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future saints to obtain any lasting value from God's pledges of deliverance, the words of this and other psalms must be preserved. Herein lies this passage's value to scriptural preservation. This same connection between the purity of God's Word, His faithfulness and preservation is found in one of the proverbs: "Every word of God *is* pure; He *is* a shield to those who put their trust in Him" (Prov. 30:5).

Passage #3: "The **law** of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; the **testimony** of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple" (Psa. 19:7).

Comments: Psalm 19 discusses God's revelation as displayed in the heavens (Psa. 19:1-6) and preserved in His written Word (Psa. 19:7-14). The obvious intent of this passage is that God's law and testimony are faultless and reliable; no one can be led astray by following them. This passage **indirectly** serves as a proof of preservation. David's description of God's Word is as something more desirable than fine gold and sweeter than honey (Psa. 19:10), and numerous references to the various literary forms of the Pentateuch (e.g., law, statutes, judgments and testimonies), indicate that he was familiar with and meditated on its words. In order for David to have kept God's law and testimony (Psa. 19:11-13), he had to have possessed a trustworthy reproduction of His words in the Pentateuch as recorded by Moses nearly 400 years earlier. If this were not true, David's statements elsewhere in the book of psalms, especially Psalms 119, would retain no meaning.

Passage #4: "The **counsel** of the LORD stands forever, the **thoughts** of His heart to all generations" (Psa. 33:11).

Comments: David exhorts his readers in Psalm 33 to praise and fear God because His "Word is right" and "all His works *are done* in truth" (Psa. 33:4). For proof, he reminds them of God's sovereign power over His creation and His righteousness, judgment and goodness (Psa. 33:5-9). In verses 10-11, "a sharp contrast is drawn between mankind's shaky plans and the LORD's sovereign plans" (MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, p. 770). God's plans for and His protection of His people are expressed in the remainder of this psalm (Psa. 33:12-22). God's people can trust His care and judgment because He alone inhabits eternity and His truth, displayed in creation, serves as a confirmation of His goodness. The psalmist **shows** that succeeding generations would understand the goodness of God (the thoughts of His heart) because some means of describing His plans would exist (i.e., a written document).

Passage #5: "For the LORD is good; His steadfast love is everlasting; and His **faithfulness** endures to all generations" (Psa. 100:5).

Comments: This psalm serves as a thank offering to God. Verse five recognizes His eternal traits of goodness, mercy and truth. Verse three, however, offers **evidence** for preservation: "Know ye that the LORD He *is* God: *It is* He *That* hath made us, and not we ourselves; *We are* His people, and the sheep of His pasture." According to biblical scholar E.W. Bullinger, "The Hebrew accent places the chief pause on 'God'; and the minor pauses on 'know' and 'made': [implying] the knowledge of Jehovah as our God reveals to His People that He made them such, and that they are His 'sheep' and His care" (Bullinger, *The Companion Bible*, p. 817). Since eternal life is based on a truthful knowledge of God's goodness and mercy (John 17:3; Eph.1:18ff), it follows that a trustworthy document must be preserved that communicates His revelation and love to His people.

Passage #6: "He has remembered His **covenant** forever, the **word** which He commanded to a thousand generations" (Psa. 105:8);

Comments: Psalms 105 and 106 review Israel's history from God's perspective. This verse describes how God made an everlasting covenant with Abraham (cf. Psa. 105:7-12). A proper interpretation of this verse rests with the understanding that "word" means "promise" (Psa. 105:42). A generation is usually 20-40 years, implying that God

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has been faithful in remembering His covenant and promise(s) to Abraham throughout the millennia. The real value of this verse to scriptural preservation is that it alerts the reader to other books of the Bible that preserve God's original promise to the patriarch (cf. Gen. 12, 15, 17, 22) and display the many fulfillments of this promise as a witness of God's faithfulness to Abraham and his descendants, both spiritual and physical (e.g., Ex. 3:6-17; Luke 1:72-73; Rom. 15:8-13; Gal. 3:14-18).

Passage #7: "Your **word** is very pure; therefore Your servant loves it" (Psa. 119:140).

Comments: Psalm 119 extols the written Word of God. The English word "pure" in this passage in Hebrew literally means "refined or tried." This obviously pertains to God's guarantee that His Word is reliable and truthful. Based on this understanding, it more appropriately relates to the purity of the autographic form of God's words (cf. Psalm 12:6). In order for the psalmist to express such esteem for God's written Word, it is logical that he possessed a trustworthy copy of the original words of God's revelation. (See explanation for passage #3.)

Passage #8: "For ever, [art Thou] O LORD [For ever], Thy **word** is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness *is* unto all generations: Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth" (Psa. 119:89-90).

Comments: According to Bullinger, in the first part of both verses "we have Jehovah" featured (Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, p. 39). In the second part of both verses, "we have what He has settled and established," meaning His Word and the Earth (Ibid.). While God's will and Word are only perfectly known in heaven, these passages offer assurances that God's revealed Word is unchangeable and as settled as the heavens. This promise is based on the fact that God lives forever (cf. Psalms 102:12, 26-28). His faithfulness is as lasting as the Earth, which He established through His spoken Word (Psa. 33:6, 9, 148:5). This passage, therefore, offers a **general** promise of Scriptural preservation.

Passage #9: "Concerning Your **testimonies**, I have known of old that You have founded them for ever" (Psa. 119:152).

Comments: This verse pertains to the unchangeable and eternal nature of God's testimonies. However, from the phrase "of old," one can **deduce** that the psalmist possessed a preserved document of God's testimonies.

Passage #10: "Your **word** is true from the beginning, and every one of Your righteous **ordinances** endures forever" (Psa. 119:160).

Comments: Many English translations of this passage render the phrase "from the beginning" as "entirely," meaning God's Word is entirely true. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown note that a literal wording of the Hebrew clause in the first part of this verse is "the beginning of Thy Word is truth" and it is contrasted with "endureth forever" (Jamieson, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 2, p. 373). The commentators continue by relating how the phrase "from the beginning" actually "implies positively *from the time when first it came to the knowledge of man*; and by implication, *from everlasting*, as it shall be *unto everlasting*" God's word is true (Ibid., p. 374). As a result, we can **conclude** from this passage that God's Word has been preserved from the moment it was first given by God to man and will be forever.

Passage #11: "I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your lovingkindness, and for Your **truth**; for You have magnified above all—Your name *and* Your **word**. In the day when I cried, You answered me and made me bold with strength in my soul. All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O LORD, when they hear the **words** of Your mouth" (Psa. 138:2-4).

Comments: Psalm 138 is one of many psalms in which David sings praises to God for the perpetual promise He made to him and his royal dynasty (Ibid., p. 392). A

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proper interpretation of this psalm is possible when we recognize that it contains several figures of speech. “Word” represents the promise God made to David, that is the Davidic covenant (cf. I Chr. 17:23-27). God’s name in verse two is a figure of speech that stands for God Himself (Bullinger, pp. 409, 608). In other words, God’s promise to David is based on His very existence (cf. Ps. 89:35-37). There is another historical parallel in the Bible that verifies this conclusion. When God made His promise to Abraham, He “swore by Himself, since He could swear by none greater” (Heb. 6:13).

Verse four provides an answer to the unspoken question in verse two: “How will God magnify His word above Himself?” Nathan, the prophet, was the one who revealed God’s promise to David and recorded it as a future witness of God’s faithfulness (cf. II Sam. 7:4-29; I Chr. 29:29). These verses **show** that the preservation of the Hebrew text is tied to the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. When the kings of the Earth hear of God’s love for king David, which they will likely read from the ancient Hebrew text, they shall praise the LORD for His faithfulness in keeping His promise to David.

Passage #12: “Every **word** of God *is* pure; He *is* a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He correct you and you be found a liar” (Prov. 30:5-6).

Comments: See comments for passage #2.

Passage #13: “Have I not **written** to you excellent **things in counsels and knowledge** that I might make you know the sureness of the **words** of truth, so that you might bring back the **words** of truth to those who send you?” (Prov. 22:20-21).

Comments: These passages offer an **implied** declaration of scriptural preservation. Solomon explained that he wrote these proverbs, so readers could build trust in the LORD, know the certainty of His truth and be able to give a truthful answer to those who inquire after God (Prov. 22:19, 21; cf. I Pet. 3:15). Readers can only have confidence in the instruction of God’s Word if the original words have been faithfully preserved.

Passage #14: “A voice says, ‘Cry!’ And he said, ‘What shall I cry?’ ‘All flesh *is* grass, and all the beauty of it *is* as the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades because the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people *are* grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the **Word** of our God shall stand forever” (Isa. 40:6-8).

Comments: Chapter 40 commences a section of Isaiah that highlights the hope and comfort of Israel’s future restoration by God after the nation’s judgment in captivity. Through the use of metaphor these verses offer **general** promises of the continued preservation and complete reliability of the biblical texts. In comparing the temporary and fading condition of nature and human beings, these passages more specifically declare that the fulfillment of the prophetic promises made to Israel is guaranteed (Isa. 46:10-11; 55:10-11; Zech. 1:4-6; John 12:34).

Passage #15: “So shall My **Word** be which goes out of My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall certainly do what I sent it to do” (Isa. 55:11).

Comments: The fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah is a prophecy about the calling and repentance of Gentiles. It highlights the covenant God will make with them, according to the promises made to Abraham (cf. Isa. 55:3-5; Rom. 15:8-13; Eph. 2:11-13). As snow and rain accomplish their ultimate work by bringing forth nourishment that satisfies human hunger, the gospel message, which is primarily in view here, shall accomplish its purpose in bringing repentance to the Gentiles. As such, this passage has relevance for the long-term preservation of the New Testament, specifically the Gospel accounts. For succeeding generations of Gentiles to believe on Jesus through the words of the apostles, a trustworthy record of their writings must have been preserved (John 17:20).

Passage #16: “As for Me, this *is* My covenant with them,” says the LORD. “My

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spirit that is upon you, and My **words** which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouth of your seed, nor out of the mouth of your seed's seed," says the LORD, "from now on and forever" (Isa. 59:21).

Comments: This verse focuses on the future restoration of Israel under the New Covenant (cf. Isa. 59:20; Rom. 11:26-27). Prophecy shows that God's Spirit will be poured out upon the Israelites and His Words will be in their mouths, minds and hearts; that is, every one of them will know the LORD (Heb. 8:7-13; Jer. 31:27-40). At that time, God's Word will truly exist forever in the hearts of the Israelites. As a result, this verse is a prophecy of the future restoration of Israel and **not a present promise** of scriptural preservation.

Passage #17: "But He answered *and* said, 'It is **written**, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every **word** that proceeds out of *the* mouth of God'" (Matt. 4:4; cf. Luke 4:4).

Comments: This passage is one of the strongest **direct** proofs for scriptural preservation of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. Greek scholar Dr. D.A. Waite explained that the Greek word for "written" is *gegraptai*, the perfect tense of the verb *grapho*, meaning to write (Waite, *Defending the King James Bible*, p. 9). Dr. Waite continued to explain how "the perfect tense indicates that an action has begun in the past and the results of that act continue right on down to the very present" (Ibid., citing from *The Intermediate Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, pp. 200-205). Dr. Waite added that Jesus' use of this Greek verb "... means that the verse He quoted to Satan had been written down in the past in the Hebrew language by Moses, and those very Hebrew words were preserved to the very day and hour when the Lord was quoting them to the Devil. Every time *gegraptai* is used or some other form of the perfect tense of that verb (and we have it scores of times in the New Testament) that is a proof of the **Bible's preservation**" (Ibid., p. 10, bold original).

More specifically, Jesus' confidence was in the word of the Hebrew text. In the first century, the words of the Hebrew text were comprised only of consonants, a few serving as vowel indicators (*matres lectionis*).

Passage #18: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until the heaven and the earth shall pass away, one **jot** or one **tittle** shall in no way pass [Gk., *ou me*, an emphatic expression] from the Law until everything has been fulfilled" (Matt. 5:17-18; cf. Luke 16:16-17).

Comments: While Scripture does foretell of the passing of the heavens and earth (Psa. 102:24-27), Jamieson, Fausset and Brown note that "the prevalent representation of the heavens and earth in Scripture, when employed as a popular figure, is that of their *stability*" (Jamieson, vol. 3, p. 31; cf. Psa. 119:89-90; Eccl. 1:4; Jer. 33:25-26). This means that Jesus' *primary* intent in these verses was to affirm the continuing authority and truth of the writings of the Law and Prophets (the Old Testament), even in their smallest details as typified by the *jot* and tittle (Matt. 5:19-20). The *jot* (Gk., *iota*) was the smallest Hebrew letter and tittle (Gk., *keratia*) an ornamental extension on some Hebrew letters.

Jesus' reference to the *jot* and tittle would be incomprehensible if His focus was not on both the details (letters and words) and substance (doctrines and truths) of the Old Testament text. The Lord's comments in this passage **reveal** that the Hebrew text of the Old Testament of the first century AD was a trustworthy reproduction of the autographs and was more stable than the physical universe.

Three proofs follow that show Jesus' point of reference was the *entire* Hebrew text of the Old Testament and not just the "the Law," meaning the five books of Moses.

First, Jesus' second reference to the "Law and the Prophets" in Matthew 7:12

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clearly proves that the intervening material from Matthew 5:17-7:12 should be taken as a complete unit. This section of Scripture shows how Jesus fulfilled or magnified the writings of *both* the Law and Prophets, making their authority more binding (Isa. 42:21). The term “the Law” in Matthew 5:18 must be interpreted in this context. The same scenario is displayed in Luke 16. At the beginning of Luke’s account Jesus declared, “The Law and Prophets *were* until John; from that time the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone zealously strives to enter it” (Luke 16:16). Near the end of this narrative (Luke 16:29), Jesus used the terminology “Moses and the prophets” in the same sense.

Through the use of parallel structure, E.W. Bullinger has demonstrated in *The Companion Bible* (pp. 1316-1317) how Jesus’ words and commands in Matthew 5-7 fulfilled the Law and exceeded the teachings of the Jewish Pharisees and scribes, who considered themselves the rightful successors of the Old Testament prophets in interpreting God’s Word (see talmudic tractate *Baba Bathra* 12a).

Parallel Structure of Jesus’ Words in Matthew 5:17-7:12

| | |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| E | F Matthew 5:17-20: They fulfill the Law and the Prophets. |
| | G Matthew 5:21-48: They transcend the Law of Moses. |
| | G Matthew 6:1-7:11: They excel the Tradition of the Elders. |
| | F Matthew 7:12: They fulfill the Law and the Prophets. |

Bullinger’s parallel structure of Luke’s account shows how the Pharisees voided the scriptural teaching on divorce and death (Bullinger, *The Companion Bible*, p. 1483). It is clear that the context of Luke 16:16-31 is different from that of Matthew 5:17-7:29. Hence, it offers a **separate** affirmation that Christ’s words dealt with *both* the Law and Prophets.

Parallel Structure of Jesus’ Words in Luke 16:15-31

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| S | A Luke 16:15: What the Pharisees esteemed (God’s abomination). |
| | B Luke 16:16-17: The Law and the Prophets Proclaimed. |
| | A Luke 16:18-30: What the Pharisees taught (God’s abomination). |
| | C ¹ Luke 16:18: Concerning divorce (the Law). |
| | C ² Luke 16:19-30: Concerning the dead (the Prophets). |
| B Luke 16:31: The Law and the Prophets. Not believed (by the Pharisees). | |

Following the ministry of John the Baptist, prophetic authority and revelation shifted to Jesus Christ and His ministry. According to Bullinger, a comparison of Psalm 15 and Matthew 5:3-7:29 shows how Jesus used His prophetic office to proclaim “the character and conditions of a true citizen” of God’s kingdom based on the writing of the prophet and psalmist David (Ibid., App. 70; see appendix for Bullinger’s original outline, which has been modified due to space limitations.)

Comparison of Psalm 15 and Matthew 5:3-7:27

Psalm 15

The Citizen of the Kingdom

15:1 Introduction
15:2 Walking uprightly
Works of righteousness
Speaking truth from heart

Matthew 5:3-7:27

The Subjects of the Kingdom

5:3-12 Introduction
5:13-16 Walking in light
5:17-20 Work of righteousness
5:21-6:34 Truth in the heart

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| | | | |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 15:3 | No backbiting or reproach of neighbor
Do no evil to neighbor | 7:1-5 | No condemnation of brother |
| 15:4 | Vileness rejected, godly fear honored
Accountability | 5:43-48
7:15-23 | Love your enemies
False prophets |
| 15:5 | Borrowing, bribery
Guarantee | 5:33-37
5:38-42
7:24-27 | Accountability
Vengeance, borrowing
Guarantee |

Second, there is ample evidence to demonstrate that the term “Law and Prophets” in first-century usage comprised more than two of the threefold divisions (Law, Prophets and Writings) of the current Hebrew Bible.

In many instances, the expression “the prophets” was used to designate books not normally associated with those written by prophets like Isaiah or Jeremiah. F.F. Bruce, former professor of biblical criticism and exegesis at the University of Manchester, explained: “The divine revelation that the Old Testament records was conveyed in two principal ways—by mighty works and prophetic words. These two modes of revelation are bound up indissolubly together. The acts of mercy and judgment by which the God of Israel made Himself known to His covenant people would not have carried their proper message had they not been interpreted to them by the prophets—the ‘spokesmen’ of God who received and communicated His word....The interplay of mighty work and prophetic word in the Old Testament explains why history and prophecy are so intermingled throughout its pages; it was no doubt some realization of this that led the Jews to include the chief historical books among the Prophets” (Comfort, *The Origin of the Bible*, p. 7).

In the first century AD, the weekly reading of Scripture in the Jewish synagogues was known by the term “the reading of the Law and the Prophets” (Acts 13:15). The Hebrew text was divided into 154 sections (*Sedarim*), allowing for a three-year lectionary cycle of the entire Old Testament. These divisions follow the ancient Palestinian cycle, which Ezra instituted upon his return from Babylon. Poetical books like Psalms, Proverbs and Job were read as part of this triennial Palestinian cycle in use during the time of Jesus and Paul. (Most synagogues follow the Babylonian annual cycle today.) This practice indicates the expression “the Prophets” used in the book of Acts was an ancient designation, including more than the traditional prophetic books. (A complete listing of the *Sedarim* for each Old Testament book is available in Christian D. Ginsburg’s *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 32-65.)

Paul’s general use of the expression “the prophets and Moses” shows that it was a phrase commonly used in the first century to describe the writings of the entire Old Testament (cf. Acts 26:22). In pleading his case before King Agrippa, Paul specifically made reference to the sufferings of Jesus (Acts 26:23), aspects of which can be found in each of the threefold divisions of the current Hebrew Bible, including Genesis, Isaiah and Psalms (e.g., Gen. 3:15; Isa. 52:13-53:12; Psa. 22).

Luke’s use of the term “Moses, and from all the prophets” in Luke 24:27 could easily be used interchangeably with the expressions “the Law of Moses and *in the Prophets* and *in the Psalms*” found in Jesus’ later statement (Luke 24:44). Both instances show how Jesus opened the minds of His listeners to understand “the things concerning Himself” as found “in **all** the Scriptures” of the Old Testament (Luke 24:27, 45).

Third, the expression “the Law” must be interpreted in a manner that is consistent with both the context of Matthew 5-7 and its first-century usage. Jesus, the Jews and the apostle Paul used this term on numerous occasions to describe the authoritative nature of the teachings of specific Old Testament writings. The following chart shows that it was used on many occasions to refer to segments of the Hebrew Old Testament other than the books of Moses:

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Scripture

John 10:35

John 12:34

John 15:25

Romans 3:19

I Corinthians 14:21

Possible References

Psa. 82:6

Psa. 89:36-37; Isa. 9:7; Ezek. 37:25; Dan. 2:44; Mic. 4:7

Psa. 35:19, 69:4

Job 5:16; Psa. 107:42; Ezek. 16:63

Isa. 28:11-12

The parallel structures of Bullinger show that Jesus' entire discussion about the Law and the Prophets focused on making their spiritual meaning and intent more binding as a pattern of life. This is evident in how Jesus taught with authority and by His numerous statements, "But, I say unto you," "Verily I say unto thee" or "Take heed" (Matt. 5:20, 22, 26, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44, 6:1-2, 5, 16, 25, 29, 7:28-29).

In light of the literary and historical usage, the term "the Law" in Matthew 5:18 ought to be viewed as a reference to the authoritative nature of the Old Testament writings. As a result, Matthew 5:17-18 offers the **strongest detailed promise** of the continued authority *and* preservation of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

Passage #19: "Truly I say to you, this generation shall in no wise pass away until all these things have taken place. The heaven and the earth shall pass away, but My words shall never pass away" (Matt. 24:34-35; cf. Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33).

Context: During His sermon known as the Olivet prophecy, Jesus stated in the most *emphatic* language that His words possessed more stability than the physical universe and would be fulfilled. This passage offers the strongest **general** promises for the continued authority and preservation of Jesus' words, which are embodied in the New Testament writings as claimed by their authors (e.g., II Pet. 3:1-2; I John 1:1-3, 5).

Passage #20: "But if anyone hears My words [*rema*] and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects Me and does not receive My words [*rema*] has one who judges him; the word [*logos*] which I have spoken [*laleo*], that shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken [*laleo*] from Myself; but the Father, Who sent Me, gave Me commandment Himself, what I should say [*eipon*] and what I should speak [*laleo*]. And I know that His commandment is eternal life. Therefore, whatever I speak [*laleo*], I speak [*laleo*] exactly as the Father has told [*epion*] Me" (John 12:47-50; notice base words in brackets in verses for later reference).

Comments: Jesus' words here constitute his final earthly invitation to the Jewish leaders for salvation. The Bible and history record that, by and large, the Jewish nation rejected it (John 12:37-43; Rom. 9-11). The actions of the Jewish leaders were grounded in their personal desire for power and prestige (John 12:42-43). Their refusal to heed Jesus' words of salvation placed them under the divine judgment spoken of by Moses nearly 1,500 years earlier (Deut. 18:18-19).

Do these passages hold any relevance for the preservation of Scripture? They **reveal** that Scripture, specifically Jesus' words, would be preserved until the judgment on the last day. If we believe that the apostles accurately recorded Jesus' words and actions, then the New Testament writings become a powerful witness in the day of judgment.

When the Greek words *rema*, *laleo*, *eipon* and *logos*, or their various forms, are used in respect to God the Father and Jesus Christ, they refer to Their spoken words. The presence of these words in this passage offers a graphic reminder of the need for accuracy and faithfulness in producing texts and translations of the Bible. The following working definitions have been adapted from *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*: 1) *rema*, "speech or discourse, consisting of few or many words (i.e., teaching)"; 2) *laleo*, "to use words in order to declare one's mind and disclose one's thoughts," thus "having refer-

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ence to the sound and pronunciation of the words and in general the form of what is uttered"; 3) *eipon*, "to declare in words, use language"; and 4) *logos*, "those things which are put together in thought ... gathered together in the mind [and] expressed in words," hence a thing spoken or written (cf. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 2, 4, 40, 616, 619).

With this background, the importance of whether the original God-breathed letters, syllables and words of the biblical authors have been preserved in the surviving documents becomes apparent.

Jesus' Galilean dialect (Gk., *lalia* from the verb *laleo*) was distinguished from others of his time by specific features of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation (John 8:43). When He spoke to the Jewish rulers, for example, He uttered specific sounds (letters), words and parts of human speech that conveyed what God the Father had revealed directly to Him. If the New Testament authors accurately understood and recorded what Jesus said and what God revealed to their minds through the agency of the Holy Spirit, then the New Testament writings comprise God's literal words set to paper. The previous four Greek words offer principles for evaluating the reliability of manuscripts. If a manuscript repeatedly omits or changes letters, words and phrases vital to obtaining the original meaning of the text, then it must be considered an unfaithful witness for textual criticism. Both the substance (doctrines and truth) and the details (letters, syllables and words) have a special purpose in God's revelation of truth. Their preservation is vital in many instances to acquiring the authentic, accurate meaning of the original text.

Passage #21: "For you have been begotten again, not from corruptible seed, but from incorruptible *seed*, by the living **Word** of God, *which* remains forever. For all flesh *is* like grass, and all *the* glory of man *is* like *the* flower of *the* field; the grass has withered, and its flower has fallen away. But the **Word** of *the* Lord remains forever; and this is the **message that was preached** to you through the gospel" (I Peter 1:23-25).

Comments: The apostle Peter adopted much of the phraseology of Isaiah 40:6-8 in his writing of these verses, omitting those words unnecessary for his purpose. When Peter wrote that the Word of God "remains forever," he was emphasizing God's **ongoing general promise** to preserve His Word, especially the words of Jesus, as the instrument through which believers would be begotten (Jas. 1:18; I Pet. 1:3). In contrast to the mortality of man, the gospel message is enduring and reveals the only means through which sinful humans can be saved and receive eternal life (I Pet. 1:2-9, 10-22). These verses affirm that the Bible is living and powerful (Heb. 4:12) and that God imparts eternal life to believers through Jesus' words preserved in the text of the Gospels. Faithful translations made from reliable Greek texts (i.e., Textus Receptus) ensure that believers possess the life-giving truths of Jesus expressed in English words (John 6:63, 68).

Summary

A review of these passages confirms that the preservation of God's Word is promised in Scripture. However, an honest evaluation of these Scriptural references reveals that many of them offer indirect promises. More direct and general ones are found more frequently in the New Testament, primarily Matthew's Gospel. This insight might tempt some to conclude that scriptural preservation is not a biblical doctrine. Such a conclusion would be mistaken. The real questions that must be answered are "Why must God preserve His Word?" and "What purpose do these promises serve?"

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God's Obligation to Preserve the Texts

The preservation of the biblical texts is solidly grounded in God's covenant with Abraham. In the postdiluvian era, God specifically chose Abraham with whom to establish His covenant of promise (Gen. 12, 15, 17, 22). Abraham became God's divinely-chosen instrument through whom the entire world would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). The Bible is essentially a record of God's fulfillment of those promises, many of which pertain to Abraham's physical descendants and some to his spiritual heirs, the Israel of God or the New Testament Church (Gal. 6:16).

God's promises to Abraham were no doubt transmitted orally to his few immediate offspring. An increase in the size of Abraham's family and the limitation of human life spans after the Noachian Flood necessitated that a precise written revelation be made of what *Jehovah*, the covenant God, required of and promised to future generations of Abraham's descendants. After God delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt as He had promised Abraham (Gen. 15:13-15), it became imperative that the new nation possess a legal and religious system and document that reflected its divine calling (Ex. 19:4-6). God began the process by making a covenant with the Israelites and producing a written record of truth to instruct them in His ways.

Instruction, Testimony Integral to Covenant: The enduring need for instruction and testimony (witness) formed an integral part of God's covenant relationship with Israel. A brief survey of the nation's history verifies that the preservation of the Hebrew text served as the basis for these two activities.

God's own example served as the model for instruction in ancient Israel. He gave the people His words in written form as a means of teaching them His ways (Deut. 6:1-2). His intent was that they not forget Him, nor His covenant when they entered Canaan, the land of their inheritance (Deut. 6:10-12).

Upon completing most of the book of Deuteronomy (chs. 1-30), Moses entrusted it to the Levites and elders of Israel for safekeeping (Deut. 31:9). This action symbolized the official "transfer of responsibility for enforcement" of the covenant from Moses to Israel's priests and leaders (Nelson, *The King James Study Bible*, p. 348). Moses then charged them with the duty of teaching the people: "...At the end of seven years, at the set time of the year of release, in the Feast of Tabernacles, When all Israel has come to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He shall choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing" (Deut. 31:10-11).

Public reading from the Book of the Law, primarily Deuteronomy, became the chief vehicle for teaching the people how to fear the LORD and to fulfill their covenant obligations (Deut. 31:12-13). The seventy-eighth psalm indicates that this regulation was also instituted to ensure that future generations of Israelites understood God's Word, so they "might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments;" (Psa. 78:7).

A counterpart to public reading was **private instruction**. Deuteronomy 6:1-7 describes it as a lasting requirement of the covenant that was to continue beyond the nation's entry into Canaan. Parents were commanded to instruct their children from various parts of God's Law at every possible opportunity, strongly implying that written copies were available and circulating among the people.

God also commanded His people to bind the covenant's words as a "**sign**" upon their hands and foreheads (Deut. 6:8-9). Modern Orthodox Jews have interpreted this and other passages (Ex. 13:8; Deut. 11:18) to mean that leather pouches with written passages from the Law placed inside (known as *tephillin*) were to be worn (Nelson, pp. 123-124). Whether one takes these lasting ordinances literally or figuratively (as Deut. 6:6 suggests), they do show at the very least that the people needed ready access to written

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copies of God's Law in order to hold its words in continual remembrance.

While no written documents are mentioned in Deuteronomy 6:8-9, Jamieson, Fausset and Brown explain that it would be a mistake to assume that the people taught their children only from memory: "... a reference to their having the precepts of the law in a written form is contained in this very passage (v. 9), and abundant evidence exists to show that the Israelites were familiar with the art of writing.... This injunction to write the 'words' on the door-posts of every house shows the extent of the popular attainments in reading as well as writing; and their previous education in those branches, however limited it might be, was a wise arrangement of Providence [God] for transmitting in Israelite families a knowledge of religious precepts" (Jamieson, vol. 1, p. 637).

God commanded Moses before his death to write a song that served as a **perpetual witness** against the children of Israel (Deut. 31:19). Moses then taught the people the song to help them "remember the demands of the covenant" (Nelson, p. 348; Deut. 31:20-22, 27-30). After Moses had finished composing this song, he placed it along with his earlier writings in the Book of the Law, and instructed the Levites to place this completed work in the side of the ark as a witness against Israel (Deut. 31:24-26).

This review verifies that the preservation of the Hebrew text was rooted in God's commands to the people and their own obligation to remember His words and works.

A lack of public instruction was the chief cause for Israel's repeated apostasy and covenant violations. A review of the nation's history shows that there were long uninterrupted periods during which God's Law was not taught publicly (II Chr. 15:2). The problem became so severe in ancient Israel and Judah that Hosea lamented: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you from being as a priest to Me. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children" (Hos. 4:6). In commenting on the role of instruction in ancient Israel, scholar Spiros Zodhiates noted: "The absence of saving knowledge became a factor in their spiritual downfall ... which ultimately led to the deportation of Israel and the exile of Judah" (Zodhiates, *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, p. 253).

As previously noted, history and prophecy were so intermingled that the Jews included the chief historical books with the writings of the prophets. Both served as God's lasting witness to His covenant people of His acts of mercy and judgment (Neh. 9:30). Poetical books, like Psalms and Proverbs, were God's way of inspiring and instructing the people to serve and obey Him more perfectly.

Upon his return from exile in Babylon, Ezra gathered the various sacred books together and established a Hebrew canon of Scripture. This allowed returning Jews to renew their identity as God's people (cf. Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.8.42). Tradition states that Ezra instituted the triennial cycle of public reading in synagogues as part of his restoration of the Mosaic system in Judah. (See comments for passage #18 for details.) This measure inseparably joined the preservation of the entire Hebrew text to the public reading and private study of the Old Testament books.

Cycle Continues in Early Church: The cycle of instruction and testimony also played an integral part in the writing and preservation of the Greek New Testament, which records another fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises. Jesus' confirmation of those promises opened the door of fellowship into Abraham's spiritual family to all people (Rom. 15:8-13; Eph. 2:11-21). God gave to the New Testament prophets and apostles the revelation that both Jew and Gentile could be partakers of the Abrahamic promise through Christ (Eph. 3:5-6). This teaching was a major thrust of Paul's writings due to his divinely appointed ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Gal. 2:7; Eph. 3:3).

While many Jews living in Jerusalem and a great number of priests became disciples of Jesus, the Jewish nation on the whole rejected the gospel. God in time called

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Gentiles to salvation, and they embraced the gospel as foretold by Isaiah (Isa. 55:5, 11; cf. Rom. 11:13-33). Within a year or so of the founding of the church, the apostles and other evangelists conducted campaigns **witnessing** for Christ in Samaria (Acts 8:5-25). They eventually took that message to the outermost regions of the Roman Empire (Rom. 15:24).

Thousands of conversions (Acts 2:41, 4:4, 6:7) soon required that the apostles institute some method for teaching newly baptized Christians to observe the things that Jesus had commanded them during His earthly ministry (Matt. 28:20). A modest survey of the book of Acts is enough to confirm this (cf. Acts 2:42, 3:12-4:1, 6:8-10; 9:20-22). The writing of the Gospels naturally served a useful function in the teaching of Jesus' disciples.

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus foretold of the early need for the writing and preservation of the Gospels for evangelistic outreach. In the midst of His prayer, He stated, "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who shall believe in Me through their word" (John 17:20; cf. 1 Cor. 3:5-11). Jesus' thoughts were focused not only on those who would be called to repentance and faith in the first century through the apostles' preaching and writings, but also on future brethren who would be set apart by God through the truth of the gospel message (John 17:17). Textual scholar John William Burgon described this unique role of the Gospel writings: "The extraordinary value and influence of the sacred Books of the New Testament became apparent soon after their publication. They were most potent forces in converting believers: they swayed the lives and informed the minds of Christians: they were read in the services of the Church" (Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*, p. 141).

By the end of the second decade of the church's existence (ca. 50 AD), the **epistle** became one of the chief instruments for preaching and teaching. Paul directed his congregations to read and to circulate his letters for teaching and doctrinal understanding (Col 4:16; I Thes. 5:27). The epistolary form allowed Paul and the other apostles to instruct, edify, correct and comfort many brethren at one time without being on location. Paul exhorted the brethren at Thessalonica to "stand firm, and hold fast the traditions that you were taught, whether by word or by our epistle" (II Thes. 2:15). He also set his epistles as the standard by which brethren were to measure themselves and admonish others: "Now if anyone does not obey our word by this epistle, take notice of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be ashamed" (II Thes. 3:14). The writings of the other apostles also served as a means of instructing and exhorting the brethren (John 20:30-31; Rom. 15:14-16; I John 1:1-4; I Pet. 1:23-25; II Pet. 1:12, 15, 3:1-2; Jude 3-5, 17).

The early Church adopted the ancient model of **public reading** and instruction. This is reflected in Paul's charge to Timothy, the young evangelist at Ephesus, to devote himself to teaching and the public reading of God's Word (I Tim. 4:11, 13). A review of the fourth and sixth chapters of First Timothy shows that public instruction was the best method for curtailing the growth of apostasy and for protecting the spiritual health of a congregation (cf. I Tim. 4:1-7, 6:3-10).

The book of Acts offers a glimpse into the prevalence of public and private instruction in the early Church. In Acts 18:26, we find Aquila and Priscilla attending synagogue in Ephesus on the Sabbath to listen to the Old Testament being read. While at synagogue, they heard the Alexandrian Jew Apollos teaching boldly, but improperly about Jesus (Acts 18:24-25). Afterwards, the couple took him aside privately, instructing him in the Scripture so that he could preach Christ more effectively (Acts 18:26, 28).

One of the best sources for information concerning public and private reading in the early Church is a work entitled *Bible Reading in the Early Church*, written by Adolf Harnack, the late professor of Church history at the University of Berlin. Harnack's ex-

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tensive research into the public and private use of Scripture by Christians from 100-400 AD exposes the unfounded claims that the New Testament was not written until centuries after the apostles lived or that manuscripts of its text were not in widespread circulation before 100 AD. His investigations solidified his own belief that “among the Gentile Christians the order of public worship and private and family discipline in matters of religion and morality, took form in accordance with the Jewish (Jewish Christian) models” (Harnack, *Bible Reading in the Early Church*, p. 32).

Harnack’s research on reading within the early Church brought to public knowledge five things about the condition of the Gospels, Pauline Epistles and Old Testament before 200 AD:

1) Early Christian, apocryphal and heretical Gnostic writings “... make it quite clear that these Scriptures were known to a comparatively large number of Christians, and that this knowledge could not have been derived solely from what they heard in public worship, but that the writings must have been also in their hands....[and] had a very wide circulation and were studied by multitudes of Christians” (Ibid., pp. 36-37, cf. pp. 38-47, 63-64).

2) The post-apostolic and heretical writings of the period show that the Gospels and Pauline Epistles and Old Testament books “became in high degree and to a wide extent the subject of study and controversy in the Christian communities” (Ibid., p. 36).

The early enemies of the Church, primarily Gnostics, found within these writings, especially the Gospel of John, the means by which to “convert Primitive Christianity to a more advanced spirituality based on Hellenistic theology, [and] at the same time wean Primitive Christians away from their religious roots in the Old Testament” (Knight, *Primitive Christianity in Crisis*, p. 43).

3) “... it could not have been so very difficult ... for even poor men to obtain possession of books of the Holy Scriptures, if they made serious efforts to purchase them” (Harnack, p. 36).

4) From instructions in the apocryphal book *Shepherd of Hermas*, Harnack concluded that “house-to-house visitation” was common among early Christians and “that every divine revelation was made accessible to every individual Christian, that it was even brought into private houses and made known to the children. We could not wish for a stronger proof of the complete publicity of the Word of God” (Ibid., p. 39). The writings of Clement of Alexandria indicate that Christians met **privately** to read and study God’s Word at meal times, a practice likely reflecting the Jewish custom of the time (Ibid., p. 56).

5) While we do not know the precise form of the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint) available to early Christians, Harnack explained: “Among the Jewish Christians the private use of the Holy Scriptures [i.e., Hebrew Old Testament] simply continued; for the fact that they had become believers in the Messiahship of Jesus had absolutely no other effect than to increase this use, in so far as it was necessary to study not only the Law but also the Prophets and the Kethubim [poetical and historical books of the Hebrew Bible], seeing that these afforded prophetic proofs of the Messiahship of Jesus....This use simply and easily passed over from the Jewish to the Gentile Christians, for the Holy Scriptures in the Greek translation were fully accessible to, and were read by, the Jews of the Dispersion” (Harnack, p. 32).

At some point in time after his release from house arrest in Rome (63 AD), Paul had his remaining books written on parchment leaves and bound in the codex format (II Tim. 4:13). This suggests that Timothy either possessed scrolls of the Gospels and some of Paul’s books or that he was following the established custom of public reading and teaching from the Old Testament writings.

When Paul wrote to Timothy that “all Scripture” was God-breathed, he evidently

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had in mind the Hebrew scrolls of the Old Testament in the synagogues and in private use in some Jewish homes, along with the autographs of almost all his books stored safely at Troas on the western coast of Asia Minor (II Tim. 3:15, 4:13). (See Inspiration, Truth #8, page 275 for details.) Paul informed Timothy that Scripture was profitable for: 1) making one wise unto salvation, 2) doctrine, 3) reproof, 4) correction and 5) instruction in righteousness (II Tim. 3:15-16).

With this background, Paul's subsequent charge to Timothy to "preach the word" takes on greater significance. Timothy was to instruct and encourage faithful believers from every God-breathed Scripture (writing) and rebuke those who refused to hold to the standard of sound words the apostles had preached, which had now been set to writing (II Tim. 1:13; 4:2). The practice of public reading and instruction was the only method that could effectively stem the rising tide of apostasy (II Tim. 4:3-4).

The divine obligation to preserve the Greek New Testament was rooted in the Christian community's continuing need for evangelism and instruction (Matt. 28:19-20; John 17:20). The Gospels and Pauline Epistles specifically addressed this need, which is precisely why Paul directed that his letters be circulated between neighboring churches like Colossae and Laodicea (cf. Col. 4:16).

Although congregations existed in many areas outside of Palestine by 180 AD, "the greatest concentration of churches was in Asia Minor and along the Aegean coast of Greece....Even around A.D. 325 the scene was still largely unchanged. Asia Minor continued to be the heartland of the Church....Here as in the coastal region of Thracia opposite, in Cyprus, and the hinterlands of Edessa, almost half the population was Christian, and the Church expanded with about equal strength from Asia Minor eastward to Armenia" (Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 53; the source for Aland comments was Harnack's *The Mission and Spread of Christendom in the First Three Centuries*).

For the apostolic writings to accomplish their intended purposes, the text of the New Testament needed to be preserved among people who spoke Greek and possessed a zeal and love for God. From Aland's comments, we can conclude that the demand for Greek manuscripts was greatest in Asia Minor and Greece for the first four centuries of the Christian era. This region, being the heartland of the early apostolic Church for nearly 400 years, was "best qualified in every way to watch over the faithful transmission" of the New Testament text (Pickering, "Concerning the Text of the *Pericope Adulterae*," p. 4). (See Preservation, Truth #3 on page 300 for more details.)

According to Aland, "the spread of the Church [in the second century] was largely among the common people ... who could not understand Greek" (Aland, p. 53). As a result, regional language translations "became the necessary medium for preaching the gospel" (Ibid.). By 150 AD, the need for a New Testament translation among Aramaic and Latin-speaking brethren became so great that faithful versions (Syriac Peshitta and *Itala*) were made from the Greek text in common use in those areas (Burgon, pp. 122-147; Johnson, "The Real Truth about the Waldenses Bible and the Old Latin Version," pp. 6-36).

The Purpose of Promises

God made general promises of preservation to reassure true believers that they would possess His Word in every age. Thus, they could with confidence fulfill the commissions that Jesus had given them (Matt. 28:19-20), which were contingent upon their having a faithful record of His words as recorded by the New Testament authors.

The Bible teaches that "inspiration" and preservation are connected. This truth is never stated explicitly in the Bible; it is reflected in the biblical authors' unflinching confidence in the purity of God's Word. This is no doubt part of the reason behind David's

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remarks, “As for God, His way is perfect; the Word of the LORD is tried. He *is* a shield to all those who take refuge in Him” (Psa. 18:30). Old Testament authors, like David, were able to pen their statements because the documents that lay before them were trustworthy reproductions of the autographic form of the Hebrew text.

For the biblical writers, purity, implying preservation, of the text was rooted at the word level. This can be confirmed by a review of the bolded segments in the previous 21 passages, many of which refer to the “words” of Scripture. God’s general promise of preservation also extended to the letters (e.g., *jot*), when a change in consonants or vowels significantly altered the meaning of a word, as is frequently the case with the Hebrew text.

The first truth of preservation is founded directly on the fact that God’s Word offers promises that cannot be broken (cf. John 10:35). In numerous passages, the preservation of the Word of God has been compared to the physical creation. The immediate implication of such a connection is that the words of Scripture, especially those of Jesus, are more stable, faithful and constant than the heavens and the Earth. As God manifested in the flesh (I Tim. 3:16), Jesus had the authority to declare that His words would endure beyond the passing of the heavens and earth (Matt. 24:35). This specific promise applies not only to the broad concepts and thoughts conveyed by the accounts bearing witness to His statements, but also to the very words and forms of speech used to verbalize those thoughts. Ultimately, believers must place their confidence in God’s promises to preserve His Word. **Creation serves as a tangible confirmation that God has the power to preserve and uphold the authority of the words of Scripture.**

Truth #2: God’s Focus Was on the Apographs (Copies) of the Autographs (Originals)

The original documents penned by the prophets, apostles and their scribes have long disappeared. Most likely they were worn out through extensive use early on, which undoubtedly must have been the case with the New Testament autographs. The earliest surviving witnesses to the New Testament autographs are Greek papyri fragments of the Gospel of John (ca. 125-150 AD). The earliest manuscripts of the Hebrew Masoretic Text, date from 800-900 AD. These manuscripts are removed from the autographs by a century or several millennia, the latter being the case with Masoretic manuscripts.

The mass of textual data collected by researchers over the centuries shows that differences in wording exist between the various biblical manuscripts. Some scholars have used this data to deny the divine authorship of Scripture and God’s promises to preserve His Word intact. In an attempt to protect the Bible’s authority, some conservative ministers and scholars have transferred God promises of preservation from the biblical manuscripts to specific English translations, namely the King James Version (KJV). Their actions have caused unnecessary confusion and debate over the purity of the biblical texts.

The second truth of preservation bridges the gap between the autographs and surviving manuscripts, showing that God’s attention was clearly focused on the apographs of the Hebrew and Greek text.

Proof #1: Before his death, Moses entrusted the autographs of his five books, known collectively as the Book of the Law (Pentateuch), to the priests who placed them in the sides of the ark in the tabernacle’s sanctuary for safekeeping. God later commanded the kings of ancient Israel to make a copy of the law from this book found “before the priests the Levites” (Deut. 17:18). The purpose of this injunction was to teach kings how to rule the nation in righteousness. The blessing for ruling with equity was an extended life span for themselves, the nation of Israel and their children.

David apparently was the first king of Israel (1050-1011 BC) to comply with this

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requirement. A cursory review of Psalm 19 confirms that David possessed a copy of the Book of the Law. (See comments for passage #3 on page 284 for details.)

Moses sealed the autographs of his books ca. 1446 BC, nearly 400 years before David lived. David could only fulfill the requirement of Deuteronomy 17 because he had direct access to a faithful copy of the Book of the Law. This copy (autographs?) was kept in the sides of the ark located in the temporary tent David had erected next to his palace on Mount Zion (II Sam. 6:17; I Chr. 15:1-3, 16:1). Asaph, the chief Levite ministering before the ark, would bring the scrolls of the Law to David, who would make a copy of them for himself (I Chr. 16:4-5, 37). (Whether or not Deuteronomy 17:14-20 was added later to Moses' final book by the prophet Samuel has been a matter of some debate. If this account was added later by Samuel, as I Samuel 10:25 implies, it serves as a testimony to the diligence of the priests in preserving the Book of the Law for 400 years.)

A copy of the Book of the Law emerges again during the reigns of Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah, three of Judah's righteous kings (II Chr. 17:9, 31:3, 21, 34:14). It appears one final time in the biblical narrative during Ezra's time, following Judah's return from Babylon (Neh. 8:1-12). What this means is that the priests and Levitical scribes had faithfully copied the Book of the Law by hand from the time of Moses to Ezra, a period of about 1,000 years. Interestingly, those who possessed later copies of the Law made no distinction between the divine authority of these copies and that of Moses' autographs.

In giving the command in Deuteronomy 17 to Israel's kings, God's care was not focused on the autographs, but on the copy of the Book of the Law found "before the priests the Levites." This command would have soon become meaningless if successive generations of kings were unable to trust the words of the copies of the Book of the Law by which they were expected to rule.

Proof #2: The Bible records in Matthew 19:3-9 that the Pharisees came to Jesus to test and ensnare Him with difficult questions about divorce, one of the most contentious Jewish issues of the first century (Nelson, p. 1457). After the Pharisees had asked Jesus their question, He responded to their query by immediately quoting Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. Jesus introduced His response with the words "Have you not read," directing the Pharisees' attention to the scroll of Genesis in their possession. The text of Genesis had been faithfully preserved for more than 1,400 years by this time.

Proof #3: Luke 4:16-21 records that Jesus came to Nazareth to teach in the synagogue on the day of Pentecost. As He stood up to read, the synagogue attendant gave Him the scroll of Isaiah. After reading from Isaiah 61:1-2, Jesus gave the scroll back to the attendant and sat down to speak. As all the eyes of the Jews were upon Him, Jesus said to them, "Today, **this scripture** (Gk., *graphe*) is being fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21).

The significance of this passage can easily be overlooked in the English. In the New Testament, *graphe* is used 51 times to refer *only* to the written texts of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. In almost all of these instances, it pertains to a passage or the entire collection of the **surviving apographs** of the Old Testament writings. Four passages distinctly refer to the autographs or preserved writings of the apostles and their scribes (e.g., I Tim. 5:18; II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:19-21, 3:16), which is to be expected since they were writing during that time period. Jesus' point of reference in Luke 4:21 was not to the autographs of Isaiah's prophecies, which had been sealed over 700 years earlier, but to the faithful copy in the possession of the synagogue at Nazareth.

Summary

These examples affirm that God's care of His Word was focused on the preserved copies of the sacred text in the possession of His people. On more than 70 occasions,

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Jesus and the apostles referred their audiences to the public scrolls of the Old Testament through their use of the clauses “it is written” and “have you not read.” For Jesus and the apostles, the text of the Hebrew Old Testament in the custody of the Jewish nation at the time was an accurate and authoritative reproduction of the writings of Moses and the Prophets. Jesus’ example demonstrates that **“traditional texts” preserved through the unbroken usage of people who understood and spoke the language are the most reliable means** of bridging the gap between the autographs and surviving manuscripts.

Textual scholar Dr. Edward F. Hills offered his analysis of why the language texts, especially the Greek New Testament, produced from faithful manuscripts are the only continuing standard for exegesis and translation: “A distinction must be made between the providence of God in the preservation of the *Greek* New Testament text and the operation of God’s providence in the translation of that text into other languages. In regard to the *Greek* text God’s providence operates directly, preserving it in its purity throughout the ages. In regard to translations God’s providence operates indirectly. By preserving a pure Greek New Testament text He accomplishes three things: first, He encourages His people to perform the needed work of translation; second, He furnishes His people with the means to perform this work; third, He gives His people a standard with which such performances can be compared and by which they can be corrected. God does not, however, promise that such translations will be preserved from mistakes, or even from serious errors. To promise this would be to dishonor the original Greek text, for it would set up texts in other languages as equal in authority to that original. Thus God’s providential preservation of the New Testament concentrated itself especially on the *Greek* text” (Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 1956 ed., p. 31).

Points to Remember

- 1) Matthew 5:17-18 offers the strongest detailed promise of the continued authority *and* preservation of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.
- 2) Matthew 24:34-35 offers the strongest general promise for the continued authority and preservation of Jesus’ words, embodied in the New Testament writings as claimed by their authors.
- 3) The enduring need for instruction and testimony (witness) formed an integral part of God’s covenant relationship with Israel; the preservation of the Hebrew text of Old Testament served as the basis for these.
- 4) The institution of the triennial cycle of public reading in synagogues inseparably joined the preservation of the entire Hebrew text to the public reading and private study of the Old Testament books.
- 5) The divine obligation to preserve the Greek New Testament was rooted in the Christian community’s continuing need for evangelism and instruction.
- 6) The text of the New Testament needed to be preserved among people who spoke Greek for the apostolic writings to accomplish their intended purposes.
- 7) God made general promises of preservation to reassure true believers that they would possess His Word in every age.
- 8) God’s promises of preservation were rooted at the word level, extending to the letters when a change in consonants or vowels significantly altered the meaning of a word.
- 9) Creation serves as a tangible confirmation that God has the power to preserve and uphold the authority of the words of Scripture.
- 10) Traditional texts preserved through the unbroken usage of people who understood and spoke the language are the most reliable means of bridging the gap between the autographs and surviving manuscripts.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE PRESERVATION OF GOD'S WORD

In an attempt to protect the Bible's integrity, many Bible believers have fostered the idealistic notion that God "perfectly" preserved the sacred text from any alteration. An accurate view of the textual evidence is important in order to avoid fundamental errors that have produced faulty conclusions concerning the words of the Bible. This third truth explains how God's preservation of the biblical apographs differed from the divine authorship of Scripture. In spite of these differences, Bible believers can have confidence that faithful manuscripts indeed represent the "very words" of God.

Truth #3: God Preserved His Word as Promised

Facts of Textual Transmission: All handwritten manuscripts exhibit traces of copyist mistakes and/or alteration. God in His wisdom chose not to protect the infallible, inerrant original text of the apographs from any mistakes and changes. As a result, the reading (combination of letters, syllables and words) of a passage of Scripture can differ from one manuscript to another. These differences known as "variant readings" or "textual variants" occurred in a number of ways when copyists and printers reproduced the sacred text. Some developed unintentionally (accidentally) and others were intentional (deliberate).

The listing that follows is by no means complete, but illustrates some of the commonly reported causes of variant readings. **Accidental changes** or scribal slips include misspellings; confusion of letters; omission of letters, words, and syllables; changes in word order; and the faulty division of words. **Deliberate changes** found among many manuscripts include the harmonization of immediate or parallel passages, revision of grammar, incorporation of marginal notes (glosses) into the text and the alteration of the text for theological reasons (heretical or otherwise).

Detailed discussions of the causes of textual variations in the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts are available in the following handbooks on textual criticism: Würthwein's *The Text of the Old Testament*, pages 107-112; Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, pages 236-275; and Burgon, *The Causes of Corruption of the Traditional Text*. For a discussion of this subject from a modern eclectic perspective, see Bruce Metzger's *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, pages 186ff.

Because of these variations no two Hebrew or Greek biblical manuscripts are identical in every detail. This fact even extends to the more reliable Greek Byzantine manuscripts, which served as the basis of the Reformation Greek texts (Textus Receptus). Yet, these manuscripts "have essentially the same text with a large amount of sporadic variation" (Hills, 1984 ed., p. 182). In contrast, vast variations exist between the earlier uncial and later minuscule copies of the Greek New Testament. In comparison to the Textus Receptus, for example, the two most popular critical or eclectic Greek texts on the market today (Nestle-Aland and United Bible Societies editions) omit more than 2,600 words from the New Testament text (Fowler, *Evaluating Versions of the New Testament*, p. 68). This is reflective of the character of the earlier uncial manuscripts upon which they are based.

Due to the meticulous care of the Levitical Sopherim and Masoretes, the Hebrew Masoretic manuscripts do not display the wide variations seen in the Greek manuscripts

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of the New Testament. Mistakes, changes and corrections are present in Masoretic manuscripts; however, these manuscripts exhibit an overall internal unity in their readings and the range of differences in consonants, vocalization and other textual details is very *small* (cf. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 25-79).

Statements from Reliable Scholars: Scholars who are intimately familiar with the textual data recognize that variant readings occurred in the transmission of the sacred texts. The late John William Burgon was one of the staunchest defenders of the traditional Greek Byzantine Text and did not subscribe to the doctrine of “perfect” preservation. Burgon, a textual scholar and Anglican clergyman, lived during the first major revision of the KJV, which produced the 1881 English Revised Version of the New Testament. He was one of the few textual scholars of his era who could claim firsthand knowledge of the Greek manuscripts, ancient versions, lectionaries and church writings.

In discussing the early corruption of the Greek manuscripts of the Gospels, Burgon showed a marvelous balance toward this subject, unlike that of many textual critics and professing Christians today: “There exists no reason for supposing that the Divine Agent, who in the first instance thus gave to mankind the Scriptures of Truth, straightway abdicated His office; took no further care of His work; abandoned those precious writings to their fate. **That a perpetual miracle was wrought for their preservation**—that the copyists were protected against the risk of error, or evil men prevented from adulterating shamefully copies of the Deposit—**no one, it is presumed, is so weak as to suppose**” (Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*, pp. 11, bold added).

Again, Burgon’s offered this sound approach on the doctrine of preservation: “That by a perpetual miracle [like the one during the original writing], Sacred Manuscripts would be protected all down the ages against depraving influences of whatever sort,—was not to have been expected; certainly, was never promised [by God is the implication]” (Ibid., *The Revision Revised*, p. 335).

Similar sentiments can be gleaned from the works of the late Frederick H.A. Scrivener, an advocate of the Byzantine Text and a contemporary of Burgon. He is considered by nearly all scholars to have been an expert in textual matters, possessing a detailed knowledge of the surviving Greek manuscripts of the New Testament and the various KJV editions. His works on textual criticism are still considered classics. He was one of the scholars who served on the committee that revised the KJV New Testament.

Scrivener’s sober judgment was that “a continuous, unceasing miracle” in the copying of the manuscripts “could not have been reasonably anticipated” (Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, 4th ed., p. 3).

Divine Prohibitions: The presence of biblical prohibitions against tampering with the sacred text refutes the notion that “perfect” preservation was promised in Scripture. The purpose of such prohibitions was to serve as a warning to readers and copyists to respect the integrity of the details (words) *and* substance (commandments and prophecies) of the documents (cf. Deut. 4:2, 12:32; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18-19). Two of them carry warnings of divine judgment: Proverbs 30:5-6 and Revelation 22:18-19.

As noted in Chapter Twelve, the presence of these prohibitions in the Bible makes sense only because God’s communication of His revelation and the autographs were error-free. If God had promised to protect the biblical texts from *any* alteration in the transmission process, there would have been no need to offer these warnings. For this reason, the claim of “perfect” preservation cannot be maintained.

A cursory review of early church history confirms that numerous false teachers, ministers, prophets and brethren were on hand to “corrupt” the apostles’ spoken words (cf. II Cor. 2:17). These same forces seized every opportunity to distort the apostles’ written messages by sending forged documents or altering the expressions of their recorded words (II Thes. 2:2; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4:29:5-6). God did not pre-

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vent such textual catastrophes from occurring because it was necessary that those who cherished His Word and its truth be made manifest (cf. I Cor. 11:19).

Reconciling the Evidence with the Bible

One of the most troubling issues for Bible believers is how to handle the fact that all apographs exhibit mistakes, corrections and/or alterations. The books of Haggai, Zechariah and Romans offer historical parallels of how God has worked with His people. The principles outlined in each book can be applied to the preservation of the sacred texts.

In the book of Romans, Paul disclosed that salvation is a matter related to a person's heart, not ancestry (Rom. 2:23-29). He realized that many Jews might object to his candid remarks, which seemingly alleged that God had been unfaithful in His promises to Abraham. In anticipation of this objection, Paul explained that the Jewish nation still possessed an advantage over non-Jews, namely, they were entrusted with the *written utterances* of God penned by the Old Testament authors (Rom. 3:1-2). Paul then explained how the Jewish nation's unbelief could not nullify God's faithfulness to the promises made to Abraham (Rom. 3:3-5).

Two key conclusions can be drawn from these verses that have relevance to our study of the biblical texts:

1) Human unbelief, fragility and sin cannot nullify God's faithfulness to His Word. In spite of the Jewish nation's near universal unbelief, it was entrusted with the oracles of God, the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. Jewish unbelief could no more invalidate the testimony of the Hebrew Scriptures as God's living oracles, than it could affect His ability to preserve it through time.

2) This pattern was repeated in the early Church, which consisted at first of "spiritual Jews." The actions of early heretics (and Gnostic Christians), the misguided attempts of early editors and the eventual spiritual decline of the Greek church could not prevent God from preserving the Greek New Testament.

The prophet Zechariah was moved by God's Spirit to convey this same lesson to Zerubbabel during the arduous rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem following Judah's Babylonian captivity: "...This *is* the Word of the LORD to Zerubbabel, saying, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). The details surrounding these events are recorded in Ezra 3:8-6:15. The prophet Haggai, a contemporary of Zechariah, encouraged the people with similar words: "According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, So My Spirit remains among you. Do not fear." (Haggai 2:5). The historical understanding of this passage is clear: It was God's Spirit that strengthened Zerubbabel, the high priest Joshua and the remnant of the Jewish people to complete the house of God (Hag. 1:14). The temple was finished in 515 BC, in preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messenger of the covenant (Mal. 3:1).

The events surrounding the rebuilding the temple offer another wonderful parallel to the preservation of the sacred texts. Just as in ancient Judah with the rebuilding of the temple, God in His wisdom has invited human beings to participate in the process of preserving His Word to **demonstrate His power and mercy and the weakness of fallible man. It is ultimately His Spirit that preserves His Word.** When history is viewed from this perspective God's watchfulness over the text becomes apparent.

Transmission of the Old Testament

The preservation of the Hebrew Old Testament began *when* Moses handed the autographs of the Book of the Law to the Levites for safekeeping (Deut. 31:24-26).

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Can God's guiding hand be detected in this event? The book of Isaiah contains a prayer (Isa. 63:7-19), which offers a sketch of the activity of the LORD and His Spirit among ancient Israel (Isa. 63:9-11, 14). This prayer shows that it was God's Spirit in Moses that led him to perform his duties on behalf of the nation, which included the committal of his books to the Levites (Isa. 63:11; cf. Num. 16:28).

It was the LORD Who *chose* the tribe of Levi to serve in the tabernacle (Num. 3:5-13), after its members displayed their loyalty for Him during the sinful episode of the golden calf (Ex. 32:26-28). "The blessing which their father Levi had lost (Gen. xxxiv.25) was restored to the tribe through the noble conduct of his descendants on this occasion.... The Levites, notwithstanding the defection of Aaron, distinguished themselves by their zeal for the honour of God, and their conduct in doing the office of executioners on this occasion; and this was one reason of their being appointed to a high and honorable office in the service of the sanctuary" (Jamieson, vol. 1, p. 410).

Dr. Hills described the Levitical system that God instituted for the preservation of the text: "The Old Testament Church was under the care of the divinely appointed Aaronic priesthood, and for this reason the Holy Spirit preserved the Old Testament through this priesthood and the scholars that grouped themselves around it. The Holy Spirit guided these priests and scholars to gather the separate parts of the Old Testament into one Old Testament canon and to maintain the purity of the Old Testament text.... The Hebrew Scriptures were written by Moses and the prophets and other inspired men to whom God had given prophetic gifts. But the duty of preserving this written revelation was assigned not to the prophets but to the *priests*. The priests were the divinely appointed guardians and teachers of the law.... Thus the law 'was placed in the charge of the priests to be kept by them along side [sic] of the most sacred vessel of the sanctuary, and in its innermost and holiest apartment.'... Evidently also the priests were given the task of making correct copies of the law for the use of kings and rulers, or at least of supervising the scribes to whom the king would delegate this work (Deut. 17:18).

"Not only the Law of Moses but also the Psalms were preserved in the Temple by the priests, and it was probably the priests who divided the Hebrew psalter into five books corresponding to the five books of Moses. It was David, the sweet singer of Israel who taught the priests to sing psalms as part of their public worship service (1 Chron. 15:16, 17). Like David, Heman, Asaph and Ethan were not only singers but also inspired authors, and some of the psalms were written by them. We are told that the priests sang these psalms on various joyful occasions, such as the dedication of the Temple by Solomon (2 Chron. 7:6), the coronation of Joash (2 Chron. 23:18), and the cleansing of the Temple by Hezekiah (2 Chron. 29:30)" (Hills, 1984. ed., pp. 91-92).

While King David, the prophet Nathan and Gad the seer are often credited with the creation of the Levitical system of worship, the Bible records that it was the LORD Who established it by His commandment (II Chr. 29:25). There can be no doubt then that He was the one behind the writing of the psalms and the use of music to glorify and praise Him in the temple (cf. I Chr. 25:1-7).

Dr. Hills continued his overview of the preservation of the Old Testament text: "How the other Old Testament books were preserved during the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah we are not told explicitly, but it is likely that the books of Solomon were collected together and carefully kept at Jerusalem. Some of Solomon's proverbs, we are told, were copied out by *the men of Hezekiah king of Judah* (Prov. 25:1). Except for periodic revivals under godly rulers, such as Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah, the days of the kings were times of apostasy and spiritual darkness in which the priests neglected almost entirely their God-given task of guarding and teaching God's holy law" (Ibid., p. 92).

Dr. Hills' last statement shows some confusion on the issue of preservation. It

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does not follow that preservation of the text was linked *inseparably* to public teaching. The preserved text served as the basis for it. Public teaching was dependent upon the joint effort of priests *and* elders, as Moses had originally commanded (Deut. 31:9-11). There is ample evidence to show that public teaching of God's Law was contingent on the disposition of the kings, who had usurped the elders' role in the teaching process. During the reigns of godly kings, like Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah, public teaching of God's Law was widespread (cf. II Chr. 17:9, 30:22, 31:3-4, 21, 34:29-33). Josiah's reading of the covenant words to the people, priests and Levites in Jerusalem sparked the last revival of the Mosaic religion in Judah before Jerusalem's destruction (II Ki. 23:1-3).

In spite of Israel's apostasy, history establishes that the Hebrew text, specifically the Book of the Law, continued to be preserved by the Levites. David's numerous references to its various parts in Psalm 19 serve as a tangible sign that it had been preserved intact during the turbulent period of the Judges (approx. 350 years). (See Preservation, Truth #2 for additional examples.) God's Spirit no doubt guided Hilkiyah, a faithful priest by all accounts, to recover *the* copy of Book of the Law after it had been mislaid or perhaps hidden in the temple during a 57-year period of apostasy (II Chr. 34:14).

Despite the unbelief of the tribe of Judah, God faithfully preserved the Hebrew Old Testament text through the Levites who understood the language. Faithful priests and Levites abandoned their property in Samaria and gathered within Judah's borders (II Chr. 11:5-14) after Israel divided into two kingdoms (ca. 970 BC) and Jeroboam instituted a non-Levitical priesthood for his pagan religious system. It is very probable that this group of loyal priests and Levites preserved the Law and later writings during the nations' repeated cycles of apostasy. The copying of Solomon's proverbs by the men of Hezekiah, most likely Levites, nearly 250 years after they had been written shows that these and implies that other Old Testament writings had been preserved. Undoubtedly it was God Who placed within the Levites the reverence for the Hebrew text as His holy Word.

The prophets and righteous kings, like Hezekiah and Josiah, must have played a role in inciting the Levites to fulfill their divine role as guardians of the sacred text. For example, it was Hezekiah and his company of Levites who placed a sign-manual (three Hebrew letters for his name) at the end of Hebrew manuscripts to seal them for public reading (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, pp. 164-165). After Hezekiah's time, the sign-manual continued to be used on all Old Testament manuscripts as a seal of their authenticity and scribes faithfully copied it from one manuscript to another.

The Hebrew text continued to be preserved during the Babylonian captivity until it was finally printed during the early Reformation. Hills wrote: "But in spite of everything, God was still watching over His holy Word and preserving it by His special providence. Thus when Daniel and Ezekiel and other true believers were led away to Babylon, they took with them copies of all the Old Testament Scriptures which had been written up to that time.

"After the Jews returned from the Babylonian exile, there was a great revival among the priesthood through the power of the Holy Spirit....The Law was taught again in Jerusalem by Ezra the priest who **had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments** (Ezra 7:10). By Ezra and his successors, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all the Old Testament books were gathered together into one Old Testament canon, and their texts were purged of errors and preserved until the days of our Lord's earthly ministry. By that time the Old Testament text was so firmly established that even the Jews' rejection of Christ could not disturb it. Unbelieving Jewish scribes [i.e., Levitical Sopherim and Masoretes] transmitted this traditional Hebrew Old Testament text blindly but faithfully, until the dawn of the Protestant Reformation.

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“It was this Traditional (Masoretic) text which was printed at the end of the medieval period....In 1488 the entire Hebrew Bible was printed for the first time. A second edition was printed in 1491 and a third in 1494. This third edition was used by Luther in translating the Old Testament into German. Other faithful Protestant translations followed, including [William Tyndale's] and in due time the King James Version. Thus it was that the Hebrew Old Testament text, divinely inspired and providentially preserved, was restored to the Church, to the circle of true believers” (Ibid., pp. 92-93, bracketed comment added).

Transmission of the New Testament

God preserved the Greek New Testament (GNT) in a decidedly different manner than the Old Testament, entrusting the original text of the apostles to a spiritual priesthood of believers, rather than to a physical priesthood (Ibid., p. 103).

Dr. Hills offered a capsule of this process in his book *The King James Version Defended*: “But God in His mercy did not leave His people to grope after the True New Testament Text. Through the leading of the Holy Spirit He guided them to preserve it during the manuscript period....*First*, many trustworthy copies of the original New Testament manuscripts were produced by faithful scribes. *Second*, these trustworthy copies were read and recopied by true believers down through the centuries. *Third*, untrustworthy copies were not so generally read or so frequently recopied. Although they enjoyed some popularity for a time, yet in the long run they were laid aside and consigned to oblivion. Thus as a result of this special providential guidance the True Text won out in the end, and today we may be sure that the text found in the vast majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts is a trustworthy reproduction of the divinely inspired Original Text. **This is the text which was preserved by the God-guided usage of the Greek Church.** Critics have called it the *Byzantine* text ... acknowledging that it was the text in use in the Greek Church during the greater part of the Byzantine period (452-1453). It is much better ... to call this text the *Traditional Text*. When we call the text found in the majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts the Traditional Text, we signify that this is the text which has been handed down by the God-guided tradition of the Church from the time of the Apostles unto the present day” (Ibid., p. 106, emphasis added).

Greek Church Key to Preservation: As previously noted, the heartland of the early Church was in Asia Minor and the Aegean Coast of Greece for nearly 400 years. God used the apostle Paul's efforts to establish churches in this region, guaranteeing that the most reliable Greek manuscripts of the New Testament would be preserved and transmitted to us for over 1,400 years as the Byzantine or Traditional Apostolic Text. That text was first printed as the Textus Receptus by Erasmus and Johann Froben in 1516 AD.

The apostle Paul spent much of his ministry in this region, establishing congregations during his first two missionary journeys (Acts 13:4-14:25, 15:40-18:23). On his third trip to the area, he stayed in Ephesus for three years (54-57 AD), strengthening the congregation that was founded by Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18-19). Paul used Ephesus as the point of departure for his preaching and planting of churches throughout the Roman province of Asia, the western third of modern-day Turkey (Acts 19:1-20).

The ancient city of Ephesus boasted a population of a half million and was the proconsular capital for the Roman province (Ungers, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, pp. 366-367). It was one of Asia Minor's most important commercial cities; it was located on major trade routes and had a seaport with access to the Aegean Sea. The city also held great religious significance for the region because it was the home of the goddess Diana, whose temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

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Apparently the Ephesian congregation served as the “mother” church for others on the same trade routes (Acts 20:17), much like Antioch was for Syria. It would play a key role in the preservation of the apostolic Greek text. Before leaving Ephesus to travel to Macedonia (57 AD), Paul appointed the young Timothy to pastor the congregation there and to address matters of false doctrine and public worship (I Tim. 1:3).

Canonization of Gospels, Paul’s Epistles: According to Dr. Ernest L. Martin, biblical historian and a scholar in canonical studies, the apostles Paul, Peter and John were the ones God used to canonize the New Testament. The evidence for his conclusions are presented in his book *Restoring the Original Bible* (pp. 282-293, 309-320, 379-391). A review of the mileposts in the formation of the New Testament canon is essential to understanding the preservation and transmission of the early apostolic text.

In the main, Dr. Martin’s assertions are undoubtedly correct and can be summarized in his own words: “There was a common goal which dominated the last few months of the lives of Peter, John and Paul. If one will read their works, when each was well aware that his death was on the immediate horizon, it can be seen what their desires were. It was most essential that a canon of divine New Testament scriptures be created which would last the world as a standard for Christian teaching until the second advent of Christ” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, p. 379).

The initial phases of canonization probably occurred at the end of a 37-year period of preaching and writing (30-67 AD) when both Peter and Paul believed their deaths were imminent (II Tim. 4:6; II Pet. 1:12-15). Paul was in prison again in Rome in 67 AD, at which time he wrote to Timothy to bring to him the chest containing his books and parchments from Troas for the final editing of his epistles (II Tim. 4:13). It appears that the book of Romans, at the very least, was written, edited and republished again.

A corpus (collection of writings) of Paul’s completed epistles existed by 65-66 AD (II Pet. 3:15-16). This reference found in Peter’s Second Epistle indicates that Peter possessed and was reviewing Paul’s letters, no doubt in preparation for their final canonization. John Mark had come to Babylon and probably delivered Peter’s Second Epistle to the brethren in the remote parts of northern Asia Minor (II Pet. 1:1; 3:16). It is probable that Mark brought Peter’s epistles to Timothy. Later, Paul asked Timothy to bring Mark to Rome, to assist with the final canonization of Paul’s epistles.

From Paul’s earlier admonishment to Timothy to “adhere to **sound words, even those of our Lord Jesus Christ**, and the doctrine *that is* according to godliness,” one can infer that the young evangelist had in his possession accurately written documents that served as a doctrinal standard (I Tim. 6:3-5). These documents would have been the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and most of John’s Gospel. This conclusion is supported by Harnack’s research establishing the early widespread usage of these books. It is reasonable to presume that Timothy became the guardian of Paul’s and Peter’s autographs and transported them back to Ephesus for safekeeping. Paul’s charge to Timothy to preach from all God-breathed *writings* strongly suggests that after this initial phase of canonization he possessed at the very least the Gospels and Paul’s epistles, and most probably Peter’s writings (II Tim. 3:16, 4:2).

Myth of a Jerusalem Canonization: According to Martin, Jerusalem served as the location of the canonization of the New Testament, primarily the final phase completed by John (cf. Martin, pp. 453-460). A closer examination of Martin’s evidence reveals his conclusion is primarily based on inferences drawn from Eusebius’ work called *The Proof of the Gospel*. This book offers details about the Christian congregation in Jerusalem following the temple’s destruction in 70 AD. Martin is correct in claiming that a Christian library existed on the Mount of Olives, a fact confirmed by the early church historian Eusebius (ca. 260-340 AD) in his *Ecclesiastical History* (6:20:1). This library had direct ties to the theological library at Caesarea, which the Alexandrian

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scholar Origen (182-251 AD) helped build. Origen was Eusebius' mentor and the teacher of Pamphilus, a later curator of the Caesarean library, which stored many of the early manuscripts of the New Testament and pagan literature. Eusebius later worked and studied with Pamphilus, carrying on Origen's efforts in promoting sacred learning of *any* kind.

The fatal flaw in Martin's theory is that he dates the existence of the Olivet library to the time of the apostle John: "His [John's] emphasis on teaching the Jews must have allowed him to have intimate connections with the Mother Church and its library on the Mount of Olives....the library of Caesarea was nothing more than an extension of that library on the Mount of Olives which was the central mount of Christian influence from a historical point of view in the eyes of Eusebius" (Martin, p. 460). This is a historical **impossibility** because the Olivet library Martin references was not built until after ca. 205 AD by Alexander, a Gentile bishop of Jerusalem. This was over 100 years after John completed his canonization of the New Testament. Martin clearly overlooked this fact in his reading of Eusebius' history because his focus was on establishing a connection between Eusebius and the Olivet library (cf. Martin, p. 458, note *italics* in citation).

Eusebius's claim that the Mount of Olives was the central focus for all Christians of the time was **an attempt** to elevate the political status of Jerusalem/Caesarea in spiritual matters. Eusebius played a key role at the Council of Nicea, convened in 325 AD by the Roman emperor Constantine to settle disputes dividing the churches, including the Arian and Quartodeciman controversies. Martin conceded this point: "Indeed, Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History [written ca. 325 AD] associates the bishops of Caesarea and Jerusalem as representing a unified political effort as far as Christian government in Palestine was concerned [see Eusebius, 5:19:16; 27]" (Martin, p. 459).

Gospels and Pauline Epistles: The fact that no canonization occurred in Jerusalem is important for the early transmission of the apostolic text. By the time Paul and Peter finished the canonization of their books (in Rome and elsewhere), the Jewish revolt against Rome was advancing. All faithful Jewish Christians in Jerusalem had heeded the warning given by God to flee the city. Jerusalem was no longer the focus for faithful Christians. An uncertain number of them went to the city of Pella, about 60 miles northeast of Jerusalem. It appears that the majority of these refugees were scattered throughout the Roman Empire (Eusebius, 3:1:1). James' and Peter's epistles confirm that a large number of Jews were living outside of Jerusalem and in Asia Minor (Jas. 1:1; I Pet. 1:1). It follows that many Jewish Christians, including the apostle John, fled to Asia Minor and settled around Ephesus. There is no indication that John returned to Jerusalem after his move to Asia Minor. The Gallic bishop Ireneus recorded that John lived there "permanently until the times of Trajan" about 98-100 AD (Ireneus, *Against Heresies*, 3:3:4). Ephesus became John's home, except while he was in exile on the Island of Patmos (95-96 AD) during the Christian persecution of emperor Domitian (81-96 AD). He died in Ephesus sometime between 98-100 AD (Eusebius, 3:31:4; 5:24:4).

The systematic copying of the Gospels, Acts, the Pauline corpus and Petrine Epistles must have begun immediately in the decades following the deaths of Paul and Peter (ca. 68-69 AD) and before the short, but severe persecution of Christians under Domitian (94-96 AD). Since all manuscripts during this early period were produced by individual Christians, it is probable that brethren at Ephesus were those who made exact papyrus copies of these books and distributed them in codices to elders and brethren in the region for public reading (Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 14). It is **reasonable** to presume that **Ephesus** was the location for this undertaking. Its accessibility to the major trade and mail routes and the city's prominence in Asia Minor would have made it a frequent destination for brethren.

The likelihood that Peter's epistles circulated generally at this time is corroborated by early citations or allusions to these books in the non-canonical Epistle of Barnabas,

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written sometime between 70-130 AD, and the works of the Roman bishop Clement, ca. 95-97 AD (House, *Chronological and Background Charts of the New Testament*, p. 22).

In surveying the early literature to determine how the value early Christians placed on the New Testament writings affected their transmission, textual scholar and linguist Dr. Wilbur N. Pickering found “the faithful recognized the authority of the New Testament writings from the start—had they not they would have been rejecting the authority of the apostles, and hence not been among the faithful. To a basic honesty would be added reverence in their handling of the text, from the start. And to these would be added vigilance, since the apostles had repeatedly and emphatically warned them against false teachers. But were all the faithful equally situated for transmitting the true text? Evidently not. The possessors of the Autographs would obviously be in the best position” (Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, pp. 110-111). And it was the apostles who possessed the autographs. Peter could not have retained a collection of Paul’s letters in 65-66 AD unless papyrus copies of Paul’s autographs had been made and sent to brethren.

Manuscripts were first sent to church readers in major cities, who were “responsible not only for reading Scripture during church meetings but also for keeping accurate and fresh copies of the Scriptures. They were the New Testament counterparts to the Old Testament Sopherim [sic] and Masorettes. Some of them may have been scribes as well. For readers who were not scribes, it would have been their duty to have scribes make copies of the text for the church” (Comfort, *The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament*, p. 15).

The **early systematic copying** of these books would have been necessary for several reasons:

1) The recent arrival of Jewish Christian emigres from Jerusalem no doubt created an urgent need for authoritative sacred books for private reading.

2) New congregations must have been formed to accommodate this influx of new brethren to the area. Many congregations, like the one in Ephesus, met in brethren’s homes, which would have been unable to adapt to such rapid growth (cf. Rom. 16:5; I Cor. 16:7-8, 19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 1:2). The demand for a complete set of authoritative books for public reading would have served as one impetus for the early widespread copying of these books. These congregations would have looked to Ephesus for manuscripts.

A systematic process of copying, exchange and collection of manuscripts between Church areas seems the best way to explain the **early widespread**, consistent circulation of the Gospels and Pauline Epistles among multitudes of Christians and pseudo-Christians (i.e., heretics) as previously indicated by Harnack’s research.

Early Church collections of Paul’s epistles in particular were incomplete and small, varying from location to location (Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 49). The explanation that these collections grew *only* by a random process of exchange over a century or more, until finally the pastoral epistles were added, does not explain the citations and allusions to some of Paul’s books in the Epistle of Barnabas, Clement and writings of Ignatius (ca. 110 AD), Polycarp (ca. 115 AD) and Hermas (ca. 115-140). The following chart lists the “canonized” New Testament books, their approximate dates of authorship, writers, initial destinations and their probable places of origin.

| <u>Book, Date (AD)</u> | <u>Writer</u> | <u>Initial Destination</u> | <u>Origin</u> |
|------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| Matthew, 35 | Matthew | Diaspora Jews, new converts | Jerusalem |
| James, 40-41 | James | Diaspora Jews and Israelites | Jerusalem |
| Mark, 42 | Mark/Peter | Judea, Galilee, Samaria,
Babylon | Jerusalem |

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| | | | |
|------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| John, 30-55, 65+ | John | Diaspora Jews | Jerusalem, Ephesus |
| I Thessalonians, 50 | Paul | Thessalonica | Corinth |
| II Thessalonians, 51 | Paul | Thessalonica | Corinth |
| Galatians, 53 | Paul | Galatia | Antioch |
| I Corinthians, 56 | Paul | Corinth | Ephesus |
| Romans, 57 | Paul | Rome | Corinth |
| II Corinthians, 57 | Paul | Corinth | Philippi |
| Luke, 59 | Luke/Paul | Diaspora Jews and Gentiles | Jerusalem, Caesarea |
| Acts, 58-63 | Luke/Paul | Supplement to Luke | Jerusalem, Caesarea
Rome |
| Hebrews, 61 | Paul | Rome, Judea, Galilee,
Jerusalem | Rome |
| Philippians, 63 | Paul | Philippi | Rome |
| Ephesians, early 63 | Paul | Ephesus, Asia Minor | Rome |
| Colossians, early 63 | Paul | Colossae | Rome |
| Philemon, early 63 | Paul | Philemon, Colossae | Rome |
| I Timothy, late 63 | Paul | Timothy, Ephesus | Nicopolis |
| Titus, late 63 | Paul | Titus, Crete | Nicopolis |
| I, II, III John, 63-64 | John | Asia Minor | Jerusalem |
| I Peter, 64-65 | Peter | Northern Asia Minor | Babylon |
| II Peter, 65-66 | Peter | Jerusalem, Asia Minor | Babylon |
| Jude, 66-67 | Jude | Jerusalem, Judea | Jerusalem |
| II Timothy, 67 | Paul | Timothy, Ephesus | Rome |
| Revelation, 95-96 | John | Seven churches, Asia Minor | Patmos |

Scholars generally agree that most of the New Testament books *initially* circulated as independent works copied on papyrus. Copies of *some* of Paul's epistles, like the ones sent to Colossae and Laodicea, were read and exchanged between neighboring churches (Col. 4:16). It does not follow that *all* letters were exchanged.

Internal and historical evidence indicates that every New Testament book was widely distributed immediately after its initial writing, except for these twelve: Romans, I and II Corinthians, Philippians, I and II Thessalonians, Titus, I and II Timothy, Philemon, and II and III John. The 10 Pauline Epistles listed here were either addressed to specific people or congregations in Greece and Rome. Nearly all scholars, including Aland, recognize that from the beginning of their copying and **general** transmission, Paul's epistles were gathered together and circulated as a group, possibly excluding the pastorals of I and II Timothy and Titus (Aland, p. 297). It is highly improbable that Philemon and the brethren at Corinth, whom Paul had mildly or severely rebuked in his epistles, would have copied and exchanged their letters with others. Human pride as displayed by the Corinthians, and Philemon's embarrassment, would probably have driven them to keep these letters to themselves. The only way to explain the circulation of these three books and others is that Paul collected them into a final corpus as II Peter 3:15-16 records.

Thus, there were **two lines** of transmission during this early period: sporadic and systematic. As already noted, the possessors of the autographs, namely the apostles and brethren at Ephesus, would have been in the best position to transmit the text. The systematic copying of Paul's books in sets explains how all churches came to possess those epistles that were *not* widely exchanged at first.

Before this mass distribution (ca. 70-95 AD), Aland is correct in noting that congregations would have possessed only small sets of Paul's earlier letters, along with those of the other apostles. In addition, the explanation that the New Testament books

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initially spread through the *sporadic* copying of private brethren remains valid: “The circulation of a document began either from the place (or church province) of its origin, where the author wrote it, or from the place to which it was addressed....Copies of the original would be made for use in neighboring churches. The circulation of a book would be like ripples of a stone cast into a pond, spreading out in all directions at once. When a book was shared by repeated copying throughout a whole diocese [area under one overseer] or metropolitan area, the close ties between dioceses would carry it from one district to another, where the process would be repeated” (Aland, p. 55).

Asiatic churches with close ties, like those on the same mail route (Rev. 2-3), could be assured that reasonably faithful manuscripts could be obtained from other brethren whom they trusted (Pickering, p. 110).

Pickering noted that “... the making of copies would have begun at once [after their initial writing]. The authors clearly intended their writings to be circulated, and the quality of the writings was so obvious that the word would get around and each assembly would want a copy....Polycarp ... in answer to a request from the Philippian church, sent a collection of Ignatius’ letters to them, possibly within five years after Ignatius wrote them. Evidently it was normal procedure to make copies and collections (of worthy writings) so each assembly could have a set. Ignatius [bishop of Antioch, ca. 110 AD] referred to the free travel and exchange between the churches and Justin [Martyr, pre-165 AD] to the weekly practice of reading Scripture in the assemblies. Already by the year 100 there must have been many copies of the various books (some more than others) while it was certainly still possible to check a copy against the original, should a question arise. **The point is that there was a swelling stream of faithfully executed copies emanating from the holders of the Autographs to the rest of the Christian world**” (Pickering, p. 111-112, bold added).

Two other conclusions can also be garnered from the previous chart:

1) Approximately 37 years were involved in the writing of the New Testament books. With the exception of Revelation, all of them were written before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD.

2) In contrast to the books of the Old Testament, those of the New Testament were authored in distant places and distributed early in a wider geographical area. Most of the books were written in Jerusalem, Rome, Greece, Asia Minor, Syria and Babylon in order of quantity. **Two-thirds** were destined for **Asia Minor or the Aegean coast**. The Gospels undoubtedly circulated in this region. Adding these to the group destined for this area, the percentage rises to 80 percent. **None** were initially sent to Egypt, the home of the Alexandrian text.

John’s Gospel, General Epistles and Revelation: For the reasons previously cited, Ephesus was the location where the apostle John and his team of editors completed the final phase of the New Testament “canonization.” This team might have included the apostle Philip, who was residing in Hierapolis (Eusebius, 3:31), Timothy and Polycarp, John’s disciple and the overseer at Smyrna. Once the task of finalizing the remaining New Testament books had been completed, copies would have been made and distributed first to church readers along the trade routes. This process must have been completed in the early years of emperor Trajan (98-117 AD). His reign was known for its relative peace. Christians were not persecuted on the whole and punished only when publicly accused of refusing to take part in emperor worship (Halley, *Halley’s Bible Handbook*, p. 761). During this period, Pliny, Trajan’s liaison to Asia Minor, wrote to the emperor that Christians in the region “had become so numerous that the heathen temples were almost forsaken” (Ibid.).

John and his team re-edited his already circulating Gospel and First Epistle, adding affidavits as a witness of their authenticity (John 21:24; I John 1:1-4). It appears he

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also added a prologue and a final chapter to his Gospel.

The widespread distribution of the remaining **General Epistles** probably occurred at this time. This delay explains why citations from many of these letters rarely appear in the early Christian and apocryphal works and reading lists (House, p. 22). The remote geographical areas in which some of these books initially circulated undoubtedly caused a delay in their entry into the final canon. This would have been the case with Jude, which was apparently addressed to the remote areas of modern-day northern Turkey as was James and I and II Peter. Other epistles like II and III John were written to specific congregations in order to temporarily address their spiritual needs in preparation for John's visit (II John 12-13; III John 13-14).

After reviewing various letters available to them, it seems that John and his team of editors selected the ones that could most effectively teach and warn brethren about the corrupting influences of Gnostic and autocratic false teachers who were vying for authority in Christian congregations (III John 9). The anti-Gnostic content of many of these letters (II Peter, I and II John and Jude) may have served as a factor in their delayed acceptance by the Hellenized Christian community. For the historical significance of some of the general epistles in the first- and second-century conflicts between apostolic Christianity and Gnosticism, see Alan Knight's *Primitive Christianity in Crisis*, pages 78-81, 98-102.

John's steadfast decision to retain these books as part of the final canon and to distribute them to the church offers a reason why he and his canonization was widely ignored by professing Christians outside of Asia Minor, either personally or in their correspondence. By the end of the first century, many brethren, especially those at Rome and Alexandria, had accepted and become accustomed to Gnostic teachings, such as the keeping of the Hellenized Christian Sabbath or Sunday (cf. Knight, pp. 62-70). Statements like "sin is lawlessness," a clear reference to such antinomian practices as Sunday Sabbath, would have offended these brethren (I John 3:4).

The book of **Revelation** was distributed to all churches, primarily among the seven congregations to whom it was addressed: "From John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace and peace be to you" (Rev. 1:4). The spiritual focus apparently by this time centered on these churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

Although some of the Gnostic teachers had left the church and formed their own radical groups by this time (I John 2:19), some of the congregations in Asia Minor (e.g., Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira) were being persecuted or infiltrated by false brethren and teachers whom John wrote were "Nicolaitanes," of the "synagogue of Satan," or led by "Jezebel." (See Knight's *Primitive Christianity* for a treatment of these terms in their historical relationship to Gnosticism, pp. 102-106, 207-219.)

Manuscripts of the book of Revelation began circulating in the early decades of the second century. Ireneus (120-202 AD) noted that he had consulted the "most approved and ancient copies" of Revelation for verification of the number 666 (Rev. 13:18) (Ireneus, *Against Heresies*, 5.30.1). Papias (130-140 AD) bore witness that the book was "inspired" (Papias, "Fragments of Papias," 8). The author of the apocryphal *Shepherd of Hermas* (ca. 115-140 AD) cited or alluded to it (House, p. 22). The early Church initially accepted Revelation as authentic. Nevertheless, some congregations and scholars in the eastern Roman Empire rejected it for nearly three centuries because its stature became tainted from connections with the Montanists, a cult that expected a "speedy outpouring of the Holy Spirit (the Paraclete) on the Church, of which it saw the first manifestation in its own prophets and prophetesses. Montanus himself, who began to prophesy either in 172 (Eusebius' *Chronicle*) or 156-7 (Epiphanius, *Haer.*, xlviii.1), proclaimed that the Heavenly Jerusalem would soon descend near Pepusa in Phry-

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gia” (Cross, s.v. “Montanism,” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 934).

The testimony of two of the most respected overseers in the second century confirm the widespread circulation of the New Testament, especially in Asia Minor. Both men had ties to the apostle John. In his letter to the Philippians (ca. 115 AD), Polycarp (ca. 69-156 AD) quoted directly from 18 of the New Testament books: the Gospels, Acts, Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, I Peter, and I and II John. He alluded to the remaining books, except Philemon (whose short length might not have provided enough quotable material).

In a letter to the Roman bishop Victor (ca. 190 AD), outlining why he and the brethren of Asia Minor would continue to observe the Passover instead of Easter, Polycrates wrote: “Last of all I too, Polycrates, the least of you all, act according to the tradition of my family, some members of which I have actually followed; for seven of them were bishops and I am the eighth, and my family have always kept the day [Passover] when the people [the Jews] put away the leaven. So, I, my friends, after spending sixty-five years in the Lord’s service and conversing with Christians from all parts of the world, and **going carefully through all Holy Scripture**, am not scared of threats. Better people than I have said: ‘We must obey God rather than men’” (Louth, *Eusebius: The History of the Church*, p. 172, emphasis added). Polycrates’ boast would have been meaningless if he had not actually studied all the Old and New Testament Scriptures since his conversion, dating back to 125 AD. Since he was an overseer at Ephesus and Polycarp’s disciple, it follows that he possessed all the canonized New Testament books.

Hills’ assessed the transmission of the text during the first- and early-second century: “At any rate, because the New Testament books were first gathered together and accorded full recognition as Scripture in Asia Minor and Antioch, the copying of these books would be done more carefully in this region than in other places. Thus it is reasonable to believe that during the late first and early second centuries an usually pure type of New Testament text was in circulation in Asia Minor and Antioch and that this soon became the traditional text (as it were) of this area” (Hills, 1956 ed., pp. 54-55).

Transmission (100-300 AD): The corruption of the apostolic text (i.e., Byzantine Text) commenced a few decades after John’s canonization: “Thus during the second and third centuries [100-300 AD] a situation arose in the Christian Church which may fittingly be ascribed to the machinations of the evil one, who, as soon as the Holy Spirit had delivered the New Testament Scriptures to the Church, immediately endeavored to snatch them away. At Rome and Alexandria, the two great cultural centers of the ancient world, two corrupt text types arose which were used increasingly to drive the true New Testament text out of existence” (Ibid., p. 53).

The attack on the apostolic text occurred on two fronts: culturally and doctrinally.

Cultural Wars: The number of Christians grew rapidly and the new “religion” increased in wealth, learning and social influence during Hadrian’s reign (117-138 AD) as Roman emperor (Halley, p. 762). Within 80 years of John’s canonization, the apostolic text “was now in the fullest sense accessible to the public” (Harnack, *Bible Reading in the Early Church*, p. 76). This made it vulnerable to the attack of critics. The Graeco-Roman world in which the apostolic text circulated “was very conscious of style” (Elliott, *The Principles and Practice of New Testament Textual Criticism*, p. 32). A movement to revive the literary style of the Attic or Classical Greek was strong in the second century and no doubt influenced people’s perception of the apostolic text. (See Appendix V, page 858, for more details.) As pagan literary critics compared the style of the *Koiné* Greek of the New Testament with that of classical Greek literature, they charged that its text was substandard and filled with ungrammatical sentences and un-Greek expressions.

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The second-century pagan philosopher Celsus wrote a literary attack on the Christian documents called *True Discourse* during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180 AD). This work is known from Origen's later reply to Celsus entitled *Contra Celsum* (mid-200s AD). "... Celsus took offense at the poor form and the inferior style of the Holy Scriptures such as were fit only for the uneducated and barbarians, and that he makes invidious [offensive] comparisons with the writings of Plato....this aspect of the Holy Scriptures presented difficulties to the Fathers, seeing that educated Christians also took offense at it" (Harnack, p. 45).

This conflict was reflected in the later writings of Arnobius and his pupil Lactantius. Both of these Latin Christians were forced to defend the entire Bible, especially the apostolic text, from charges that it was "swarmed with barbarisms and solecisms" and "written in a rude and poor style" (Harnack, pp. 78-79). Harnack concluded: "... Lactantius finds himself forced to admit that the Bible was written in a poor style, and therefore needed explanation if it was to do its work; there was, however, a lack of experienced teachers fitted to deal with people of culture" (Ibid., p. 79).

These "same reproaches were to be heard from the lips even of members of the Christian communities. The charge of barbaric style applied to the Latin Bible [Old Latin?] in much higher degree than to the Greek Bible, and must have been deeply felt by everyone. From the work of Arnobius we have the impression that the discussion of the Bible had become a public controversy in the great world of literature, and we gain the same impression from Lactantius. This could only have happened if the Bible was in the hand of a multitude of people" (Ibid., p. 78).

A stigma came to be associated with the GNT and Christians became ashamed of it. This attitude was especially prevalent among educated and wealthier Christians, who were unwilling to relinquish their "craving" for heathen and classical literature (Harnack, pp. 58-59). This mindset toward the biblical text contributed to a decline in the reading of Scripture. Harnack summarized Origen's comments from his homilies and *Contra Celsum*: "Origen speaks in several passages of the *taedium verbi divini* [the tedium of the divine word] among Christians; the reading of the Scripture in church and at home is distasteful to them, indeed they do all they can to escape it. This is one of the characteristics of a worldly popular Christianity which we first find depicted in the works of Origen and Cyprian [d. 258 AD], and which strikes us the more forcibly because the earlier Fathers in their writings so seldom refer to it....The fact that the style of the Biblical narratives and exhortations was not in accord with a more refined taste contributed somewhat to this" (Harnack, p. 69-70).

The formation of suggested reading lists or catalogs of the sacred writings, like the Muratorian fragment (ca. 190 AD), was one attempt by the ministry to encourage the reading of the Bible, while simultaneously repressing the reading of heathen literature. The Muratorian fragment listed every New Testament book except Hebrews, James, and I and II Peter, which its author excluded for theological and not textual reasons (Aland, p. 49). Many scholars have wrongly taken this fragment and other such catalogs to be canonical lists. Their real purpose was to regulate reading as Harnack noted: "Though these lists were in the first place drawn up to make known the books to be used in public worship, they were also meant to be in force for private reading. In earlier days, however, wider bounds were given to private reading" (Harnack, p. 62, fn. 1).

Depending on the literary tastes of various writers, scholars and ministers, these lists varied from location to location (Harnack, pp. 67-68, 73-74). The Muratorian fragment contains the Apocalypse of Peter and Wisdom of Solomon for reading, but with a warning. Heathen literature was not outrightly banned until after the Imperial Church was founded by Constantine (313 AD).

Doctrinal Wars: When the apostles sealed their writings, they were acutely aware

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of how they were being handled corruptly as shown by Peter's reference to ignorant and unstable men who "twisted" and "distorted" Paul's words (II Pet. 3:16). While the context of Second Peter reveals the apostles were focusing on the interpretation rather than the copying of the text, Pickering explained that "since any alteration of the text may result in a different interpretation we may reasonably infer that their concern for the truth would include the faithful transmission of the text. Indeed, we could scarcely ask for a clearer expression of this concern than that given in Rev. 22:18-19" (Pickering, p. 107).

While many of the literary works of early heretics no longer exist, their corrupting influence on the apostolic text cannot be underestimated. Various forms of Gnosticism began to plague Christianity about 50-51 AD (II Thes. 2:7). It was not until the 400s AD that the ancient forms of Gnosticism largely passed away, only to reappear repeatedly in subtle forms throughout the centuries (Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, p. 490). Gnosticism was a movement within the early Church that combined and proclaimed the higher knowledge (Gk., *gnosis*) of the false Hellenistic religions under the guise of Christianity (cf. Knight, p. 41). It was represented by many schools of thought at different periods, and in particular affected the educated classes (Ibid., p. 489). Some of its sects departed farther than others from the apostolic Christian faith, "but even in its mildest form Gnosticism was a danger to the Church" (Ibid.).

Historian Alan Knight described one of the insidious intents of early Gnostics: "Gnostics saw themselves as a reformation, not of Judaism but of the New Testament church, the so-called Primitive or 'Jewish' Christianity that prevailed for a time after the founding of the church in the 30s A.D. For them, Primitive Christianity was a partial enlightenment. Nevertheless, it is decidedly inferior precisely because it failed to completely break its ties with the deception of Old Testament religion...In effect, Gnosticism believed its commission in the world was to convert Primitive Christianity to a more advanced spirituality based on Hellenistic theology, at the same [time] to wean Primitive Christians away from their religious roots in the Old Testament" (Knight, p. 43).

The New Testament contains numerous warnings against Gnostics who were infiltrating the early Church and spreading their heretical views. Already in the second half of the first century AD, various competing Gnostic groups were claiming that they alone practiced genuine Christianity (Ibid., pp. 1, 41). In his second epistle to the Thessalonians (51 AD), Paul cautioned the brethren to be aware of an apostate system, which he called the "mystery of lawlessness" that was already developing in the early Church (cf. II Thess. 2:1-12). Paul's reference was undoubtedly to early Gnostic antinomianism, a belief that there was no law or restraint placed on mankind. The books of Ephesians, Colossians, I and II Timothy, Titus, II Thessalonians, II Peter, I and II John, Jude and Revelation 2-3 all speak of the influence of first-century Gnosticism.

First-century Gnostics listed in the Bible include Nicolas and Simon Magus, the sorcerer we encounter during Peter and John's tour of Samaria (Act 6:5; Acts 8; Rev. 2). The second-century Syrian heretic Saturninus was a disciple of Menander, who was a follower of Simon. Knight explained that this specific Gnostic sect advocated an ascetic lifestyle, renouncing marriages and the eating of meat, and believed that *Jehovah*, the God of the Old Testament, was one of seven angels involved in the creation. Knight added that the sect claimed the Christ came to destroy the worship of the God of the Jews and to save all who merely believed in Him, a doctrine prevalent among many Protestant sects (Knight, p. 53).

"As time progressed, Gnosticism flourished in many new forms as it continued to mix and match ideas from the broad range of Hellenistic religion and New Testament Christianity" (Ibid., p. 51). The second century AD witnessed the destructive influence of Gnostic teachers such as Carpocrates, Saturninus, Marcion, Apelles, Basilides, Valentinus

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and Mani of Babylon (Ibid., pp. 51-60). Most of these early Gnostics began their “schools” in Alexandria and later moved to the empire’s capital, Rome, attaching themselves to the early Roman church. A description of the first- and second-century Gnostics and their beliefs is available in Knight’s *Primitive Christianity in Crisis* (cf. pp. 45-61).

It is in this period that we detect trends that influenced the copying of key Western and Egyptian uncial manuscripts and early versions. History offers numerous glimpses of false teachers and brethren who corrupted the Scriptures.

Probably the most dangerous was the Gnostic teacher **Marcion** (100-165 AD), a wealthy ship owner and the son of a bishop of Sinope in Pontus (northern Asia Minor). His father excommunicated him due to his immorality and Gnostic heresies. Marcion journeyed through Asia Minor where he met Polycarp, who rejected his false views (Eusebius, 4:14). Marcion continued westward until he arrived in Rome about 140 AD, where he purchased entry into a local congregation. There he taught for about four years until the local congregation excommunicated him for his beliefs. He then organized his followers into a separate community.

Marcion’s gospel was wholly a message of love to the absolute exclusion of God’s law. This extreme Gnostic antinomian doctrine led him to reject the Hebrew Scriptures and to make a distinction between the God of the Old Testament and the New Testament. He produced a version of the New Testament, including a dissected Luke’s Gospel and 10 Pauline Epistles (not the pastorals), because he felt these books alone reflected the contrast between law and grace. In Luke’s Gospel, Marcion carved out anything that connected Christ with nature and history. By 400 AD, His church had grown and spread to Italy, Egypt, Palestine, Arabia, Syria, Cyprus and Persia (Cross, p. 870; Bromiley, p. 490).

Tatian (ca. 160 AD), a former philosophy student, pupil of Justin Martyr and later leader of the ascetic Gnostic sect of Encratites, edited the Gospels into a collection about the life of Jesus called the *Diatessaron*. He altered the expressions of the apostles to harmonize with and to correct the style of the Gospel narratives (Eusebius, 4:29). It was among the various Encratic sects that many of the apocryphal gospels and acts were written (Cross, p. 457).

The Gnostic **Theodotus** (ca. 190 AD) and his disciples claimed that Jesus was a mere man. For this belief Victor, the bishop of Rome, excommunicated them. Eusebius described their corruption of the New Testament text in their attempts to “correct” it: “... for should any one collect and compare their copies one with another, he would find them greatly at variance among themselves. For the copies of Asclepidotus will be found to differ from those of Theodotus. Copies of many you may find in abundance, altered, by the eagerness of their disciples to insert each one his own corrections, as they call them, i.e., their corruptions....For neither can they deny that they have been guilty of the daring act, when the copies were written with their own hand, nor did they receive such Scriptures from those by whom they were instructed in the elements of the faith; nor can they show copies from which they were transcribed” (Eusebius 5:28).

Many ancient apologists record that heretics tampered with the New Testament text. Tertullian, an African Church scholar (ca. 160-225 AD), lamented: “Now **this heresy** of yours does not receive certain Scriptures; and whichever of them it does receive, it perverts **by means of additions and diminutions** [omissions], for the accomplishment of its own purpose” (Tertullian, *On Prescription Against Heresies*, 1:17:1, emphasis added).

See Appendix W, page 868, for an overview of the Gnostic roots of the Egyptian church.

Doctrinal Controversy Safeguards Text: Research shows that the majority of deliberate changes to the apostolic text, heretical or otherwise, ceased by 200 AD. The frequent condemnations of heretical activity by early apologists (defenders of Christian-

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ity) like Tertullian had the effect of putting early copyists of Scripture on guard (Elliott, p. 24). According to the late George D. Kilpatrick, a British textual scholar: “From the third century onward even an Origen could not effectively alter the text....From the early third century onward the freedom to alter the text ... can no longer be practised. Tatian [160 AD] is the last author to make deliberate changes in the text of whom we have explicit information. Between Tatian and Origen Christian opinion had so changed that it was no longer possible to make changes in the text whether they were harmless or not.... If these changes had been confined to style and other indifferent features, this production of new variants may have gone on indefinitely. But the making of doctrinal changes provoked a fierce reaction. We have ample evidence on this period....Tatian also came under censure for his treatment of the Gospels and we may infer that it was the doctrinal changes of the second century heretics which led to the change in the Church’s attitude. In order to avoid giving countenance to these heretical activities, even relatively harmless stylistic changes were no longer [widely] permitted and, as we have seen, Tatian’s stylistic alterations were condemned....by the end of the second century A.D. Christian opinion had hardened against deliberate alteration of the text, however harmless the alteration might be” (Ibid., pp. 22-24).

It was through this process that God began gently leading all Christendom back to the pure apostolic text. According to Burgon, God allowed deliberate variations as a means of stirring His Church to action: “But the Church, in her collective capacity, hath nevertheless ... been perpetually purging herself of those shamefully depraved [Greek] copies which once everywhere abounded within her pale: retaining only such an amount of discrepancy in her Text as might serve to remind her children that they carry their ‘treasure in earthen vessels,’—as well as to stimulate them to perpetual watchfulness and solicitude for the purity and integrity of the Deposit [the Biblical texts]. Never, however, up to the present hour, hath there been any complete eradication of all traces of the attempted mischief,—any absolute getting rid of every depraved copy extant. These are found to have lingered on anciently in many quarters. *A few such copies linger on to the present day.* The wounds were healed, but the scars remained” (Burgon, *The Revision Revised*, p. 335).

During the second century, clashes between Hellenized and apostolic Christianity fueled a controversy that served to protect the original text from corruption. Asia Minor and the Aegean coast of Greece continued to be the heartland of apostolic Christianity. This is confirmed by the stance the region’s churches took in the Quartodeciman controversies. This dispute was over whether the Passover should be observed on a fixed day of the Hebrew lunar month Nisan as initially enjoined in the Mosaic injunction (Ex. 12:6) or Easter on the following Sunday (Cross, pp. 1037, 1150). The former practice was the ancient tradition of Asia Minor, the Aegean coast and Antioch. Both Polycarp and Polycrates figure predominately in this early battle with Hellenized Christianity. A full account of both episodes (ca. 155 and 190 AD) is available in Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* (Eusebius, 5:23-25). (See page 312 for statement by Polycrates.)

In the end, the Asiatic churches refused to adopt Easter to emphasize Jesus’ resurrection as had Rome, Egypt and the Western churches. The Asiatic churches instead continued to keep the Passover in commemoration of Jesus’ death, as the Savior had commanded the apostles and Church (John 13:14-17; I Cor. 11:23-26). In an attempt to quell Passover observance, the Roman bishop Victor excommunicated Polycrates and the churches in Asia Minor for their refusal to keep Easter; however, Ireneaus exhorted Victor to maintain peace in the Church as his predecessor Anicetus had done 40 years earlier during a similar confrontation over the Passover (Eusebius, 5:24:9-11).

Hills described the effects of this bitter debate upon the state of the apostolic text in Asia Minor: “This controversy no doubt induced in the minds of the Christians of Asia

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Minor a violent prejudice against the Western text, which they knew to have emanated from Rome. And the fact that the Alexandrian Church had sided with Rome in this controversy would combine with their traditional jealousy of that great Egyptian city to create in them a similar aversion to the Alexandrian text. Thus, throughout the second and third centuries [100-300 AD] and down into the middle of the fourth century [300s AD], the rank and file of the Christians of Asia Minor, and probably also of Antioch, remained loyal to the true New Testament text, which had become the traditional text of their native region, and resolute in their rejection of the Western and Alexandrian texts. It was in this way, no doubt, that the true text was preserved by the providence of God during these early troubled years" (Hills, 1956 ed., p. 55).

The Quartodeciman controversy did not disappear. Chrysostom (ca. 347-407 AD), bishop and expository preacher, encountered an enclave of faithful believers in 387 AD, while pastoring a church in Antioch in Pisidia (central Asia Minor). In a series of homilies entitled "Against the Jews," he reproved those whom he labeled "brothers" in the faith for forsaking the Imperial Greek church and returning to Sabbath and festival observance (Chrysostom, "Against the Jews," 1:1:6-8, 1:2:5, 1:6:14). Besides displaying his confusion over God's festivals, Chrysostom documented in his homilies the *public* subversion of apostolic Christianity in 325 AD by the ecumenical Council held at Nicea in Bithynia (Chrysostom, 1:3:1-4). One of the major issues discussed at the Council meetings was the observance of Passover. The Council finally ruled that observance of the ancient custom of Passover was a crime, punishable by death.

Letters from the Council and Constantine show the areas of the empire that had at this time accepted the custom of Easter, which was observed on the first Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox: Italy, Rome, North Africa, Egypt, Spain, Gaul, Britain, Libya, Achaia (Greece), portions of Asia, Pontus (northern Asia Minor) and Cilicia (near Tarsus). Those who refused were of the apostolic churches located in the south-central and western portions of Asia Minor. They remained loyal to God until they fled into the valleys and mountainous areas of Europe and Asia Minor in the fifth century (Rev. 12:6). Research also confirms that large segments of the Celtic church in Britain held fast to the doctrine of the apostles, including the observance of the Passover, upward into the sixth century AD (Hardinge, *The Celtic Church in Britain*, pp. 9-12, 20-21, 75-76).

Prestige Texts: The cultural and doctrinal wars of the second century served as the stimulus for the creation of two local Greek texts. Hills described the second-century attempts of scholars and grammarians to corrupt the apostolic text: "Beginning with the Western and Alexandrian texts, we see that they represent two nearly simultaneous departures from the True Text which took place during the 2nd century. The making of these two texts proceeded, for the most part, according to two entirely different plans. The scribes that produced the Western text regarded themselves more as interpreters than as mere copyists....they made bold alterations in the text and added many interpolations. The makers of the Alexandrian text, on the other hand, conceived of themselves as grammarians. Their chief aim was to improve the style of the sacred text. They made few additions to it. Indeed, their fear of interpolation was so great that they often went to the opposite extreme of wrongly removing genuine readings from the text. Because of this the Western text is generally longer than the True Text and the Alexandrian is generally shorter.

"As all scholars agree, the Western text was the text of the Christian Church at Rome and the Alexandrian text that of the Christian scribes and scholars of Alexandria. For this reason these two texts were prestige-texts, much sought after by the wealthier and more scholarly members of the Christian community. The True Text, on the other hand, continued in use among the poorer and less learned Christian brethren. These

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humble believers would be less sensitive to matters of prestige and would no doubt prefer the familiar wording of the True Text to the changes introduced by the new prestige-texts...they would be little tempted to write the variant readings of the prestige-texts into the margins of their own New Testament manuscripts and would be even less inclined to make complete copies of these prestige-texts. And since they were poor, they would be unable to buy new manuscripts containing these prestige-texts.

“For all these reasons, therefore the True Text would continue to circulate among these lowly Christian folk virtually undisturbed by the influence of other texts. Moreover, because it was difficult for these less prosperous Christians to obtain new manuscripts, they put the ones they had to maximum use. Thus all these early manuscripts of the True Text were eventually worn out. None of them seems to be extant today. The papyri which do survive seem for the most part to be prestige-texts which were preserved in the libraries of ancient Christian schools. According to Aland (1963), both the Chester Beatty and the Bodmer Papyri may have been kept at such an institution. But the papyri with the True Text were read to pieces by the believing Bible students of antiquity. In the providence of God they were used by the Church. They survived long enough, however, to preserve the True (Traditional) New Testament Text during this early period and to bring it into the period of triumph that followed” (Hills, 1984, pp. 183-184).

(See Appendix V, page 858, for a reconstruction of the history of the Alexandrian text. Since nearly all scholars reject the Western text as a genuine representative of the apostolic text, we refer the reader to the following sources for additional detailed information: Hills, 1956 ed., pp. 39-40, 51-52; 1984 ed., pp. 121-126.)

Early Versions Emerge: The testimonies of the *Itala* and Syriac Peshitta versions of the New Testament are pivotal in the textual debate because both witness to the early existence of the Byzantine Text. Until the twentieth century, most scholars believed that the Peshitta was translated in the early 100s AD. An overview of how the testimonies of these versions became corrupted from interaction with the prestige texts follows.

The Western text gained acceptance in other parts of the empire due to the influence of the Roman church and because “it circulated from Rome, the capital and centre of all things” (Hills, 1984 ed., p. 121). By 200 AD, it had spread to Gaul, Africa and Egypt, where its readings infected the Old Latin versions and the Alexandrian text (Hills, 1956 ed., p. 51). The readings of the Western text were transported to the East through Tatian’s *Diatessaron* (160 AD), which was made in Rome from manuscripts of this type (Kenyon, *The Greek Text of the Bible*, pp. 121-122). The corrupt readings of the Western text also spread to the Old Syriac version from the *Diatessaron*.

Latin-speaking brethren, living in remote areas to the west of Rome and in North Africa, would naturally have looked to the Roman church for Greek manuscripts for use in translation. This accounts for the presence of Western readings in Old Latin versions and in many of the citations of the Western Church Fathers (e.g., Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine). The charge of “barbarism” made against the Old Latin versions undoubtedly arose from the production of informal translations by Latin-speaking brethren with no training in Greek and the Italic language spoken in Rome, Milan and other large cities in the West (Miller, *A Guide to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 76). This background adds clarity to the later statement of the North African bishop Augustine (354-430 AD): “in the earliest days of the faith whenever any Greek codex fell into the hands of any one who thought that he had slight familiarity ... with Greek and Latin, he was bold enough to attempt to make a translation” (Burgon, p. 141 citing Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana* ii.16).

The influence of the “Christian university” at Alexandria secured for the text of that great city an unprecedented authority. As expected, readings of the Alexandrian text can be found among the more educated and scholarly Christians (Church Fathers) and in

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those ancient versions whose translators obtained their Greek manuscripts from the celebrated theological library at Caesarea, which the Alexandrian scholar Origen helped build (Burgon, p. 153). The circulation of this text was enhanced because it did not exhibit the alleged “barbaric style” of the *Koiné* apostolic text.

This portrayal explains the origins of the corrupt readings in the Old Syriac and the numerous nonauthoritative Old Latin versions made independently of each other (cf. Burgon, pp. 140-141). It also accounts for the circulation of the **local** prestige texts outside of Egypt and Rome.

According to Hills, beginning in the 300s AD there appears to have been a “God-guided movement of the Church away from the readings which were false and misleading and toward those which were true and trustworthy” (Hills, 1984 ed., p. 187).

Numerous competing and highly corrupt versions of the Old Latin led Damasus to request Jerome to revise the Old Latin Bible in 383 AD. Jerome’s Latin version arose from his comparison of the Old Latin versions with “old” Greek manuscripts. Comparative studies of readings indicate Jerome preferred the Alexandrian text and generally avoided the readings of the Western text (Sparks, “Jerome as a Bible Scholar,” *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, pp. 529-530).

After completing an analysis to ascertain Jerome’s choice of text, Oxford University professor H.F.D. Sparks concluded: “Frequently, no doubt, doctrinal and other considerations, apart from purely textual, determined his choice, so that it is difficult to be certain, in absence of a direct statement, on what grounds in any instance his preference for a particular reading is based. Jerome is always arbitrary” (Sparks, p. 529). This unpredictability sparked an immediate outrage by the fourth-century Latin theologian Helvidius when Jerome changed the reading of Luke 2:33 from the traditional Byzantine/Old Latin one of “And Joseph and his mother wondered,” to “His father and mother wondered” (as found in the early uncials). Helvidius accused Jerome of using corrupt Greek manuscripts to perpetuate the popular doctrine that Mary had been a virgin her entire life and that the brethren of the Lord were not his natural brothers and sisters (Schaff, “The Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary,” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, p. 730). The charge that Jerome changed the Old Latin text solely for theological reasons cannot be *wholly* maintained in light of contemporary research, which shows that in his revision of the Gospels, he selected some readings (e.g., Luke 23:34) that support the Byzantine Text, much like those of Codex Alexandrinus (Hills, pp. 187-188). Codex Alexandrinus is Byzantine in nature in the Gospels and Alexandrian in the remaining New Testament books.

The “lineal descendants” of the *Itala* were preserved by faithful brethren in northern Italy, southern France (Vaudois) and the Celtic church of Britain (Johnson, “The Real Truth about the Waldenses Bible and the Old Latin Version,” pp. 29-32, 35-36; Hardinge, p. 31). Eventually, remains of the *Itala* emerged in the earliest translations of the Waldenses about 1,200 years later during the Reformation (cf. Rev. 12:6). The Christians in Britain were able to retain faithful copies of the *Itala* until it “was gradually modified with phrases from the Vulgate” and the readings of other Old Latin versions after the Romanizing of the Celtic church in the late 500s AD (Hardinge, p. 32).

While the Old Syriac appears to have circulated to some extent in the Syrian church until the mid-300s AD, Tatian’s *Diatessaron* was confined *only* to a region along the upper Euphrates valley (Hills, p. 187; Burgon, p. 134). Two incomplete surviving manuscripts containing only the Gospels support the Old Syriac: the Curetonian (400s AD) and Old Sinaitic (300s AD) (Kenyon, p. 117). The fact that the Old Sinaitic is a palimpsest, meaning that its text was erased and leaves reused, shows that Syrian Christians did not value its corrupt readings after this time. The readings of these early fragments contradict each other in 21 passages; in many instances, both manuscripts support

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the Byzantine Text (Kenyon, pp. 121-122; Hills, p. 174).

There is no solid evidence to refute the claim that the Peshitta served as the standard version among the common Syrian brethren, a position that it held long before the Old Syriac was produced probably by the sect of the Nestorians in the 200s AD (Burgon, pp. 133-134). This conclusion is supported by the fact that all opposing sects of the Syrian church (Nestorians and Monophysites) accept the Peshitta as their authoritative text (Hills, pp. 173-174). This could not have happened had the Peshitta been created by the bishop Rabbula (a Monophysite) during the fifth century when the division in the Syrian church occurred as some have wrongly supposed. According to scholar Dr. Jack Moorman, the presence of some corrupt Old Syriac verses in the Peshitta and the omission of the book of Revelation can be traced to the influence of Origen and the Caesarean library (Moorman, *Forever Settled*, p. 161). According to textual scholar A. Voobus' *Investigations into the Text of the New Testament Used by Rabbula*, the original Syriac Peshitta also possessed II Peter, II John, Jude and Revelation, which it currently omits (Moorman, p. 161).

Other versions of the New Testament based upon the apostolic (Byzantine) text were produced as Christianity spread to remote areas and Greek was no longer the common language (after 330 AD): Gothic (383 AD), Ethiopic (300/400 AD) and Armenian (early 400s AD) (Kenyon, pp. 126, 149; Moorman, p. 164). Of special note is the Armenian version, supposedly first translated in part from the Old Syriac and in part from an unknown Greek text. After the Council of Ephesus (431 AD) condemned Nestorianism (a denial that Jesus was God and man in one person), the Armenian church secured "correct" copies of the Byzantine Text from Constantinople to revise its version of the New Testament (Kenyon, p. 126). The original Georgian version (300s AD) was initially based upon the Armenian version since this Caucasus region was evangelized from neighboring Armenia (Ibid., p. 127-128). The people likewise revised their version in the 1000s AD according to accurate Byzantine manuscripts after they realized their native translation contained corrupt readings of the Old Syriac.

Transmission (300-400 AD): The single most important event of the first millennium following John's canonization of the New Testament was the institution of Hellenized Christianity in 313 AD. Prior to this time, Roman emperors had launched ten persecutions with the intent of obliterating Christianity. Countless thousands were tortured and martyred for God's Word, such as Polycarp, the Savior's brother Simeon (ca. 107 AD) and Ignatius (ca. 110 AD), the second bishop of Antioch.

None of these repeated campaigns to stamp out Christianity was as severe as the oppression of emperor Diocletian (284-305 AD). Christians had enjoyed 40 years of peace after the issuing of the Rescript of Galienus (260 AD). Encouraged by his tetrarch Galerius, Diocletian suddenly issued a series of edicts beginning in 303 AD that inaugurated the destruction of church buildings and the burning of Christian books. The army imprisoned and tortured, and at times murdered, any clergy who resisted. Church readers often gave their manuscripts to brethren to protect. In 304 AD, another edict extended the persecution and bloodshed to all Christians. Many rural brethren hid their manuscripts in clay jars (in Egypt) or walls in order to save them from destruction.

Aland described the destruction of GNT manuscripts: "Persecution then broke out again with a sudden ferocity in the reign of Diocletian as paganism rallied in a final combat against Christianity....the period of persecution which lasted almost ten years in the West and much longer in the East was characterized by the systematic destruction of church buildings (and church centers), and any manuscripts that were found in them were publicly burned. Church officials were required to surrender for public burning all holy books in their possession or custody. Although clergy who submitted to the demands of the state were branded as traitors and defectors from the faith, their number was by no

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means small. The result was a widespread scarcity of New Testament manuscripts which became all the more acute when persecution ceased" (Aland, pp. 64-65).

The scene changed drastically after 313 AD when Constantine (306-337 AD) signed the Edict of Toleration in Milan. Christianity became a legal religion, and Christians were granted full liberty (Halley, p. 759). While the subject of Constantine's conversion has been debated by numerous scholars, it appears that Constantine used Christianity as a glue to hold the factionous empire together, because by the end of the imperial persecution, half of the Roman Empire's population was Christian (Halley, p. 759). The concentration of Christians was highest in Asia Minor, northeastern Greece, Cyprus, the region around Edessa (Syria) and eastward to Armenia (Aland, p. 53).

Hence, the emperor generously extended royal favor to Christians to rebuild church buildings; ministers became exempt from taxes, and Christians were elected to public office (Halley, p. 759). Constantine was so repulsed by the addiction of Rome's aristocracy to paganism that he moved the capital from Rome to Byzantium in 327 AD, renaming it Constantinople.

Following the persecution there was an urgent need for new manuscripts for public reading. "For when Christianity could again engage freely in missionary activity there was a tremendous growth in both the size of the existing churches and the number of new churches. There also followed a sudden demand for large numbers of manuscripts in all provinces of the empire. Privately made copies contributed significantly, but they were inadequate to satisfy this growing need, which could be met only by large copying houses [scriptoria]. Bishops were no longer prevented from opening their own scriptoria: any text used as the exemplar in such a production center would naturally be widely distributed and wield a dominant influence" (Aland, p. 65).

While the local prestige texts were undoubtedly copied in educated, scholarly or "official" circles in Rome, Alexandria and Caesarea, privately-made manuscripts in predominately Christian areas would have formed the majority of the new manuscripts produced and distributed to churches. This would have occurred in Asia Minor eastward to Armenia, northeastern Greece, Cyprus and parts of Syria, where Christians comprised half of the population.

It was during this period of time that a return to the apostolic (Byzantine) text occurred. To account for the sudden and widespread appearance of the Byzantine Text at this time, some textual scholars, like Aland, have postulated that it flourished due to a centralized ecclesiastical distribution. While many bishops did control their churches more tightly after the inception of the Imperial church due to the spread of heresies like Arianism, there is no solid historical evidence that bishops replaced the manuscripts in their churches with those Byzantine in nature on a widespread scale. The only possible exception is Theodoret (ca. 423-466 AD), bishop of Cyrrhus in Syria, who removed 200 copies of Tatian's corrupt *Diatessaron* from his churches, replacing them with authentic copies of the Gospels. We can only speculate concerning the manuscript type.

"Recent studies in the Traditional (Byzantine) Text indicate still more clearly that this was not an official text imposed upon the Church by ecclesiastical authority or by the influence of any outstanding leader. Westcott and Hort, for example, regarded Chrysostom as one of the first to use this text and promote its use in the Church. But studies by Geerlings and New (1931) and by Dicks (1948) appear to indicate that Chrysostom could hardly have performed this function, since he himself does not seem always to have used the Traditional Text. Photius (815-897) also, patriarch of Constantinople, seems to have been no patron of the Traditional Text, for according to studies by Birdsall (1956-58), he customarily used a mixed type of text thought to be Caesarean. The lectionaries also indicate that the Traditional Text could not have been imposed on the Church by ecclesiastical authority. These, as has been stated, are manuscripts containing

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the New Testament Scripture lessons appointed to be read at various worship services of the ecclesiastical year. According to the researches of Colwell (1933) and his associates, the oldest of these lessons are not Traditional but “mixed” in text. This would not be the case if Westcott and Hort’s theory were true that the Traditional Text from the very beginning had enjoyed official status” (Hill, 1984 ed., pp. 179-180).

In addition, scholars have tried to explain this phenomenon by alleging that Diocletian’s persecution destroyed a disproportionate number of prestige text manuscripts or that the persecutions were more severe in areas where these texts circulated.

Dr. Maurice Robinson, textual scholar and professor at Southern Baptist Seminary, examined the fallacies behind these arguments: “This really assumes too much: an initial presumption is that a non-Byzantine text dominated the Eastern Empire; then, when persecutors demanded scriptures for destruction, the Alexandrian text alone was overwhelmingly surrendered. Persecutions, however, were not selective in their textual targets. The MSS surrendered and destroyed in a given region would reflect the general proportion of existing MSS, regardless of texttype; so too those which survived. Were 1000 MSS destroyed in a local area of which only 100 were Byzantine, even a 90% decimation still would leave a survival proportion similar to that which was destroyed. One cannot stretch credulity to presume a reversal of texttype dominance as the result of basically random persecutions...had the Alexandrian text been original, it should have dominated the Greek-speaking portion of the Eastern Empire. It would retain its dominance even if the text in any other region were utterly destroyed. But if Alexandrian dominance did not continue, one should assume only a local and regional aspect for that text, and understand that before Constantine the Byzantine Textform had already become dominant in the primary Greek-speaking region of the Empire. This would exclude or minimize Alexandrian influence outside of Egypt and Palestine. Either way, the claimed early dominance of the Alexandrian text is called into question” (Robinson, “New Testament Textual Criticism: The Case for the Byzantine Priority,” *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism*, pars. 81-82).

Because no distinct Byzantine manuscripts have been found that existed before 400 AD, other scholars have speculated that the Byzantine Text was a product of a third- and fourth-century Church revision. They primarily point to Lucian (d. 312 AD), a biblical scholar from the theological school of Antioch, as the textual genius behind this revision. This explanation is inaccurate for several reasons.

First, although the theological school of Antioch was known for its accurate literal interpretation of Scripture in the first two centuries, it later became a haven for Arianism. Lucian is considered by most scholars to have been the father of Arianism, a heretical belief that Jesus was less divine than the Father and was created as an agent for creating the world. Lucian studied in schools in Edessa and Caesarea where he was influenced by the doctrines and textual studies of Origen. Early Arians like Arius and Eusebius of Nicomedia (Constantine’s court bishop) were Lucian’s pupils and they claimed “Lucian’s teaching was fundamental to their doctrine. He is thus credited with subordinationist views of Christ” (Ferguson, s.v. “Lucian of Antioch,” *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, p. 697). With the condemnation of Arius and Arianism at the Council of Nicea (325 AD), it is highly improbable that orthodox scholars and Church members would have adopted a text tainted by the Arian leanings of the later Antiochian school. The Armenian church’s rejection of its earlier version of the New Testament from the Old Syriac after the condemnation of Nestorianism by the Council of Ephesus (431 AD) serves as an ancient example of how sensitive Christians were to these matters.

Second, there is *no* historical record that the Byzantine Text was the creation of a deliberate recension (revision) as was the case with Jerome’s revision of the Old Latin versions. Dutch textual scholar Jakob Van Bruggen examined the only citations that dis-

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cuss a Lucianic revision of the Septuagint (LXX) and New Testament, which are in a preface to the Latin Gospels of Jerome (Hieronymus): “The historical starting-point for this recension-idea is sought with the person of Lucianus of Antioch. That we, however, can not speak with great certainty here, appears from the fact that Hort did not do anything more than mention the possibility that Lucianus stands at the beginning of the Byzantine text....It is also not possible to prove historically that Lucianus of Antioch offered a revised text of the *New Testament*. Even though for a long time, since De Lagarde, people have anxiously searched for the assumed LXX-recension of Lucianus, some are at present even sceptical concerning Lucianus’ revisionary work on the *Old Testament*. What Hieronymus’ says in mutual contradictory statements about the work of Lucianus, also gives little support. In any case there is no clear indication in Hieronymus’ statements of influential work that Lucianus was thought to have done on the Greek *New Testament*. If he was busy with a revision of this text, his work remained of very limited value. This also appears to be so from the fact that the later *Decretum Gelasianum* [sixth-century Latin document listing early doctrines and sacred books of the Roman church] speaks with aversion about some of Lucianic manuscripts. If the original Greek text is superseded by an inferior recension in the 4th and following centuries, then this process has left surprisingly few trails in the historiography” (Van Bruggen, *The Ancient Text of the New Testament*, pp. 17-18).

Van Bruggen added, “The fact that the Byzantine text is already used in the 4th century [300s AD] as a **normal text** proves that it must be from an earlier date and was not regarded as ‘new’” (Van Bruggen, p. 24, bold added).

Robinson explained how religious tolerance created an atmosphere for the apostolic (Byzantine) text to flourish: “Once the status of the churches had become sanctioned under Constantine, however, the predominantly ‘local’ nature of the church was permanently altered. Official sanction engendered wider communication between churches, including regional and Empire-wide councils. Greater communication meant wider travel and exchange of manuscripts among the churches and individual Christians. It was only natural that cross-comparison and correction of one manuscript by another should then proceed on a numerical and geographical scale far greater than ever before.

“The result of this spontaneous ‘improvement’ of manuscripts through cross-correction would not manifest itself immediately. Over the process of time, however, all manuscripts would slowly but inexorably tend toward a common and universally-shared text—a text with its own subgroups and minor differences among the manuscripts, but a text which was basically unitary in form and content, though not itself an ingrown ‘local text’ nor identical with any single local text. This ‘universal text’ could only be one which would approach the common archetype which lay behind all the local text forms. For the Greek manuscripts, that archetype could only be the autograph form itself” (Robinson, *The New Testament in the Original Greek according to the Byzantine/Majority Textform*, www.skypoint.com, p. 6).

Van Bruggen explained: “Closer examination of the Byzantine tradition has shown, in the period after Hort, that several tendencies can be pointed out in this tradition. Von Soden distinguished various layers in these Koine manuscripts. It proved to be impossible to describe the layers as a variation arising within a group of manuscripts, which in fact go back to one archetype [i.e., a Lucianic revision]. That there is much agreement between all these manuscripts does not mean that they all come from one and the same source. The later research-work done by Lake and Colwell did change the picture given by Von Soden, but at the same time it has shown even more clearly that it is better to describe the Byzantine textual tradition as a collection of converging textual traditions than as a varying reproduction of one archetype. This fact now prevents us from thinking of one recension as the source for the text that is found in the majority of the

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manuscripts....one can not simply reduce the large majority of manuscripts to one vote and then only a secondary vote” (Van Bruggen, p. 19). **Thus, Dr. F.J.A. Hort’s theory that the testimony of Byzantine manuscripts could be dismissed *en masse* because they came from the same parent manuscript is false.** Hort’s theory undergirds modern New Testament textual criticism.

In addition to improved communication and some scribal cross-comparison of manuscripts, Hills noted that new heretical controversies spurred Christians to reject the deficient readings of the prestige texts: “The great 4th-century [300s AD] conflict with the Arian heresy brought orthodox Christians to a theological maturity which enabled them, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, to perceive the superior doctrinal soundness and richness of the True Text. In ever increasing numbers Christians in the higher social brackets abandoned the corrupt prestige-texts which they had been using and turned to the well worn manuscripts of their poorer brethren, manuscripts which, though meaner in appearance, were found in reality to be far more precious, since they contained the True New Testament Text. No doubt they paid handsome sums to have copies made of these ancient books, and this was done so often that these venerable documents were worn out through much handling by the scribes. But before these old manuscripts finally perished, they left behind them a host of fresh copies made from them and bearing witness to the True Text. Thus it was that the True (Traditional) Text became the standard text now found in the vast majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts.

“The trend toward the True (Traditional) Text began with the common people ... and then rapidly built up such strength that the bishops and other official leaders were carried along with it. Chrysostom, for example, does not seem to have initiated this trend....There is evidence that the triumphal march of the Traditional (Byzantine) Text met with resistance in certain quarters. There were some scribes and scholars who were reluctant to renounce entirely their faulty Western, Alexandrian, and Caesarean texts. And so they compromised by following sometimes their false texts and sometimes the True (Traditional) Text. Thus arose those classes of mixed manuscripts described by von Soden and other scholars. This would explain also the non-Traditional readings which Colwell and his associates have found in certain portions of the lectionary manuscripts. And if Birdsall is right in his contention that Photius (815-897), patriarch of Constantinople, customarily used the Caesarean text, this too must be regarded as a belated effort on the part of this learned churchman to keep up the struggle against the Traditional Text. But his endeavor was in vain. Even before his time the God-guided preference of the common people for the True (Traditional) New Testament Text had prevailed, causing it to be adopted generally throughout the Greek-speaking Church” (Hills, pp. 185-186).

As Hills noted earlier, the older Byzantine manuscripts became worn out from overuse. This accounts for the lack of Byzantine manuscript evidence before 400 AD. A major “revolution” in the copying of the Greek manuscripts occurred at this time. Instead of using material made of cheap, fragile papyrus, scribes began copying the New Testament to costly and more durable parchment. Papyrus exemplars (model ancient manuscripts) were copied directly to parchment and then destroyed. Hills explained: “During the march of the Traditional (Byzantine) Text toward supremacy many manuscripts of the Traditional type must have perished. The investigations of Lake (1928) and his associates indicate that this was so. ‘Why,’ he asked, ‘are there only a few fragments (even in the two oldest of the monastic collections, Sinai and St. Saba) which come from a date earlier than the 10th century? There must have been in existence many thousands of manuscripts of the gospels in the great days of Byzantine prosperity, between the 4th and the 10th centuries. There are now extant but a pitifully small number. Moreover, the amount of direct genealogy which has been detected in extant codices is

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almost negligible. Nor are many known manuscripts sister codices.’

“As a result of these investigations, Lake found it ‘hard to resist the conclusion that the scribes usually destroyed their exemplars when they copied the sacred books.’ If Lake’s hypothesis is correct, then the manuscripts most likely to be destroyed would be those containing the Traditional Text. For these were the ones which were copied most during the period between the 4th and the 10th centuries, as is proved by the fact that the vast majority of the later Greek New Testament manuscripts are of the Traditional type. The Gothic version moreover, was made about 350 A.D. from manuscripts of the Traditional type which are no longer extant. Perhaps Lake’s hypothesis can account for their disappearance. By the same token, the survival of old uncial manuscripts of the Alexandrian and Western type, such as *Aleph* [Sinaiticus], *B* [Vaticanus], and *D* [Beza], was due to the fact that they were rejected by the Church and not read or copied but allowed to rest relatively undisturbed on the library shelves of ancient monasteries” (Hills, 1984 ed., pp. 185-186).

When Constantine converted to Christianity, the *Koiné* Greek of the New Testament acquired “a largely religious hue” (Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*, p. 16). After the Roman Empire split in 395 AD, this ecclesiastical or Byzantine Greek was primarily spoken in the Eastern Empire with its capital at Constantinople. Latin continued to be the language of the Western Empire with its capital at Rome.

In the 300s AD, the Greek church instituted a lectionary system (Cross, p. 808). Closely mirroring the custom of public reading in synagogues, regular lesson books (synaxarion) were created for the weekly reading of the Gospels, Acts, and Pauline and General Epistles. Lesson books for special occasions (menologion) were used for feast days and private reading. The book of Revelation never became part of the lectionary system.

By becoming rooted in the liturgical (lectionary) system of the Greek Orthodox church, the readings of the Byzantine Text stabilized during the intervening centuries (600-1453 AD). Textual scholar Bruce Metzger explained: “It is noteworthy that substantially the same choice of Scripture passages in lectionary manuscripts dating from the seventh or eighth century [600-700s AD] is still followed by the Greek Orthodox Church today. Scholars have only recently begun to appreciate the importance of lectionary manuscripts in tracing the history of the text of the New Testament during the Byzantine period. Inasmuch as the form of the citation of the Scriptures in official liturgical books always tends to be conservative and almost archaic [ancient], lectionaries are valuable in preserving a type of text that is frequently much older than the actual age of the manuscript” (Metzger, p. 31).

While some of the earlier lectionaries exhibit different text types, nearly all of the 2,300 surviving lectionaries contain a text almost identical to the Byzantine Text (Aland, p. 169). This is very similar to what happened to Biblical Hebrew after Ezra instituted the triennial lectionary cycle for the synagogue. Once the Hebrew consonantal text became an inseparable part of this system, the Sopherim worked on developing a uniform, stable text for reading during the following centuries [400 BC-100 AD]. This task was virtually complete for the Hebrew Bible by 100 AD.

Unlike the Old Testament, **the lectionary system can only explain the stabilization of the text, not the trend toward uniformity in the Byzantine Text.** The uniformity of the Byzantine Text can only be explained by the fact that there were several pure streams of transmission that reflected the original apostolic text. Copyists sought out the most ancient and reliable manuscripts in their geographical area and conformed to the universal ancient text found in them.

Van Bruggen explained: “... history faces us with a tradition which has a convergent character. How can this be accounted for, if there is no clear reviser's hand [i.e.,

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Lucian] in the picture after all? This difficult question can be answered historically, as long as the tradition of the text is not described as secondary. The different centres of production in the 4th and following centuries aimed at a most faithful copy of the original or at a good restoration of the original text. Therefore, after the first centuries of persecution and dearth, a number of traditions [independent streams] automatically appeared which went back to the good text and came close to each other because they all orientated themselves on the most faithful copy of the original. The similar motive explains the trend towards an identical text. Yet, how is one to explain that various centres of production, independent of each other, show the same deviations? To say that government intervention caused this similarity ... has no historical grounds. If you wish the uniforming influence of the liturgy to explain this, then you are only transferring the problem into a different field.

“*Summarizing* we can say that the large number of manuscripts wherein the traditional or Church [Byzantine] text occurs, must carry weight. This striking number can not be disqualified with an appeal to Hieronymus’ statements about Lucianus of Antioch. It also can not be put aside as meaningless, as though it is to be traced back to one archetype in the 4th century. On the contrary, the large number deserves attention, since, in the midst of all sorts of variation, it confronts us with a growing uniformity... **It rather points in the direction of a simultaneous turning-back in various centres to the same central point of the original text. This text was sought in the oldest and most faithful manuscripts, and people conformed to it after centuries of textual disintegration** [of the local prestige texts]” (Van Bruggen, pp. 20-21, bold added).

Transmission (400-1453 AD): Once the return to the Byzantine Text was set in the fourth century, it could not be reversed. Hills described this trend: “During the Middle Ages [476-1500s AD] ... in every land there appeared a trend toward the orthodox Traditional (Byzantine) Text. Since the days of Griesbach naturalistic textual critics have tried to explain this fact by attributing it to the influence of ‘monastic piety.’ According to these critics, the monks in the Greek monasteries invented the orthodox readings of the Traditional Text and then multiplied copies of that text until it achieved supremacy. But if the Traditional (Byzantine) Text had been the product of Greek monastic piety, it would not have remained orthodox, for this piety included many errors such as the worship of Mary, of the saints, and of images and pictures. If the Greek monks had invented the Traditional Text, then surely they would have invented readings favoring these errors and superstitions. But as a matter of fact no such heretical readings occur in the Traditional Text.

“Here, then, we have a truly astonishing fact which no naturalistic historian or textual critic can explain. Not only in the Greek Church but also throughout all Christendom the medieval period was one of spiritual decline and doctrinal corruption. But in spite of this growth of error and superstition the New Testament text most widely read and copied in the medieval Greek Church was the orthodox, Traditional (Byzantine) Text. And not only so but also in the other regions of Christendom there was a trend toward this same Traditional Text. How shall we account for this unique circumstance? There is only one possible explanation....All during this corrupt medieval period God by His providence kept alive in the Greek Church ... a reverence for and an interest in the holy Scriptures....In this Traditional Text, found in the vast majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts, no readings occur which favor Mary worship, saint-worship, or image-worship. On the contrary, the Traditional Text was kept pure from these errors and gained ground everywhere” (Hills, pp. 188-189).

By the 800-900s AD, the writing of Greek manuscripts had advanced considerably. Another copying revolution occurred when the style used for writing manuscripts changed from the uncial to cursive script. Most likely established by the gifted writer

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and monastic reformer Theodore of Studium (759-826 AD), this trend became accepted throughout the Greek-speaking world.

Van Bruggen explained the significance of this copying revolution: "At this time the most important New Testament manuscripts written in majuscule [uncial] script were carefully transcribed into minuscule [cursive] script. It is assumed that after this transliteration-process the majuscule was taken out of circulation. This is also the conclusion of Lake: copyists destroyed their original after it had been 'renewed.' The import of this datum has not been taken into account enough in the present New Testament textual criticism. For it implies, that just the oldest, best and most customary manuscripts come to us in the new uniform of the minuscule script, does it not? This is even more cogent, since it appears that various archetypes can be detected in this transliteration-process for the New Testament. Therefore we do not receive one mother-manuscript through the flood-gates of transliteration, but several" (Van Bruggen, p. 26).

How do we know the earlier uncials were renewed in the form of later dated minuscules? Robinson reviewed the textual data: "This is evidenced even during the earliest portion of the minuscule era when both scripts coexisted. The minuscule MSS from the ninth through perhaps the first half of the eleventh century are very likely to represent uncial exemplars far earlier than those uncials which date from the ninth-century. Thus, many early minuscules are likely only two or three generations removed from papyrus ancestors of the fourth century or before, perhaps even closer. There are no indicators opposing such a possibility, and the ... independent nature of most early minuscule witnesses (their 'orphan' status as per Lake, Blake, and New) increases the likelihood of such a case. It becomes presumptuous to suppose otherwise, especially when many minuscules are already recognized by modern eclectics to contain 'early' texts" (Robinson, "New Testament Textual Criticism: The Case for the Byzantine Priority," par. 63).

This description of the textual data by Van Bruggen and Robinson means that the testimony of the minuscules cannot be rejected due to their age as Hort alleged. It likewise means that the *earliest* surviving papyri and uncials (Vaticanus and Sinaiticus) survived because people rejected them due to the corrupt nature of their texts: "Why do the surviving ancient manuscripts show another text-type? Because they are the only survivors of their generation, and because their survival is due to the fact that they were of a different text....There certainly were majuscules just as venerable and ancient as the surviving Vaticanus or Sinaiticus, which, like a section of the Alexandrinus, presented a Byzantine text. But they have been renewed into minuscule script and their majuscule-appearance has vanished" (Van Bruggen, pp. 26-27).

During the Middle Ages, the knowledge of Greek was kept alive in the Byzantine Empire (312-1453 AD), which until the eleventh century also included portions of southern Italy (Hills, 1956 ed., p. 118). Competent Byzantine scholars built upon the learning of ancient Greek grammarians, writing numerous dictionaries, grammars and lexicons. These would later serve as the tools for the revival of Greek learning at universities across Europe after the fall of the Byzantine Empire.

As the Ottoman Turks were advancing on Constantinople in 1453 AD, Greek scholars escaped with their Greek minuscule manuscripts of ancient classical works and the New Testament. Hills noted that these "learned refugees" were "eager to earn their living by giving instruction in the language and literature of ancient Greece. The Greek grammars which Chrysolarus, Gaza, and other Byzantine refugees introduced into Italy were based on the original work of Dionysius Thrax, which had been produced in Alexandria more than fifteen hundred years before. And when, at the end of the fifteenth century, the revival of Greek learning spread from Italy to northern and western Europe, these same Greek grammars were studied in England by Erasmus (1466-1536 AD), the

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editor of the first printed Greek New Testament....Thus the providence of God not only preserved intact the Greek New Testament text but also kept in continual existence the language in which it was written. Under God's guidance the knowledge of the Greek language was handed down for more than fifteen centuries in an unbroken stream of tradition to the leaders of the Protestant Reformation. It was because this stream flowed through the medieval Greek Church that this Church was appointed by God to be the custodian of the Greek New Testament text" (Ibid., p. 119).

Over the next several decades as these grammars and manuscripts spread throughout western Europe and their texts were studied, theologians and scholars realized that the Latin text (Jerome's version) they were using in liturgical worship was highly inaccurate. As a result, the authority of the Latin text declined considerably. Encouraged by rampant abuse (nepotism, simony, worldliness and indulgences) in the Roman Catholic church, many within its ranks began to question its authority and teachings. This set the stage for the Protestant Reformation. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the cathedral door in Wittenberg, thus inaugurating the German Reformation.

One year prior to this momentous event, another crucial milestone transpired: the publishing of the first Greek New Testament by the Dutch scholar Desiderius Erasmus, and Johann Froben in Basel, Switzerland (1516 AD). This moment marked another revolution: the transfer of the Greek New Testament from hand-copied manuscripts to the printed page, which made the New Testament text available to translators, theologians, reformers and scholars across western Europe, like Martin Luther and William Tyndale. Over the next 20 years, Erasmus continued to revise and update his Greek text, producing four additional editions. His fifth edition (1535) served as the basis for the 1550 text of Robert Stephen (Estienne). In time each of these texts became part of a collection of early printed Greek texts of the New Testament known as Textus Receptus.

Are these texts disadvantaged because their editors did not have access to the earlier Vatican or Sinaitic manuscripts? Sir Frederick Kenyon, the late director and principal librarian of the British Museum, related how a papal correspondent in 1533 sent Erasmus a number of selected readings from the Vaticanus, as "proof of its superiority" to the Textus Receptus (Kenyon, *Our Bible and The Ancient Manuscripts*, p. 138). Instead of affirming the readings, Erasmus rejected them against the overwhelming testimony of the Greek manuscripts, which he had classified and studied during the years prior to the printing of his 1516 edition.

The Textus Receptus is essentially 98-99 percent identical with the text found in the vast majority of Greek New Testament manuscripts (i.e., Byzantine Text). Referencing the research of Kirsopp Lake, Hills added: "As Lake (1902) remarks, there are only a 'few places' in which it has an 'unusual' (non-Byzantine) reading. These few departures of the Textus Receptus from the Byzantine text are nearly all attributable to Erasmus' occasional use of non-Byzantine sources, especially the Latin Vulgate. Most of these non-Byzantine readings are too trivial for special mention" (Hills, 1956 ed., p. 121).

By the end of the sixteenth century, the true apostolic (Byzantine) text had been restored to the priesthood of believers in order to fulfill the purpose for which it was written.

Verifying Scribal Accuracy

Thousands of scribes over centuries, and even millennia, manually copied the sacred texts. To gain some perspective, let us consider these facts:

- 1) Individual believers made copies of the New Testament (NT) books in the privacy of

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their homes for at least 300 years, often under persecution and duress (Metzger, p. 14). Literate people, often the church reader, most likely made copies for themselves and area congregations (Aland, pp. 55, 65; Comfort, p. 15).

- 2) There were generally no commercial scriptoria (professional copying centers) before 300 AD. The first recorded scriptorium existed in Egypt about 200 AD (Ibid., p. 59).
- 3) After Christianity received official sanction from the Roman Empire in 313 AD following the Diocletian persecutions (303-313 AD), the widespread need for NT manuscripts required that professional scribes be engaged (Ibid., p. 65).
- 4) For a millennium (400-1453 AD), Byzantine Greek monks produced copies of the New Testament books in monasteries (Metzger, p. 16).

Kenyon, described the human element involved in the copying of New Testament manuscripts. While his comments relate to the transmission of Greek copies, they can also be applied generally to Hebrew manuscripts: "...before the invention of printing every copy of a book had to be written by hand....Owing to the frailties of the human hand and eye and brain, it is impossible to copy large quantities of matter without making mistakes. These mistakes will be repeated by the next scribe who copies this manuscript, with additions of his own, so that as time goes on the text will tend to vary further and further from the true original. Attempts may be made from time to time to correct them, either by comparison with other copies or by conjecture....There thus grows up a number of *various readings* [textual variants], as they are called, with competing claims which a modern editor has to consider" (Kenyon, *The Text*, pp. 9-10).

Kenyon's comments capture the reality of copying any document by hand. Manual copying was not mechanical; scribes were vulnerable to fatigue and other factors that affected their copying. If the document was of considerable length, it was impossible for a scribe to copy a text without making some mistakes. Over time simple copying mistakes became an inevitable part of the transmission process, even in the best manuscripts.

Textual Fallacy: Kenyon's assertion that a scribe would perpetuate manuscript errors while making new errors of his own so that the text would vary further and further from the original is a false assumption. This falsehood reflects the often repeated and mostly unsupported theory of Dr. Hort: "The consequent presumption that **a relatively late text is likely to be a relatively corrupt text** is found true on application of all available texts in an overwhelming proportion of all extant MSS in which ancient literature has been preserved." Later he added that in the early centuries "**Textual purity**, as far as can be judged from the extant literature, **attracted hardly any interest**. There is no evidence to shew that care was generally taken to choose out for transcription the exemplars [model manuscripts] having highest claims to be regarded as authentic" (Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, vol. 2, pp. 5-6, 9, emphasis added).

Thus, Hort alleged that early brethren and Christian scribes exercised little care (textual purity) in how they copied the text, and that they did not use manuscripts of high character to monitor their work. According to Hort's false assumption, the further one moved away from the autographs, the more one would find manuscripts corrupted by the accumulation of errors. For Hort, this meant that the later Byzantine minuscules were presumed to be "corrupt and inferior" in comparison to the earlier uncials to which he appealed (i.e., Sinaiticus and Vaticanus). Since Hort's time, scholars have utilized the earlier dated Greek papyri and uncials in hope of recovering the original text of the New Testament. Hort based his appeals on the principles used in editing ancient secular literature and *assumed* scribal tendencies. A closer examination of these two areas reveals that both Kenyon and Hort were incorrect.

New Testament Scribal Habits: Each manuscript has its own history and character. Some are more reliable witnesses than others, depending on the scribes who copied

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them. A knowledge of individual scribal habits is essential when evaluating a manuscript and its readings (text).

Robinson presented his doctoral dissertation on the habits of Byzantine-era scribes entitled “Scribal Habits Among Manuscripts of the Apocalypse.” His research is one of the most significant contributions to the field of New Testament textual criticism to date and has superseded all other previous studies on scribal habits because it surveyed manuscripts from “widely diverse locales and time periods” (Robinson, “Scribal Habits Among Manuscripts of the Apocalypse,” p. 19). As part of his dissertation, Robinson conducted a limited statistical sampling of the singular readings of the 220 manuscripts of the book of Revelation collated by the late Herman C. Hoskier. Singular readings are those usually found in only one manuscript and likely produced by an individual scribe; they serve as indicators of what a scribe might normally do in a given situation. The intent was to evaluate classical textual principles based on the habits of scribes.

The findings of Robinson’s study **refuted** scholarly assumptions about the customs of Byzantine-era scribes and revealed that “generalizations concerning scribal habits *are* faulty; the textual handbooks thus need *drastic* revision” and “*generalizations* as to what a scribe ‘usually’ would or would not do are useless. *General* principles simply do *not* apply to most *specific* situations!” (Ibid., pp. 2, 199).

The **most important finding** of his study was that “Scribes were *not* the ‘great corrupters’ of the text as has been supposed. *Most* scribes—and especially those of the later ‘Byzantine era’—were extremely careful, their few corruptions being mostly accidental and the deliberate alterations being mostly stylistic changes of a minor nature. Such a conclusion appears to hold good for the entire NT since, if anything, the textual problems of the Apocalypse should have tended to *increase* corruption over that of the other NT books” (Ibid., p. 190).

While most Byzantine-era scribes were careful in their copying of the text of their exemplars (model manuscripts), Robinson’s research also demonstrated that “early Egyptian scribes ... plus a *very few* Byzantine-era scribes were both extremely careless and highly ‘editorial’” (Ibid., p. 2).

Since completing his initial research on scribal habits, Robinson has collated over 1,389 manuscripts of the adulteress narrative of John 7:53-8:11. This work offers scholars a virtually complete portrait of the textual facts regarding this section of Scripture and additional data concerning scribal habits. Robinson’s conclusions are based on verifiable data from the apparatus of modern printed texts and his own 30-year study of the GNT manuscripts. He argues that variant readings ought to be evaluated based on their transmission through time and conformity to scribal habits:

“A transmissional aspect needs to be recognized: an error or deliberate alteration made in a single MS [manuscript] or a few MSS is unlikely to be perpetuated in quantity. The many singular and quasi-singular readings that exist demonstrate the unlikelihood of a transcriptionally-based scribal creation extending much beyond any MS or MSS which first produced it. The chances that any sensible alteration subsequent to the autograph would extend beyond a small group of localized witnesses **would be slim**. Indeed, such readings as characterize minority texttypes witnesses [e.g., Alexandrian text] generally remain small and localized. That any deliberate alteration or transcriptional error [copying mistake] would gain the cooperation of scribes so as to dominate the entire stream of transmission is **a null proposition**: scribes demonstrably **did not engage in such a practice on the grand scale**. Earlier exemplars would serve to nullify the growth and widespread dissemination of most scribal alterations, thus holding in check the unbridled mass of minority variants” (Robinson, “New Testament Textual Criticism: The Case for the Byzantine Priority,” pars. 40, emphasis added).

Verifiable scribal patterns reveal that errors or deliberate changes in one manu-

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script seldom infected other manuscripts when both were produced by independent scribes; and the use of exemplars to monitor completed manuscripts coupled with the tendencies of scribes not to engage in such practices makes the widespread transmission of variations nearly impossible.

Robinson continued: "In both classical and NT [New Testament] traditions there thus seems to be a 'scribal continuity' of a basic 'standard text' which remained relatively stable, preserved by the unforced action of copyists through the centuries **who merely copied faithfully the text which lay before them**.... Apart from clear indication that such consensus texts were produced by formal recension [critical editing], it would appear that **normal scribal activity and transmissional continuity would preserve in most manuscripts 'not only a very ancient text, but a very pure line of very ancient text'**" (Robinson, par. 23, emphasis added).

For the mathematical probabilities against any other interpretation of the textual data, see Zane C. and David M. Hodges' work entitled "The Implications of Statistical Probability for the History of the Text," *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, pages 159-169. An excerpt follows: "... all things being equal *statistical probability* favors the perpetuation in every generation of the original majority status of the authentic reading. And it must then be kept in mind that the larger the original majority, the more compelling this argument from probabilities becomes" (Pickering, 1980 ed., p. 166).

This does not mean that a simple counting of noses is all that is needed to find the original text of the New Testament. In the 250-400 places where the evidence makes it impossible to determine the original wording of the autographs, other factors must be considered. For reasons why numerical evidence is only one valid criteria in textual criticism, the reader is referred to the essay written by the late John William Burgon in *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*, pages 43-47.

In response to arguments that scribes could not of themselves copy accurately, Dr. Robinson countered: "Were this not so, the MSS of the NT and all ancient works swiftly would have become a mass of confusion, and one would despair at ever recovering an original form of the text. While all scribes blundered and made intentional alterations to the text at various times, **the overall character of the copied text was not so affected as to preclude a reasonably accurate transmission on 'normal' terms**, thus facilitating the recovery of an original from comparison of various witnesses" (Robinson, par. 97, emphasis added).

Robinson's comments were made in response to scholar Ernest Colwell, who alleged the Byzantine Text was the result of a carefully controlled process over centuries. Colwell's argument was based on his belief that scribes needed some **outside** control to copy accurately; this, he explained, was the reason for the close agreement between text of the Byzantine manuscripts. His argument was made to compensate for the lack of archeological and historical evidence explaining how the Byzantine Text became the dominant form of the GNT.

Based on the textual evidence, Robinson concluded: "Scribes for the most part were generally *careful* and reasonably *accurate* in their copying endeavors.... **The primary locus of 'control' resided in scribes' perceived duty to be careful and accurate, duplicating the exemplar MS as precisely as possible**. This level of 'control' is wholly sufficient to explain most observable phenomena: there was **a general accuracy** in representing the text, while blunders and intentional alterations would differentiate the various texttypes and subtypes over the long period of transmissional history" (Ibid., emphasis added).

During the first three centuries that individual Christians copied the GNT, there is ample evidence to show these early scribes had an incentive to produce reasonably accurate manuscripts. Many of the early brethren in Asia Minor were Jewish Christians.

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Harnack's research as already noted led him to believe that faithful Gentile Christians largely adopted Jewish Christian models, which would entail their reverence for the text. Both Jesus and Paul set the example for early brethren in showing an acute attention to the details of the Hebrew and Greek texts. (See *Inspiration, Truth #1* on page 231 for these examples.)

Pickering noted "The rise of the so-called 'school of Antioch' is a further relevant consideration. Beginning with Theophilus, a bishop of Antioch who died around 185, the Antiochians began insisting upon the literal interpretation of Scripture, a position that hardened progressively in opposition to the so-called 'school of Alexandria' as it went into orbit with its allegorical interpretation of Scripture. The point is that a literalist is obligated to be concerned about the precise wording of the text since his interpretation or exegesis hinges on it. It is reasonable to assume that this 'literalist' mentality would have influenced the churches of Asia Minor and Greece and encouraged them in the careful and faithful transmission of the pure text that they had received. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the Antiochian antipathy toward Alexandrian allegorical interpretation of Scripture would rather dispose them to view with favor any competing forms of the text coming out of Egypt" (Pickering, p. 228, fn. 20).

Although later scribes were also given financial and punitive incentives, they still needed to be self-motivated in their copying of the text of their exemplar.

Following the legalization of Christianity in 313 AD, commercial book makers (scriptoria) instituted numerous regulations: "In order to ensure greater accuracy, books produced in scriptoria were commonly checked over by a corrector ... specially trained to rectify mistakes in copying. His annotations in the manuscripts can usually be detected today from the differences in styles of handwriting or tints of ink....When prose works [like the GNT] were copied, a line called a stichos, having sixteen (or sometimes fifteen) syllables, was frequently used for determining the market price of a manuscript. ...The application of stichometric reckoning served also as a rough and ready check on the general accuracy of a manuscript ... a document which was short of the total number of stichoi was a defective copy" (Metzger, pp. 15-16).

It is important to note that scriptoria scribes copied only a small portion of the manuscripts produced during the first copying revolution (ca. 313-400 AD). The majority would have been produced privately by brethren who had a higher motivation for copying the text accurately and faithfully.

Later, during the Byzantine period (312-1453 AD), monasteries established and enforced certain rules for their scriptoria: "The following are examples of such regulations prepared for the renowned monastery of Studium at Constantinople. About A.D. 800 the abbot of this monastery, Theodore the Studite, who was himself highly skilled in writing an elegant Greek hand, included in his rules for the monastery severe punishments for monks who were not careful in copying manuscripts. A diet of bread and water was the penalty set for the scribe who became so much interested in the subject-matter of what he was copying that he neglected this task of copying. Monks had to keep their parchment leaves neat and clean, on penalty of 130 penances. If anyone should take without permission another's quaternion (that is, the ruled and folded sheets of parchment), fifty penances were prescribed. If anyone should make more glue than he could use at one time, and it should harden, he must do fifty penances. If a scribe broke his pen in a fit of temper (perhaps after having made some accidental blunder near the close of an otherwise perfectly copied sheet), he had to do thirty penances" (Ibid., p. 19). In working alone in their cells, monks were able to achieve reasonably accurate copies. "Such a method of multiplying copies was not open to the same kinds of errors involved in the dictation methods" as in normal scriptoria settings like in Alexandria, Egypt (Ibid., p. 16).

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In summary, verifiable assessments of the textual evidence and scribal habits do not support the allegations of Kenyon and Hort. **Instead of getting farther from the original text, the dominant wording found in the majority of manuscripts would continue to reflect the ancient GNT text.**

Copying Mistakes

The **vast majority of variant readings** found in the New Testament manuscripts **are probably the result of copying error**. Robinson noted: “Transcriptional [copying] error is more likely to be the ultimate source of many sensible variants rather than deliberate alteration. Many variant readings have their root in transcriptional causes. While this principle includes all cases which produce pure ‘nonsense,’ it also includes many in which the end result in some way ‘makes sense.’ Sensible readings may arise from the simple omission of a letter, syllable, or word; so too readings produced by haplography [oversight and omission of text], dittography [repetition of text], homoioteleuton [see following example] or other forms of transcriptional error. Even an error that produced a nonsense reading may result later in other sensible variants, created in an attempt to correct the earlier error” (Robinson, par. 41).

Burgon classified at least 95 percent of all variant readings as the whims of scribes (Burgon, *Traditional Text*, p. 35). These mistakes can mostly be identified and dismissed as the result of unskilled, lax or weary scribes. This is one of the chief reasons why no two of the 3,200 Greek copies of the New Testament are entirely alike in all their details, indicating that they were produced by independent scribes.

Nowhere was the transmission process more susceptible to accidents than in the copying of the early Greek uncial manuscripts. This writing style was dominant from 50 -800 AD (see Figure 5 on page 226). Translator Ralph Earle explained that early Greek uncials like Vaticanus had no chapter and verse divisions, no marks separating sentences (no punctuation marks) and no separation between words. “All we have are thousands of consecutive Greek letters in line after line, column after column, page after page, through a whole book of the New Testament. This made the task of copying exceedingly difficult. Even typists today will sometimes skip a line if two consecutive lines begin or end with the same word. This same error, as would be expected, is found in ancient Greek manuscripts” (Barker, “The Rationale for an Eclectic New Testament Text,” *The NIV: The Making of a Contemporary Translation*, p. 54). The copying mistake to which Earle referred to is known as *homoioteleuton*, meaning “similar ending.”

Researchers have access to a sufficient number of the 3,200 Greek copies and 2,300 lectionaries for the New Testament (along with other witnesses) to allow them to detect, collect, analyze, compare, classify and eliminate textual variants. The following *hypothetical* manuscript readings for Romans 8:2 demonstrate the point. The authentic reading of the following series of prepositional phrases is “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2). Copying mistakes are in bold print and omissions are indicated by ellipsis.

Manuscript A = the Spirit of life **ni** Christ Jesus
Manuscript B = the ... **file** in **Jesus Christ**
Manuscript C = ... Spirit ... in Christ Jesus
Manuscript D = the Spirit of ... Jesus

Now multiply these same effects in varying forms over thousands of copies. Based on what we know of scribal habits, we would expect these **same** errors to have **only** spread to one or a minority of manuscripts, except in cases where a common ances-

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try or textual link can clearly be demonstrated. Our hypothetical example above shows that by comparing the readings of passages, researchers can compensate for copying mistakes, even scribal changes in many cases and recover the original text of the biblical manuscripts. **Humans mistakes made during the manual copying of the biblical texts do not make them an unreliable source of God's revelation.**

Deliberate Changes

Not all manuscript variants can be explained simply as scribal mistakes. Deliberate changes to the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts are of greater concern.

Fortunately, as noted by Robinson, these deliberate changes would not have been indiscriminately perpetuated: "That any deliberate alteration ... would gain the cooperation of scribes so as to dominate the entire stream of transmission is a null proposition: scribes demonstrably did not engage in such a practice on the grand scale" (Robinson, par. 40).

A similar situation also applies to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. In fact, identifying what constitutes a deliberate change in the Hebrew text is a **highly subjective** endeavor. While it is possible to produce a list of alleged scribal changes by comparing the texts of various witnesses, Emanuel Tov, a leading Hebrew textual scholar and former editor-in-chief of the Dead Sea Scrolls publication project, noted the practice was not widespread. His comments of exegetical or interpretative changes made by scribes should suffice to capture the nature of deliberate changes to the Hebrew text: "**Few of these changes were pervasive** [widespread] **and encompassing**, since copyists would not change the text to any great extent" (Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, p. 262, emphasis added).

In other words, Bible believers can have confidence that the incidents of heretical or *unofficial* deliberate alteration of the text were confined to a minority of Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. The original text did not become hopelessly lost over time. The tell-tale signs of suspect readings, which do not reflect the original text of the biblical writers, is their limited transmission through time and their existence in only a handful or minority of witnesses. This fact can largely be confirmed in the New Testament by carefully examining the variant readings of the modern critical or eclectic Greek texts (Nestle-Aland 27th ed. or United Bible Societies 4th ed.). Where readings are not in alignment with the Byzantine Text, they tend to have minority support among the Greek manuscripts, ancient versions and early Christian citations.

Summary

While the Bible clearly promises that the Word of God would remain forever, nowhere does it teach that the apographs would remain free from **any alterations of any kind** in the transmission process. The evidence of history and textual criticism, however, proves that God was faithful in preserving His Word.

The greatest untold story of scriptural preservation is that most scribes, especially faithful brethren and those of the Byzantine-era, were extremely careful and faithful in their task of copying God's Word. A scribe's reverence for the text generally played a key role in his copying, preventing errors and corruption from ever gaining precedence over the pure Word of God. Those who held the sacred text (letters, syllables and words) in high regard strove to reproduce an accurate copy of the text of their exemplars, the model manuscripts that lay before them (cf. Robinson, "Scribal Habits," p. 225). The exceptions are the Alexandrian and a few Byzantine-era scribes who exhibited extreme carelessness or habits suggesting editorial activity.

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The true miracle lies in the fact that at the very beginning of the transmission process the first scribe possessed an accurately written manuscript of God's words from which to begin. Bible believers can have confidence that God's original words have been transmitted and preserved through time in faithful apographs, which generally constitute the majority of handwritten manuscripts.

Points to Remember

- 1) All handwritten manuscripts exhibit traces of copyist mistakes and/or alteration.
- 2) Greek Byzantine manuscripts, which served as the basis of the Reformation Greek texts (Textus Receptus), exhibit essentially the same text with sporadic variation.
- 3) Vast variations do exist between the earlier uncial and later minuscule copies of the Greek New Testament.
- 4) The two most popular critical or eclectic Greek texts (Nestle-Aland and United Bible Societies editions) omit more than 2,600 words from the New Testament text.
- 5) Masoretic manuscripts exhibit an overall internal unity in their readings and the range of differences in consonants, vocalization and other textual details is quite small.
- 6) If God had promised to protect the biblical texts from *any* alteration, there would have been no need to offer written prohibitions against altering the text.
- 7) Human unbelief, fragility and sin cannot nullify God's faithfulness to His Word.
- 8) In spite of the Jewish nation's near universal unbelief, it was entrusted with the oracles of God, the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.
- 9) Jewish unbelief could no more invalidate the testimony of the Hebrew Scriptures as God's living oracles, than it could affect His ability to preserve it through time.
- 10) The actions of early heretics, the misguided attempts of early editors and the eventual spiritual decline of the Greek church could not prevent God from preserving the Greek New Testament.
- 11) God permitted errors to occur in the process of preserving His Word to demonstrate His power and mercy and the weakness of fallible man.
- 12) The Greek text of the New Testament was preserved by the God-guided usage of the Greek church, primarily in Asia Minor and the Aegean area.
- 13) God used the apostle Paul's efforts to establish churches in Asia Minor, guaranteeing that the most reliable Greek manuscripts of the New Testament would be preserved and passed down to us for over 1,400 years.
- 14) That Byzantine Text was first printed as the Textus Receptus by Erasmus and Johann Froben in 1516 AD.
- 15) The systematic copying of the Gospels, Acts, the Pauline corpus and Petrine Epistles must have begun immediately in the decades following the deaths of Paul and Peter (ca. 68-69 AD) and before the persecution of Christians under Domitian (81-96 AD).
- 16) The possessors of the apostles autographs would obviously be the best suited to transmit the Greek text instead of the faithful brethren scattered throughout the empire.
- 17) There were two lines of transmission during the early period of the church: sporadic and systematic.
- 18) The systematic copying of Paul's books in sets explains how all churches came to possess his epistles that were *not* widely exchanged at first.
- 19) The canonization of John must have occurred between 98-99 AD, followed by the mass distribution of the John's writings, the general epistles and Revelation.
- 20) Between 100-300 AD, some scholars and scribes created two prestige texts at Rome and Alexandria that reflect those two great centers of the ancient world.

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- 21) The early so-called “canonical” catalogs were nothing more than recommended public and private reading lists that varied from location to location.
- 22) The majority of deliberate changes, heretical or otherwise, to the apostolic text ceased by 200 AD.
- 23) The condemnations of heretical activity by early apologists (defenders of Christianity) had the effect of putting early copyists of Scriptures on guard.
- 24) The Quartodeciman controversy induced in the minds of the Christians of Asia Minor a violent prejudice against the Western and Alexandrian texts.
- 25) The legalization of Hellenized Christianity in 313 AD was the impetus for a widespread return to the apostolic (Byzantine) text.
- 26) The Byzantine Text was not an official text imposed upon the Church by ecclesiastical authority or by the influence of any outstanding leader.
- 27) There is *no* historical record that the Byzantine Text was the creation of a deliberate recension (revision) as was the case with Jerome’s revision of the Old Latin versions.
- 28) Private copies made by common brethren contributed significantly to the demand for new manuscripts after the legalization of Christianity.
- 29) The absence of early surviving Byzantine manuscripts is due to the fact that they were worn out from overuse and that during the first major copying revolution the papyrus exemplars (model ancient manuscripts) were copied directly to parchment and then destroyed.
- 30) The lectionary system of the Greek Orthodox church can *only* explain the stabilization of the text, not the trend toward uniformity in the Byzantine Text.
- 31) The uniformity of the Byzantine Text can only be explained by the fact that there were several pure streams of transmission that reflected the original text and copyists conformed to that universal ancient text found in those manuscripts.
- 32) Despite spiritual decline throughout the Middle Ages (476-1500 AD), the trend toward the Byzantine Text continued. This decline did not materially affect the Byzantine Text.
- 33) The second copying revolution (ca. 800-1000 AD), produced highly accurate minuscule manuscripts copied from ancient parchment uncials.
- 34) During the Middle Ages, the knowledge of Greek was kept alive in the Byzantine Empire.
- 35) The Textus Receptus is 98-99 percent identical to the text found in the vast majority of Greek manuscripts (Byzantine Text).
- 36) Research shows that most Byzantine-era scribes produced reasonably, accurate copies of their exemplars (model manuscripts). Early Egyptian scribes and a *few* Byzantine-era scribes were extremely careless and edited the text they were copying.
- 37) The vast majority of variant readings are copying errors.
- 38) Human mistakes made during the manual copying of the biblical texts do not make them an unreliable source of God’s revelation.
- 39) Incidents of heretical or other deliberate alteration of the text were confined to a minority of Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.
- 40) Bible believers can have confidence that God’s original words have been transmitted and preserved through time in faithful apographs, which generally constitute the majority of handwritten manuscripts.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE AUTHORITY OF FAITHFUL APOGRAPHS

Has modern textual criticism (i.e., the existence of textual variations) disproved the trustworthiness and infallibility of the Bible? This vital question is addressed in the two truths of scriptural preservation that follow.

Truth #4: Faithful Apographs Are God-breathed, Authoritative, Infallible and Trustworthy

The fourth truth of preservation shows that the faithful handwritten copies of biblical manuscripts possess the same divine qualities as the autographs.

Proof #1: According to Dr. Robert Dunzweiler, the Bible's infallibility and authority can be verified. Consider John 10:34-35, where Jesus appealed to Psalms 82:6 "... to support the propriety of his own title, the Son of God, and in doing so, he [laid] down a principle which the Jews would not dare to controvert: the Scripture is not able to be set aside!" The implication of Jesus' reference to the Psalms as "law" is that "all of the Old Testament had the force of law, i.e., was binding upon the faith and obedience of the Israelite" (Dunzweiler, "Are the Bibles in Our Possession Inspired?" p. 3).

Further, when Jesus declared that Scripture could not be broken (John 10:35), He was referring to the apographs, since the originals had disappeared centuries before. Dunzweiler noted, "This text [passage] would argue not only for the 'inspiredness' (and thus the truth and divine authority) of copies, **but would also argue for the uncorrupted preservation, in the apographs, of the truths of the autographs, in spite of errors of transmission**" (Ibid., p. 4, emphasis added).

Proof #2: The Jews of Jesus' time held this same view of Scripture. John 12:31-34 records that the Jews were perplexed by Jesus' statements of His impending death because Scripture clearly states "the Christ lives forever" (cf. Mic. 4:7). In an attempt to reconcile their perceptions of Jesus as the prophesied Messiah, the Jews used the term "the law" to describe this passage in Micah, meaning that they believed its truth was authoritative and trustworthy in defining their understanding of the Messiah. They could only have done so if the text in their possession had not been compromised materially.

Proof #3: During His temptation by Satan, Jesus stated, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word [utterance] that proceeds out of *the* mouth of God'" (Matt. 4:4). The scripture Jesus quoted, Deuteronomy 8:3, originally described how ancient Israel depended on God's spoken words for its food (manna) in the wilderness (Ex. 16). Matthew recorded that in the ensuing struggle with Satan, Jesus conquered His weakness and hunger from 40 days of fasting by appealing to the Old Testament writings for spiritual relief and nourishment. This is shown by His use of the clause "it is written." The passages Jesus quoted to Satan in this section of Scripture are all from the book of Deuteronomy. Though Moses' writings had been copied for more than 1,400 years, Jesus still considered them to be trustworthy in all their declarations and to carry the same divine authority as when they were first written. In doing so, He sanctioned every part of the Old Testament apographs as the living, authoritative utterances of God.

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Summary

Manuscripts of the Hebrew Old Testament were meticulously copied by Levitical scribes. The testimony of Jesus and the Jews confirm that the apographs, which first-century Judah possessed, were authoritative representatives because they were near letter-perfect reproductions of the original writings of Moses and the Prophets.

This same confidence was extended to the text of the Greek New Testament. In giving instructions to Timothy concerning the ministry, Paul quoted from the Gospel of Luke and the book of Deuteronomy: “For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox treading out *the* corn,’ and ‘The workman *is* worthy of his hire’” (I Tim. 5:18; cf. Deut. 25:4; Luke 10:7). In this passage Paul explicitly placed the Gospel of Luke on the same level with Deuteronomy, designating both as God-breathed Scripture that possessed divine authority for settling matters pertaining to the ministry. The implication of Paul’s statement is that Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, like their counterparts of the Old Testament, possessed divine qualities when they faithfully represented the details and substance of their autographs.

As a result, believers can view translations of the Old and New Testament texts with confidence when faithful and reliable manuscripts are employed and sound methods of textual criticism and translation are followed.

Truth #5: The Accuracy of Faithful Handwritten Apographs Can Be Verified

Hebrew Masoretic Text

The faithfulness of the Levitical scribes to their inherited roles (Deut. 17:18, 31:9, 24-26) as the human agents for preserving the Hebrew text of the Old Testament is a testimony to God’s faithfulness to His promises. It was to the Jews and Levites gathered within Judah’s borders that God entrusted the oracles of Old Testament (II Chr. 11:5-14; Rom. 3:2).

It is well-known that the scribes who made the Hebrew scrolls for the temple and synagogues followed numerous regulations during their copying of the manuscripts (cf. Connolly, *The Indestructible Book*, pp. 15-16; Geisler, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, pp. 240-241). Even private or common scrolls were written with great care. Almost every aspect of the copying process was strictly regulated, from the type of animal skin used to the number of columns or letters on a page to the disposal of old or worn documents. No word or letter was written from memory and every letter and verse was significant. In addition, there was a 30-day review process, and if three pages were found to be in need of correction, the entire document was rewritten.

Many Hebraic scholars, such as the late Dr. Robert Dick Wilson, consider the Masoretic Text (MT) to be a faithful representative of the Hebrew Old Testament. Dr. Wilson, who died in 1930, mastered 45 languages and dialects in order to study the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. He examined every one of the approximately 1,250,000 Hebrew consonants of the Old Testament text and reviewed every variation found in the manuscripts, Masoretic notes, ancient versions, parallel passages and critical scholarly reviews (Fuller, *Which Bible?*, p. 44). This entire endeavor took Dr. Wilson 30 years to complete. His book entitled *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament* offers one of the most thorough and candid investigations of the Old Testament documents ever undertaken with regard to their texts, grammar, vocabulary and history.

Dr. Wilson wrote this assessment in 1926 about the accuracy of the transmission of the Hebrew Masoretic Text: “The proof that copies of the original documents have been handed down with substantial correctness for more than 2,000 years cannot be de-

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nied. That the copies in existence 2,000 years ago had been in like manner handed down from the originals is not merely possible, but, as we have shown, is rendered probable by the analogies of Babylonian documents now existing of which we have both originals and copies, thousands of years apart, and of scores of papyri which show when compared with our modern editions of the classics that only minor changes of the text have taken place in more than 2,000 years and especially with which the proper spelling of the names of kings and of the numerous foreign terms embedded in the Hebrew text has been transmitted to us” (Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament*, p. 99).

After examining all the available evidence, Wilson declared, “... we are scientifically certain that **we have substantially the same text that was in the possession of Christ and the apostles and, so far as anybody knows, the same as that written by the original composers of the Old Testament documents....**The general correctness of the Hebrew text that has been transmitted to us is established beyond just grounds of controversy. The morphology, syntax, and meaning of the language of various books conform with what the face of the documents demands. The chronological and geographical statements are more accurate and reliable than those afforded by any other ancient documents; and the biographical and other historical narratives harmonize marvelously with the evidence afforded by extra-biblical documents” (Ibid., pp. 8, 213-214, emphasis added).

Since Wilson completed his evaluation of the existing evidence available to him during the 1920s, has more recent evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls substantially changed Wilson’s findings?

The presence of two nearly complete copies of Isaiah among the Dead Sea Scrolls whose text virtually mirrors that of medieval Masoretic manuscripts has been perplexing for textual scholars. In comparison to Qumran Isaiah Scroll A, which agrees with the medieval Masoretic manuscripts 80 percent of the time, the agreement of a second Isaiah scroll (1QIsa^b) with the MT is “striking.” Hebrew textual scholar Ernest Würthwein described this remarkable find: “The second Isaiah scroll exhibits significantly fewer variants from [the MT] than the first, and these **do not go beyond the range of variants observed in medieval manuscripts.** This fact led Paul E. Kahle to infer that 1QIs^b had been assimilated [brought into conformity] to the standard consonantal text, and therefore could not have been written before this standard text was available. But ... **the scroll cannot be dated later than the 60s of the first century A.D.** on archaeological grounds, and on the basis of paleographical evidence it should apparently be assigned several decades earlier [20-10 BC?] and could itself very well transmit the text of an even earlier exemplar” (Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, p. 156, emphasis added).

Wilson’s research can be verified to at least 75 BC. Qumran Isaiah scroll B can be dated to approximately the same time period or several decades earlier, and it agrees remarkably well with today’s MT. As a result, Wilson’s conclusions remain unshaken.

The Jot and Tittle: In Matthew 5:18 Jesus spoke of how the Law of Moses, and by extension the entire Old Testament text, would be preserved. Archeological and textual research confirms that Jesus’ statement about the *jot* and *tittle* has been fulfilled.

The “tittle” Jesus referred to in this passage were “ornaments or flourish on the top of certain letters. They implied no meaning of any kind, but, so jealously was the sacred text safeguarded, that the scribe was informed how many of each of the letters had these ornaments. These ornaments were called *Ta’agim* (or *Tagin*), meaning *little crowns*. The Greek-speaking Jews called them *little horns* (Heb. *keranoth*) because they looked like ‘horns.’...It was to these *Taagin* the Lord referred in Matt. 5:18, and Luke 16:17, when He said that not only the smallest letter (‘ = *Yod* = Y), but that not even the merest mark or ornament (*Tag*) should pass away from the Law until all things should come to pass. So that our Lord Himself recognized these *Taagin*, which must have been

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in His Bible from which He quoted” (Bullinger, *The Companion Bible*, Appendix 93).

By Jesus’ time, some portions of the Hebrew Old Testament text had been copied by hand for nearly 1,400 years. His reference to the tittle most likely related to the temple master scrolls. Hebrew manuscripts for use in the synagogues were compared to and copied from the temple master scrolls. The greatest care was exercised in their preservation. While later Masoretic codices often omit the *Taagim*, they have consistently been preserved in synagogue scrolls from Jesus’ time to the present (Yeivin, *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah*, p. 8).

Accuracy of the Pentateuch: The earliest Biblical scroll fragment found in the Qumran Caves is from Leviticus, and it contains Leviticus 19:31-34, 20:20-23 and 21:24-22:3-5. Only one minor discrepancy has been found in this fragment dated nearly 1,000 years earlier than the canonical Hebrew Masoretic Text. That variant reading exists in Leviticus 20:21. Textual scholar Dr. Thomas Holland evaluated this reading: “The Masoretic Text uses the Hebrew word *hoo* while the Dead Sea Scrolls use the Hebrew word *he*. It is the same Hebrew word and is a personal pronoun meaning he, she, or it. The two are used interchangeably throughout the Hebrew Old Testament” (Holland, *Crowned With Glory*, p. 113; cf. Würthwein, p. 160).

The research of Masoretic scholar Dr. Mordechai Breuer has verified that the Law of Moses has been faithfully copied. In his book entitled, *The Aleppo Codex and the Accepted Text of the Torah*, Breuer described his research and discussed his conclusions in using accurate MT manuscripts to recover the original text of the Pentateuch.

In describing Breuer’s research, Dovid Lichtman of the Center for Biblical Hebrew wrote: “Dr. Breuer began by selecting four texts of ancient origin to compare and contrast in his study. The texts were all of the type written by the Tiberian Masorites [sic] (as opposed to the Babylonian Masorites) yet [they] clearly differed from each other in certain significant formatting areas, including that they were not copied from an immediate common source” (Lichtman, *The Accuracy of Our Written Torah*, p. 3). Breuer also included the Pentateuch text of the 1525 Rabbinic Bible, the ben Chayyim text, in his analysis. There are 304,805 letters in the Torah (Pentateuch). The text of all five sources used was in total agreement, except for 220 letters. Of these, all but 20 were resolved by using a majority of at least four texts against the other one. Finally, after carefully studying thousands of Masoretic notes, Dr. Breuer was able to clarify all but six letters (Ibid.; Breuer, *The Aleppo Codex and the Accepted Text of the Torah*, p. xxv). According to Breuer’s research, **the accuracy rate of Moses’ books in faithful Hebrew MT manuscripts was 99.9998 percent.**

Entire Old Testament: Breuer also worked on the remaining books of the Hebrew Bible based on the highly accurate Aleppo Codex. He noted: “... a Torah scroll containing orthographic [spelling] errors is disqualified from being used in public readings. No such law applies for the Prophets and Hagiographa [Writings] from parchment....With this in mind one can understand that the Jewish sages took tremendous pains clarifying the text of the Torah, but did not exercise the same care with respect to the text of the Prophets and Hagiographa” (Breuer, p. xxxii).

In spite of the fact that some corrections and discrepancies do exist in the Prophets and Writings sections of the Hebrew texts, the general framework, basic historical flow and words of prophecy have been preserved remarkably intact.

To ascertain the accuracy of the Old Testament text, Benjamin Kennicott (1776 AD) conducted a study of 581 Hebrew Masoretic manuscripts. He found that nearly 85 percent of the differences in the various manuscripts involved spelling. The real errors occurred in very few, and primarily, in only one of the manuscripts studied. His findings revealed only a .0006 percent textual corruption. In other words, **the Hebrew text of the entire Old Testament was 99.9994 percent accurate** (Jones, *Which Version Is the Bible?*, p. 24).

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The work of Kennicott and J.B. de Rossi (1784 AD) profoundly affected the understanding of the accuracy of the MT. “The phenomenon of the MT is unique in the field of biblical textual criticism. No other stream of scribal transmission, in either the Old Testament or New Testament, manifests such remarkable uniformity. Intense study of the MT MSS [manuscripts] since the late 18th century has shown that only a limited number of consonantal variants of substance [approximately eight] can be found in the entire tradition. When this observation is seen to hold true not only for the principal MSS of the ben Asher tradition but also for the numerous text specimens of the Cairo Genizah [500s-800s AD] antedating those [Masoretic] MSS, **the phenomenon is truly extraordinary and bears witness to a genuinely conservative and cautious scribal tradition**” (Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, p. 811, bold added).

Byzantine Text

There are an estimated 200,000 variations found among the witnesses to the New Testament text: Greek manuscripts, early translations, Christian citations and lectionaries. How does this large number of variations affect the reliability of the Greek apographs?

All Greek manuscripts are in essential agreement in 92 percent of the New Testament text. (Note: Some scholars place the figure closer to 90 percent.) Thus significant and inconsequential differences exist in only about eight percent of the text. These figures include the **faulty** Alexandrian manuscripts, whose testimony to the original text of the New Testament can be questioned in many passages because they disagree significantly among themselves as to the correct reading where they overlap. In other words, textual editors really deal with only about **eight percent** of the Greek text when producing a printed edition (about 10,000-16,000 variations).

Can we do better than 92 percent? In spite of both deliberate and accidental readings, the majority of the approximately 3,000 New Testament Greek manuscripts, excluding lectionaries, compare extremely well with ancient secular works like Homer’s *Iliad*, which has 643 surviving manuscripts. Considered sacred by some, the *Iliad* has more manuscripts than any other ancient book apart from the Greek New Testament. The New Testament has about 20,000 lines; the *Iliad* has about 15,600. Only 40 lines or about 400 words of the New Testament are in doubt, whereas 764 lines of the *Iliad* are in question. **This means the New Testament is 99.5 accurate**; the *Iliad* is about 95 percent (Giesler, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, pp. 366-367).

This level of accuracy, which reflects a reasonably high level of manuscript agreement, can only refer to the Byzantine Text represented by the later surviving uncials and almost all minuscules.

The parallels between the transmission of the New Testament text and Homer’s *Iliad* are striking. Textual scholar Maurice Robinson explained that like the text of the New Testament, the Homeric text existed in three forms: one shorter, one longer and one in-between. The first reflects Alexandrian “scholarly revisions,” while the second reflects the popular and uncontrolled expansions and scribal improvements of the Western text. Of the remaining in-between form of the *Iliad*, Robinson explained: “Between these extremes, a ‘medium’ or ‘vulgate’ text exists, which resisted both the popular expansions and the critical revisions; **this text continued in much the same form from the early period into the minuscule era** [800-1600 AD]. The NT [New Testament] Byzantine Textform reflects a similar continuance from at least the fourth century onward” (Robinson, “New Testament Textual Criticism: The Case for the Byzantine Priority,” *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism*, par. 17-20, emphasis added).

This parallel is not isolated just to Homer’s *Iliad*, but the same situation exists

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regarding the ancient works of Hippocrates. Robinson related the following facts from Thomas Allen's *Homer: The Origins and Transmission*: "... the actual text of Hippocrates in Galen's day **was essentially the same** as that of the mediaeval [sic!] MSS ... [just as] the text of [Homer in] the first century B.C. ... is the same as that of the tenth-century minuscules" (Ibid., par. 22, emphasis added).

In summary, Robinson wrote: "In both classical and NT traditions there thus seems to be a 'scribal continuity' of a basic 'standard text' which remained relatively stable, preserved by the unforced action of copyists through the centuries who merely copied faithfully the text which lay before them. Further, such a text appears to prevail in the larger quantity of copies in Homer, Hippocrates, and the NT tradition. Apart from a clear indication that such consensus texts were produced by formal recension [editing], it would appear that normal scribal activity and transmissional continuity would preserve in most manuscripts 'not only a very ancient text, but a very pure line of very ancient text'" (Ibid., par. 23).

According to textual scholar Dr. Wilbur N. Pickering, nearly all of the later minuscule manuscripts reflect the Byzantine Text: "Of the 3,000 plus Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, about 1,700 are from the 12th - 14th centuries. They, along with 640 copies from the 9th - 11th centuries, are in basic agreement on approximately 99% of the words of the New Testament" (Jones, p. iv). As a whole they comprise about an 80 percent majority of the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Almost all of the 2,200 lectionaries exhibit a Byzantine Text. When added to the group of Greek manuscripts, the percentage of documents that represent the Byzantine Text rises to 87 percent.

The differences between this group of manuscripts and the earlier papyri and uncials are significant: "... for the past 100 years, the world of scholarship has been dominated by the view that this majority text [i.e., Byzantine Text] is a secondary and inferior text. Scholars have rejected that we have had the true text of the originals all along and have thus attempted to **reconstruct** the original text of the New Testament on the basis of a few early manuscripts [i.e., Vaticanus and Sinaiticus]. But as these copies differ considerably among themselves, the result has been a "patchwork quilt." The editors of the dominant eclectic Greek text of today have usually followed a single Greek MSS and in dozens of places they have printed a text not found in **any** known Greek copy! The discrepancy between this eclectic text and the majority reading is 8%. That would amount to 48 full pages of discrepancies in a 600 page text. Around 1/5 of that represents omissions in the [Alexandrian] 'minority text' such that it is about 10 pages shorter than the majority text" (Jones, p. iv). Nearly all of the modern English versions have been based on the Alexandrian-based Nestle-Aland or United Bible Societies texts. While 13 pages contain differences in the two texts that are inconsequential, about 25 pages are significant discrepancies, many of which affect doctrine and the Bible's inerrancy (Ibid.).

Summary

Faithful apographs of the biblical texts are highly accurate. The Hebrew Masoretic Text and the Greek Byzantine Text (represented by the 1550 Stephens Text) represent the most reliable and faithful reproductions of the true words of God. In spite of the fact that God gave no promises of "perfect" preservation, He has accurately preserved His Word.

Points to Remember

- 1) Jesus and the apostles never appealed to the autographs because they had letter-perfect reproductions of Old Testament writings in their possession.

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- 2) Faithful Hebrew and Greek apographs of the Old and New Testament, respectively, contain the same divine qualities as the autographs.
- 3) Contemporary research shows the Hebrew Masoretic Text is substantially the same as was in the possession of Jesus and the apostles, and as written by the writers of the Old Testament.
- 4) The evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls does not materially change the witness of the Hebrew Masoretic Text.
- 5) Jesus' promises of the *jot* and tittle in Matthew 5:18 have been fulfilled.
- 6) The accuracy rate of the Pentateuch in Masoretic manuscripts is 99.99998 percent.
- 7) The accuracy rate for the entire Old Testament as found in Masoretic manuscripts is 99.9994 percent.
- 8) The parallels between the manuscripts of classical literature and the New Testament confirm that the later minuscules possess much the same form as earlier manuscripts.
- 9) The text of the later dated minuscules is 99 percent in agreement. This text constitutes the Byzantine Text.
- 10) The discrepancy between the Byzantine and eclectic text is eight percent. That translates to 48 pages: 10 pages of omissions, 13 pages of insignificant differences and 25 pages of significant differences (affecting meaning and in many cases doctrine).

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Numerous resources have been consulted due to the inconsistent and ambiguous manner in which many of these terms have been explained in the standard reference works. We have attempted, therefore, to define these important terms in an accurate, yet understandable manner. The following entries have been adapted mainly from these sources: *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar*, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls* and *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*.

Aleppensis (Aleppo) codex

A tenth-century Hebrew manuscript containing all the books of the Old Testament. Shelomo ben Baya'a wrote the consonantal text. The Masoretic system (vowel points, accentuation and marginal notes) of the premier Tiberian scholar Aaron ben Moses ben Asher is faithfully represented in this codex. About one quarter of this manuscript was lost during anti-Jewish riots in 1947, including most of the Pentateuch and nine books of the third division (Hagiographa) of the Hebrew Bible.

Alexandrinus (A)

A fifth-century Greek manuscript containing nearly all of the books of the Old and New Testaments, including the apocrypha and other non-canonical books such as I and II Clement. This codex is identified by the letter A.

Apocrypha

A Greek word that means "hidden things." The term refers to non-canonical books believed to have been written by Jewish writers between 200 BC and 100 AD that generally reflect the historical Jewish context before the Christian era. This word was originally used by Jerome to refer to non-canonical books written in Greek and included in the Septuagint translation and other early manuscripts among the canonical books. Some of these works are truthful historical accounts; however, most include esoteric writings that teach immoral practices and doctrines at variance with the Bible. The Old Testament apocrypha includes 14 books written after the close of the Hebrew canon: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, I and II Maccabees, Baruch (Letter of Jeremiah), certain additions to Esther and Daniel (Song of Three Children, Bel and the Dragon and History of Susanna), I and II Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh. Some of these books were originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic and later translated into Greek. The Roman Church officially accepted most of the preceding books as canonical in 1546. The Jews and most Protestants do not view them as part of Scripture.

New Testament apocryphal books written after 100 AD include the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, Armenian Gospel of the Infancy, Bartholomew's Book of the Resurrection of Christ, Gospel of Bartholomew, Gospel of Basilides, Gospel of the Birth of Mary, Gospel of the Ebionites, Gospel According to the Hebrews, Protevangelium of James, History of Joseph the Carpenter, Gospel of Marcion, Gospel of Matthias, Gospel of the Nazarene, Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Philip, Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and Gospel of Thomas. Many of these books are considered gnostic or semi-gnostic in nature. There are also numerous other apocryphal books whose titles begin with the phrases "Acts of," "Passion of," or "Epistles of."

Glossary

Apograph

A manuscript copied from another manuscript.

Aramaic

A Semitic language sharing a common script and certain structural elements with ancient (Biblical) Hebrew. Sections of the Bible were written in Aramaic, including Gen. 31:47a, Ezra 4:8-6:18 and 7:12-26, Jer. 10:11 (possible gloss) and Dan. 2:4-7:28. Syriac and Chaldean are the names given to two dialects of Aramaic. The former was spoken by people in northwestern Mesopotamia and later by the Christian communities at Edessa. It was used for several Christian literary and liturgical documents (see Peshitta). Chaldean is an Aramaic dialect of southeastern Mesopotamia, including Babylon. Certain parts of the Bible were composed in this language. The Targums of the Bible were written in Aramaic, which, like Greek, was a commonly spoken language during the time of Jesus Christ. The Masoretic notations appearing in the page margins of Hebrew codices were written in an abbreviated form of Aramaic, because that was the working language of scholars who prepared them.

Autograph

The original document of a God-breathed writing of one of the authors of the books of the Bible, from which scribes made copies.

Beza (D)

A fifth- or sixth-century Greek-Latin manuscript containing nearly all of the Gospels, Acts and a portion of III John. This uncial codex received its name from its final owner Theodore Beza, the Protestant Reformer. It is identified by the letter D and is the primary representative of the Western text and exhibits wide variations in its readings.

Canon

A Greek word that means “rule or standard of measurement.” In biblical criticism, the term refers to a collection of authoritative biblical books that met the standard of the ancient “canonizers” of Scripture and were regarded as God-breathed.

Church Fathers

Men who led normative Christianity in the first few centuries after the New Testament was completed. Many of them might have seen and handled the autographs of the apostles and other New Testament writers. The writings of the Church Fathers are considered by many to be authoritative testimony of the teaching and practices of the early Church. These testimonies are identified by abbreviations of their popular names.

Codex (*pl. codices*)

A manuscript in book form with folded pages and stitched at the spine. This word comes from Latin, meaning “book.” It is commonly believed that early Christians created the first codices.

Critical apparatus

The footnotes given in Hebrew and Greek editions of the Old and New Testaments that cite manuscript sources and significant readings that differ from those adopted in the text printed above. See Critical text and Reading.

Critical text

A printed Hebrew or Greek edition of the Old or New Testament text, usually

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based on one or more available manuscripts and normally accompanied by a critical apparatus. Critical texts are labeled as such because they represent a scholar's judgments, criticisms and even conjectures concerning the original form of the biblical text. Some critical texts are hypothetical reconstructions that insert variant (alternate) readings in the text instead of a critical apparatus (see Eclectic text). See Critical apparatus.

Cursive

A handwriting style in which lowercase letters are connected instead of written singly. See Minuscule.

Dead Sea scrolls

Manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible and other non-biblical books found in caves near the Dead Sea between 1947-1956. The non-biblical writings reflect the doctrines and lifestyle of the ascetic Essene cult. Each manuscript is identified by a number for the cave in which it was found, a letter for the location, initials for the document name and a superscript for the specific copy (e.g., 4QIsa^b).

Diplomatic text

A printed edition of the Bible that strictly follows the text of only one manuscript rather than combining the readings of several witnesses. See Eclectic text.

Eclecticism

A method of textual criticism that establishes the biblical text by selecting readings for each passage where manuscripts disagree randomly from one witness than another based on a number of subjective criteria of evaluation. There are two general types of eclecticism. Reasoned (rational) eclecticism seeks to balance the use of internal and external evidence in evaluating the authenticity of variant readings. It was the dominant method used by textual scholars in the twentieth century. Rigorous (thoroughgoing or radical) eclecticism establishes the text by appealing mainly to internal evidence. See Eclectic text, External evidence and Internal evidence.

Eclectic text

A printed text whose readings are drawn from more than one manuscript and textual witness. In modern textual criticism, the term frequently refers to a critical text produced by using the methods of rigorous eclecticism. See Diplomatic text and Eclecticism.

Ephraemi Rescriptus (C)

A fifth-century Greek manuscript containing parts of the Old and New Testament books. Written initially in Alexandria, Egypt, this manuscript is a palimpsest, meaning its original script of the entire Old and New Testament was erased. It was reused by Ephraem of Syria, who recorded his sermons on the leaves of this manuscript in the 1100s AD.

External evidence

The external proof of the reliability of a document (manuscript) as a witness for textual criticism. Scholars evaluate manuscripts according to a set of criteria related to their external features (age, transcription quality, origin, location, etc.) and use this data to determine the quality of readings found in them.

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Exegesis

A technical interpretation of the text.

Fragment

A scrap or portion of a manuscript with only a few words or verses on it.

Hebrew (Ancient)

The Semitic language of the ancient Hebrew Scriptures. Is. 19:18 describes Hebrew as the “language of Canaan.” In Neh. 13:24, it is called the “language of Judah.” Most scholars believe that in the period following the exile in Babylon and the establishment of the Qumran community (ca. 135 BC), Hebrew was no longer the language of daily use among Jews in Palestine, but was primarily reserved for liturgical or scribal use in the Temple or synagogue. According to Hebraist Bruce Walke, Mishnaic Hebrew and Aramaic (along with Greek) were the spoken languages of Palestine at the time of Christ.

Hexapla, Origen’s

The earliest manuscript of the Greek Old Testament prepared by Origen at the library in Caesarea in the third century AD. The Hexapla contained six parallel columns: the Hebrew Old Testament text, the Hebrew consonants transliterated into Greek letters, Aquila’s Greek version from 130 AD, Symmachus’ Greek version from 170 AD, the Septuagint and Theodotion’s Greek version from 190 AD. Only a few surviving fragments of this work still exist.

Infallibility

Used in reference to the Bible, infallibility means that the Bible is true and reliable in all matters—the promises, statements, and prophecies of the Holy Scriptures can never fail or mislead anyone who turns to them, humbly seeking God’s truth.

Inerrancy

This word was **first** used in reference to Scripture in the mid-1800s as a result of the debate over the Biblical texts and manuscripts. Prior to that time, the word infallibility was exclusively used in reference to the biblical texts. There are two definitions of this word as it is used in reference to Scripture: 1) It means that every letter and word of the biblical autographs was inspired by God without any error. 2) More broadly, it means that the Bible is free of falsehood and internal contradictions and is trustworthy and authoritative in all its assertions. Through generations of copying, editorial “corrections” and mistakes have crept into the apographs. Yet, faithful and accurate copies of the biblical writings (that is, the autographs) are appropriately described as authoritative, God-breathed and infallible, and in a general sense inerrant.

Internal evidence

The inherent proof for a reading’s authenticity. Scholars evaluate variant readings according to criteria related to their internal character (length, readability, grammar, context, style, etc.) and use this data to determine which reading is more likely to have been the original one. See Reading.

Koine Greek

The Greek dialect that spread from the Attic peninsula throughout the entire Mediterranean world following the conquest of Alexander the Great. The New Testament books were written in *Koiné* (“common”) Greek.

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Lectionaries

A collection of selected Scriptural passages arranged according to the liturgical year and used in worship services or private devotion. These witnesses are identified by the letter “I” followed by a number (e.g., I45).

Leningradensis (Leningrad) codex

An eleventh-century Hebrew manuscript containing the entire Old Testament text. Samuel ben Jacob wrote the consonantal text in 1008 AD. This codex was later corrected according to the text, vowel points, accent marks and Masora of the Aleppo codex. This is the earliest dated manuscript containing the complete Hebrew Bible.

Majuscule

A block-style capital letter. The word *majuscule* is derived from Latin and means “rather large,” referring to the size of the letter. See Uncial.

Manuscript

Biblical scholars broadly use this word to refer to anything printed or handwritten, dating from any age, that has some part of Scripture on it. Hence, it could be applied to books of the Bible, or sermons, lectionaries and early commentaries that quote some portion of Scripture or reproduce a portion of a biblical passage. For clarity, the term in this book is used strictly in reference to the autographs and apographs, whether Hebrew or Greek. Editors use manuscripts to compile a text (e.g., Textus Receptus). The term comes from the Latin *manu* and *scriptus*, meaning handwritten. The abbreviations *ms/mss* refer to minuscules and *MS/MSS* to uncials. See Autograph, Cursive, Fragment, Majuscule and Minuscule.

Manuscript family

A group of manuscripts that display common textual characteristics. These mostly artificial designations include Alexandria, Byzantine, Caesarean and Western text families. The Alexandrian family, represented mainly by manuscripts Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, display the kind of text that was used mostly in Alexandria in the early centuries of the Christian era. The Byzantine text refers to the Greek text used primarily in Antioch and Byzantium, the center of the Greek-speaking Orthodox church. The Western family generally circulated in North Africa, southern France and Italy. The Caesarean family primarily circulated in the areas surrounding Caesarea in Palestine.

The Byzantine text family is also known as the Antiochian text, Syrian text, Majority text, Universal text, Reformation text, Imperial text and Traditional text. The Alexandrian text family is often referred to as the Egyptian text, Local text, Hesychian text or Minority text.

Masoretes

Levitical scholars active from 500 to 950 AD who continued the work of earlier scribes in preserving the Hebrew Scriptures (known as the Old Testament). Because Hebrew had largely ceased to be spoken in their time, the Masoretes developed a system of vowel points and accent marks superimposed on the fixed consonantal Hebrew text. The text that resulted from their efforts is known as the Masoretic text (MT).

Masoretic text (MT)

The name given to the fixed consonantal text annotated for punctuation (with accent marks) and vocalization (vowel points), including marginal notes called the *Masora* or *Massorah* (Heb., meaning “tradition”). This text, which was produced by the Tiberian

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Masoretic and sealed in the early 900s AD, eventually became the accepted standard text of the Hebrew Bible.

Midrash, midrashic

Hebrew for “to search” or “to inquire.” The interpretation of a biblical text for the purpose of discovering the biblical answer to a current question. This type of teaching was common at the time of Ezra, Nehemiah and the Great Assembly. Later the word *midrashim* (plural) came to be associated with rabbinic commentaries on Scripture that included word-for-word explanations of the biblical text. *Halakah* (legal exegesis) and *haggadah* (homiletic exegesis) are two types of rabbinic Midrash. See also Mishnah.

Minuscule

The word *minuscule* is derived from Latin and means “rather small.” In the context of biblical writing, it refers to any of a number of handwritten manuscripts dating from the 800s to the 1600s AD, in which the words written in small lowercase letters run together (cursive script). These manuscripts are by far the most numerous of the Greek copies still extant (that is, surviving). They usually are of later date than uncial manuscripts and are identified by Arabic numbers without a preceding zero (e.g., 125). See Cursive and Uncial.

Mishnah

A collection of Jewish legal teachings (*halakah*) published around 200 AD. These interpretations were developed within the oral traditions of pharisaic and rabbinic Judaism under the influence of Greek philosophy. The word is derived from *shanah*, meaning “to repeat.” Mishnah instruction is a secondary form of teaching, repeated from instructor to student and not based directly on Scripture.

Paleography

The study of ancient writings, their history and development.

Papyrus (pl. papyri)

A reed plant formerly found in the Nile Delta or near Lake Huleh in Galilee used to make a writing material in ancient times with the consistency of paper. Our word paper is derived from the Latin *papyrus*. Manuscripts from this type of material are identified by the letter “P” followed by a number (e.g., P45 or P⁴⁵) and generally date from antiquity to the 800s AD.

Parchment

Material made from animal skins and used for writing by scribes and monks from 200 BC to 1400 AD. The region surrounding Pergamum became known for the production of this material.

Patristic writers; see Church Fathers.

Peshitta

The authorized version of the Syriac church, dating from the second-century AD.

Polyglot

The word means “many tongues.” In biblical scholarship, it refers to a printed edition of the Bible that includes the Hebrew and Greek text plus translations in parallel columns.

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Pseudepigrapha

A Greek word meaning “falsely entitled.” Non-canonical books dating between 200 BC and 100 AD and falsely attributed to one (e.g., Old Testament patriarchs) who did not write them. Pseudepigrapha include Enoch, Michael the Archangel, Jannes and Jambres, the Apocalypse of Elijah and the like.

Reading

A handwritten or printed character or combination of characters of which a specific text is composed (i.e., letters, syllables and words). Less precisely known as “wording.” See Text.

Recension

An official systematic revision or editing of a text by an author or another to suit specific needs. A recension results in new variant readings.

Scroll

Sheets of papyrus glued or vellum sewn together into a long strip that is used as a writing surface and rolled up for compact storage.

Septuagint

A Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. The name Septuagint comes from the Latin *septuaginta* (seventy); it is often abbreviated LXX. The Septuagint includes writings not found in the traditional Hebrew canon. These additional books are known as the “apocrypha” to Protestants and as the Deuterocanonical books to Roman Catholics. According to legend, the Egyptian king (Ptolemy II, 285-246 BC) sent a request to Jerusalem for a delegation of six men from each of the tribes of Israel to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. These 72 men went to Alexandria and translated the Bible in 70 days.

Sinaiticus (S)

A fourth-century vellum Greek manuscript discovered by Constantin Tischendorf in 1859 in a garbage bin at the monastery of St. Catherine near Mount Sinai. This codex is identified by the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet **ש** and contains the entire New Testament (except Mark 16:9-10 and John 7:53-8:11) and half of the Old Testament with apocrypha in Greek.

Talmud

Consists of the Mishnah and its accompanying commentary called the Gemara. Jewish rabbis compiled the Palestinian Talmud between 200-500 AD. Babylonian rabbis finished compiling their Talmud by the 600s AD.

Targums

Oral Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew text, later written down. These texts were used in the synagogue and early worship under Ezra for those Jews who no longer understood biblical Hebrew. One Aramaic targum from the mid-100s AD included a poorly paraphrased version of the Greek Gospel of Matthew.

Text

The term broadly refers to the handwritten or printed letters, syllables, words and sentences that appear on the page of a manuscript of any book of the Bible. It more nar-

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rowly refers to a compilation of manuscript readings in a printed edition of either the Hebrew Old Testament or Greek New Testament. An example includes the *Textus Receptus*.

Text family; see Manuscript family.

Textual Criticism

Formerly known as lower criticism, this is the art and science of studying and establishing the most trustworthy text by using the various MSS, VSS, quotations or allusions in the writings of the Church Fathers, lectionaries or similar aids. In contrast, higher or biblical criticism deals with questions of a text's authorship, dating, contextual meaning and the like.

Textus Receptus (TR)

The printed Greek New Testament of the Elzevir brothers of Leiden, which appeared with a preface containing these Latin words meaning "received text." The term *Textus Receptus* was first used in reference to the Greek text of Stephanus during the 1800s, when scholars began to debate its worth for translation purposes. Until the nineteenth century, the *Textus Receptus* was the authoritative Greek text of the New Testament. This term collectively refers to the texts of Erasmus, Stephanus, Beza and Elzevir, which are based largely on the readings of the vast majority of New Testament witnesses written in Greek.

Traditional text

The Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament texts preserved through the unbroken authority of and usage by those people who understood and spoke the language.

Translation

The rendering or giving of the sense of a text from one language into another. See Version.

Uncial

A technical term for capital letters or a handwriting style using large, ornate, rounded capital letters, which was prevalent before 800 AD (see Majuscule). The word *uncial* is derived from the Latin and means "a twelfth part," implying that the letter was one-twelfth the size of a normal line. Any manuscript written in majuscule letters, usually in Greek or Latin, primarily between the 300s and 800s AD. These manuscripts are identified either by a number preceded by a zero (e.g., 035) or by a single letter (e.g., A or B).

Urtext

A German word for the original text of a book after its initial composition and editing.

Variant Reading

A place (passage of Scripture) where the reading (whether letters, syllables or words) differs from one manuscript to another. Some scholars classify any difference in the details of a text as a variant reading. More properly, the term refers to any **major translatable** inconsistency or difference between manuscripts, introduced accidentally or deliberately through generations of copying. Also known as textual variant, variation and manuscript difference. See Reading.

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Vaticanus (B)

A fourth-century Greek uncial manuscript that lay hidden in the Vatican library from the 1400s to the 1800s AD, after which time it was published. It is identified by the letter *B*. This Greek manuscript contains most of the Old and New Testaments, excluding sections from Gen. 1:1-46:28, Psa. 105:27-137:6 and Heb. 9:15 to the end of Revelation. It also contains the apocrypha, but Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11 were purposefully omitted from its text.

Vellum; see Parchment.

Version (VS; *pl.* VSS)

In textual criticism, this term is used to refer to the ancient translations of the Hebrew or Greek Scriptures into another language. In the field of Bible translation, it indicates one of several editions of the Bible produced in a single language. For example, the Authorized Version (AV) and the Revised Standard Version (RSV) are two different English versions. Many ancient versions are identified by a simple abbreviation of the translated language, followed by a superscript abbreviation of the version name. For example, the Syriac Peshitta version is identified by the sign sy^p. See Translation.

Vorlage

A German word for the copy of a biblical document used as a source by a scribe, translator or writer.

Vulgate

One of the various Latin versions of the Bible. The title comes from *vulgata editio*, meaning “the old and popular edition,” and is applied both to the early Old Latin version (it), which dates from ca. 150 AD, and to Jerome’s Latin translation (vg) of ca. 405 AD, used by the Roman Catholic Church today after many revisions through the centuries.

Part Three

Appendices from

***The New Testament In Its Original Order—
A Faithful Version With Commentary***

2006 Printing,

that are not included in

***The Holy Bible In Its Original Order—
A New English Translation —***

A Faithful Version With Commentary

2007, 2009, 2010 Printings

Appendix P

Temple Mount at Jerusalem

A summary of Ernest L. Martin's book, *The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot*
by Robert Martin

Josephus gives a different perspective of the temple than what is accepted by most historians today. This may be due to the Jews' distrust of Josephus for having capitulated to the Romans during the onslaught of Jerusalem. In reality, he was trying to save his people from the destruction and terror that would inevitably befall them with their continued resistance. Unfortunately, Josephus' capitulation to the Romans caused many within the Jewish community to view him as a traitor, and thus many within Jewish academia have dismissed him as a historian.

However, Josephus was fully aware of the cardinal features of the Temple Mount: It was built directly over the subterranean Spring of Gihon, and there were caves within its sub-surface. These features were also witnessed by Aristeeas of Egypt three hundred years before Josephus and confirmed by the Roman historian Tacitus (115 AD), who quoted eyewitnesses that were in Jerusalem before 70 AD.

Josephus informs us that Mount Zion, the City of David, was the first citadel protecting the Temple Mount from the south. Later, John Hyrcanus (Maccabees) built a palace north of the Temple Mount called Baris. Hasmonaean princes used this palace, and later, Herod the Great made it into a citadel. He renamed it Fort Antonia, in honor of Marcus Anthony. With great effort, Herod built Fort Antonia into a large enclosed area for the Romans to garrison an entire legion along with their auxiliary personnel.

Josephus Understood the Symbolism of the Gihon Spring

Gihon Spring was the only natural spring of pure water within five miles of Jerusalem in any direction. Pure water was an indispensable requirement for the essential rituals of the temple. Because of this spring of pure water, the temple was a microcosm of the Garden of Eden. (One of the rivers that flowed through the Garden of Eden was the river Gihon.) The water of Gihon was symbolic of the Water of Life.

The Gihon Spring was about a quarter mile south from today's Dome of the Rock. There are no caves or spring in the vicinity of today's Dome of the Rock. This information is crucial in determining the correct location of the Temple Mount. Josephus was fully aware of the symbolism involving the Gihon Spring and the Throne or the Holy of Holies of Almighty God, which the learned men of Judaism have ignored.

The Location of Mount Zion, Ophel and Fort Antonia

Josephus understood that the original site of Mount Zion (it was actually a mound) was located on the southern third of the southeast ridge. This was where David had built his city, and it became known as the "Lower City" of Jerusalem. The limits of David and Solomon's Jerusalem were between Kidron Valley to the east and Tyropoeon Valley to the west, with both valleys merging at the south end of the southeast ridge. The Tyropoeon Valley was gradually populated as Jerusalem grew toward the west during the time of King Uzziah. In the latter part of the second century BC, the Maccabees extensively populated this valley, and it became known as the "Upper City."

The Hinnim Valley was to the immediate west at the south end of the western hill adjoining the Kidron and Tyropoeon Valleys at the foot of the southeast ridge. On the south-

Temple Mount at Jerusalem

ern third of this ridge there were two mounds: Zion and “Ophel” (literally “humped mount”). From south to north, the two mounds together were about 400 yards in length. The distance from the top of Mount Zion to the top of Mount Ophel was over 200 yards. This ridge continued to ascend northward from Mount Ophel to where an outcrop of rock was protruding, which today is called the Dome of the Rock. The Dome of the Rock is located over 600 yards north from the top of Mount Zion and 400 yards from the top of Mount Ophel.

The Temple Mount was built on Mount Ophel over the subterranean Gihon Spring, below which were numerous subsurface caves. From this mount, the Water of Life for the temple services was immediately available. It was renowned for its purity (sweet water) over that of any other spring in the entire region.

Writing of this, Josephus states, “Now on the north side of the temple was built a citadel (Fort Antonia), whose walls were square and strong and of extraordinary firmness. The kings of the Hasmonaean dynasty, who were also high priests before the time of Herod, called it the Tower.” Josephus further informs us, “Fort Antonia dominated the temple.” This fortress guarded the security of the temple, the city of Jerusalem and the fortress itself.

From the north, it was impossible for one to see the temple because Fort Antonia obscured the view. The hill on which the Tower of Antonia stood was the highest of the three mounds (Zion, Ophel, and Fort Antonia) on the north end of the southeast ridge.

During the Hasmonaean dynasty, the tower of Baris was expanded to become Fort Antonia. It adjoined the new city Bezetha and further obscured the Temple Mount from the north of Jerusalem. An aqueduct coming from Bethlehem supplied Fort Antonia with water that was stored in 37 cisterns for the Tenth Legion and their support personnel, which numbered approximately 10,000 men.

No Rock Outcropping Associated with the Temple

There is no reference in Scripture or any secular historical source that describes a natural outcropping of rock located at the highest point of the ridge or hill that was associated with the Temple Mount. This includes the sites of the temple floor, the Holy of Holies and the Altar of Burnt Offering.

The Altar of Burnt Offering was formally used as a threshing floor. It is clear that the threshing floor was a level area on top of Mount Ophel, not an irregular formation of rock on top of a ridge.

Solomon built the east wall of the temple that reached upwards from the base on the east side of the hill. The foundation was built below the Kidron Valley floor, and the visible wall began from the bottom of the valley and extended upwards for three hundred cubits (450 feet). An area between the top of the hill and an artificial embankment that Solomon had built along the Kidron Valley was completely filled in with rubble and large rocks known as millo. The millo reached the top of Mount Ophel, 300 cubits—about 40 to 45 stories—above the Kidron Valley floor, further extending the temple platform to the east. As viewed from the Mount of Olives on the east, the temple area looked like a modern skyscraper with a huge platform 150 by 450 feet.

Solomon built no walls on the north, west, and south sides. However, in the course of time this hilltop area was enlarged, filling in some of those areas and enclosing the hill from its base at the floor of the Kidron Valley on the east and the Tyropoeon Valley on the west. Its southern and northern sides extended westward over the ridge between the Kidron and Tyropoeon valleys. The final foundation of the temple was shaped like a cube, and the area on top of the Temple Mount was a perfect square platform.

Solomon built his palace and judgment hall just south of the temple. This was the area of Mount Zion and the city of David, around which Jerusalem evolved. In the second century BC, Mount Zion was leveled during the time of Simon the Hasmonaean, just south of Mount Ophel. After that time the Temple Mount was not obscured from the south by the higher elevation of Mount Zion.

Appendix P

The Gihon Spring

The Temple Mount had a natural spring with an unlimited supply of water coming from underneath the Holy of Holies. Scriptural references require a water source to be associated with the temple and its function. The Gihon Spring is referred to numerous times in the book of Psalms and by the prophets.

During the time of David and Solomon, Gihon Spring supplied the Siloam Pool and fed the Kidron Valley. Toward the end of the eighth century BC, King Hezekiah built a tunnel to supply underground water from the Gihon Spring to western Jerusalem (II Chron. 32:30). Hezekiah built this tunnel because he was expecting a siege against Jerusalem by Sennacherib, the king of Assyria.

Before 70 AD, the Jews often used the word “Siloam” to describe the whole system of the Gihon Spring—Siloam Pool, Hezekiah’s underground tunnel and the channels into the Kidron Valley. (Christians did not use the name “Gihon” but continued to use “Siloam” to describe this water network even into modern times.)

It is most significant that the pure water of Gihon Spring under the Temple Mount ran near the seat of the Holy of Holies, symbolic of the seat of Almighty God’s throne. John’s description of God’s throne in Revelation shows a river of water coming out from beneath the throne: “Then he showed me a pure river of *the* water of life, clear as crystal, flowing out from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1).

Destruction of the Temple Foretold

Micah prophesied of the destruction of the temple (Mic. 3:10-12): “Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor justice, and pervert all iniquity. They build up Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for a bribe, and the priests thereof teach for pay, and the prophets thereof divine for money. Yet will they lean upon the Lord, saying is not the Lord among us? No harm can come upon us. Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the temple as the bare hills.”

Jesus confirmed this prophecy as the writers of the gospels agree: Matthew 24:1-2 and Mark 13:1-2: “And after going out, Jesus departed from the temple; and His disciples came to *Him* to point out the buildings of the temple. But Jesus said to them. ‘Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, there shall not be left here even a stone upon a stone that shall not be thrown down.’”

Luke 19:43-44: “For *the* days shall come upon you that your enemies shall cast a rampart about you, and shall enclose you around and keep you in on every side, and shall level you to the ground, and your children within you; and they shall not leave in you a stone upon a stone, because you did not know the season of your visitation.”

Luke 21:5-6: “And while some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and consecrated gifts, He said, ‘*As for* these things that you now see, *the* days will come in which *there* shall not be left *one* stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.’”

Fort Antonia’s walls were 40 cubits (60 feet) high. Inside these walls, the buildings and grounds were built on a level platform. At the four corners of the walls were towers. Three of these towers were 50 cubits (75 feet) high, and the southwest tower was 70 cubits (105 feet) high. This higher tower overlooked the entire temple court to the south of Fort Antonia.

Josephus wrote that all of Fort Antonia was built over and around a rock outcrop at the summit of the ridge. Today, a mosque stands over this rock formation known as the Dome of the Rock. Completed by Abdul el-Malik in 691 AD, the mosque covers the remainder of this protruding rock but occupies only a very small fraction of the entire surface area of the 36-acre artificial platform that the Romans built.

Temple Mount at Jerusalem

Fort Antonia and the Roman Legion

A Roman legion had 5,000 infantry troops and with them 5,000 support personnel. There were 278 military personnel per acre within Fort Antonia.

The Roman garrison was the dominant feature of Jerusalem, a continuous reminder to the Jews of Rome's supremacy. Further, being four and one-half times greater in area than the Temple Mount, Fort Antonia was intimidating, and therefore, a successful tool of psychological warfare to secure Jewish conformity to Roman authority.

The crowds that assembled at the temple during the Holy Days were overseen by 2,000 Roman troops. In order to prevent disorder and riots among the Jews, they were stationed on a 45-foot wide walkway built atop the four rows of colonnades that surrounded the temple grounds. During the Jewish festivals, there were three rotations of guards, totaling 6,000 soldiers, each day.

Josephus' Description of the Colonnades

The colonnades between the temple and Fort Antonia were extended around the outer edge of the entire Temple Mount platform. These colonnades were roofed with the roadway 30 cubits (45 feet) wide. The colonnade roadway was the vantage point from which the Roman troops were able to guard the entrances and exits to and from the temple as well as keep a watchful eye on the inside area of the court (with the exception of the inside of the temple). In addition, the colonnade roadway gave them nearly instant access from Fort Antonia to the temple area. The double colonnade-bridge that connected the temple with Fort Antonia was one stade (600 feet). Josephus described two colonnades as military roadways that were an integral part of the temple. These two colonnades led from the south (west corner) wall of Fort Antonia to the gate on the north (west corner) wall of the Temple Mount. Called the Tadi Gate, this north wall was not used by the general public but only by the Roman Legion.

The Romans were very astute in military engineering and constructed their fortifications with this advantage. They understood well that the key to controlling Jerusalem was to manage and control the Temple Mount. Fort Antonia's protection was its dominant position over the Temple Mount.

Appendix Q

Peter's Tomb Recently Discovered in Jerusalem

(Excerpts from personal account by F. Paul Peterson)

“While visiting a friend in Switzerland, I heard of what seemed to me one of the greatest discoveries since the time of Christ—that Peter was buried in Jerusalem and not in Rome. The source of this rumor, written in Italian, was not clear; it left considerable room for doubt, or rather wonder. Rome was the place where I could investigate the matter, and if such proved encouraging, a trip to Jerusalem might be necessary in order to gather valuable firsthand information on the subject. I therefore went to Rome. After talking to many priests and investigating various sources of information, I finally was greatly rewarded by learning where I could buy the only known book on the subject, which was also written in Italian. It is called *Gli Scavi del Dominus Flevit* printed in 1958 at the Tipografia del PP. Francescani, in Jerusalem. It was written by P. B. Bagatti and J. T. Milik, both Roman Catholic priests. The story of the discovery was there, but it seemed to be purposely hidden for much was lacking. I consequently determined to go to Jerusalem to see for myself, if possible, that which appeared to be almost unbelievable, especially since it came from priests who naturally, because of the existing tradition that Peter was buried in Rome, would be the last ones to welcome such a discovery or to bring it to the attention of the world.

“In Jerusalem I spoke to many Franciscan priests who all said, finally, though reluctantly, that the bones of Simon Bar Jona (St. Peter) were found in Jerusalem on the Franciscan monastery site called Dominus Flevit (where Jesus was supposed to have wept over Jerusalem) on the Mount of Olives ... where the names of Christian Biblical characters were found on the ossuaries (bone boxes). The names of Mary and Martha were found on one box and right next to it was one with the name of Lazarus, their brother. Other names of early Christians were found on other boxes. Of greatest interest, however, was that which was found within twelve feet from the place where the remains of Mary, Martha and Lazarus were found—the remains of St. Peter. They were found in an ossuary, on the outside of which was clearly and beautifully written in Aramaic, ‘Simon Bar Jona.’ ...

“The story of the cave and the ossuaries and the regular cemetery just outside of the Convent site is this: It was a Roman custom that, when a person had died and after about ten years when the body had decomposed, the grave would be opened. The bones would be placed in a small ossuary with the name of the person carefully written on the outside front. These ossuaries would then be placed in a cave as in the case of this Christian burial ground and thus making room for others. But this cave or burial place where the ossuaries were found and which was created and brought about through the natural and disinterested sequence of events, without any reason to change facts or circumstances, was a greater testimony than if there were a witness recorded, stating that Peter was buried there. And yet, even that is unmistakably recorded in the three words in Aramaic of the ossuary, Simon Bar Jona....

“When Pope Pius XII declared the Assumption of Mary to be an article of faith in 1950, the Catholic Church in Jerusalem then quickly sold the tomb of Mary to the Armenian Church. Ex-priest Lavallo told me personally that there is another tomb of St. Mary in Ephesus. But the tomb of St. Peter is altogether different for they would rather that it never existed, and to buy or sell such a site would be out of the question. It fell upon them in this manner, as I was told by a Franciscan monk of the monastery of Dominus Flevit. One of their members was spading the ground on this site in 1953, when his shovel fell through. Excavation was started and there a large underground Christian burial ground was uncovered. The initial of Christ in Greek was written there which would never have been found in

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a Jewish, Arab or pagan cemetery. By the structure of the writings, it was established by scientists that they were of the days just before the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A.D....You can see then, how the Christians would be inclined to have their burial ground on the Mount, for here also had been a favorite meeting place of Jesus and His disciples. In all the cemetery, nothing was found (as also in the Catacombs in Rome) which resembles Arab, Jewish, Catholic or pagan practices....

“The Catholic Church says that Peter was Pope in Rome from 41 to 66 A.D., a period of twenty-five years, but the Bible shows a different story. The book of the Acts of the Apostles (in either the Catholic or Protestant Bible) records the following: Peter was preaching the Gospel to the circumcision (the Jews) in Caesarea and Joppa in Palestine, ministering unto the household of Cornelius, which is a distance of 1,800 miles from Rome (Acts 10:23, 24). Soon after, about the year 44 A.D. (Acts 12), Peter was cast into prison in Jerusalem by Herod, but he was released by an angel. Apparently, Peter left Jerusalem and went to Babylon. Peter is not mentioned again until the Jerusalem conference in 49 AD (Acts 15:7).

“Saul was converted in 33 A.D. and became Paul the Apostle (Acts 9). Paul tells us that three years after his conversion in 36 A.D., he ‘went up to Jerusalem to see Peter’ (Galatians 1:18), and in 49 A.D., fourteen years later, he again went up to Jerusalem (Gal. 2:1, 8), Peter being mentioned. Soon after that he met Peter in Antioch, and as Paul says he ‘withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed,’ Gal. 2:11. The evidence is abundant; the truth is clear from the Scriptures ... Very few, if any, have withstood a Pope and lived (except in these days when everybody seems to withstand him). If Peter were Pope it would have been no different. Paul does not only withstand Peter but he rebukes him and blames him of being at fault....

“This ancient Christian burial ground shows that Peter died and was buried in Jerusalem, which is easily understandable since neither history nor the Bible tells of Peter’s having been in Rome. To make matters more clear, the Bible tells us that Peter was the Apostle to the Jews. It was Paul who was the Apostle to the Gentiles, and both history and the Bible tells of his being in Rome. No wonder that the Roman Catholic Bishop, Strossniayer, in his great speech against papal infallibility before the Pope and the Council of 1870 said, ‘Scaliger, one of the most learned men, has not hesitated to say that St. Peter’s episcopate and residence in Rome ought to be classed with ridiculous legends.’ Eusebius, one of the most learned men of his time, wrote the Church history up to the year 325 A.D. He said that Peter never was in Rome....

“Mark you, all the priests agree that the Vatican and St. Peter’s were built over a pagan cemetery....You realize surely that Christians would never bury their dead in a pagan cemetery, and you may be very sure that pagans would never allow a Christian to be buried in their cemetery. So, even if Peter died in Rome, which is out of the question, surely the pagan cemetery under St. Peter’s Basilica would be the last place in which he would have been buried....

“... But they have said that after all these years of excavation under the Vatican, they have discovered Greek words which read, ‘Peter is buried here,’ and it gives the date 160 A.D. First of all, the very structure of the sentence immediately gives one the impression that either quite recently or long ago, someone put the sign there hoping that it would be taken as authentic in order to establish that which then, and even now, has never been proven. Then there is a discrepancy in the date, for Peter was martyred around the year 62 A.D. and not 160 A.D. Thirdly, why is it that they mention nothing about finding bones under or around the sign? While visiting the Catacombs, one sees a few things which are not becoming to Christians but which tend to indicate that the Christians had some pagan practices similar to those of Rome today. Nothing is said about them, and only after persistent questioning will the Roman Catholic priest, who acts as guide, tell you that those things (images, etc.) were placed there centuries after the early Christian era.

“In 1950, just a few years prior to the discovery of the Christian burial ground in Jerusalem, the Pope made the strange declaration that the bones of St. Peter were found under

Appendix Q

St. Peter's in Rome. Strange it was, for since beginning to build the church in 1450 (finished in 1626) they erected St. Peter's Tomb (?) under the large dome and Brandini serpentine columns. Since then multiplied millions were thereby deceived into believing that the remains of St. Peter were there, which the hierarchy had all along known was not true, as is proven by the late Pope's declaration. The following was published in Newsweek of July 1, 1957:

'It was in 1950 that Pope Pius XII in his Christmas message announced that the tomb of St. Peter had indeed been found, as tradition held, beneath the immense dome of the Cathedral (there was, however, no evidence that the bones uncovered there belonged to the body of the martyr).' ...

"To make an announcement of such importance when there is absolutely 'no evidence' is rather ridiculous as was also brought out in Time Magazine of October 28, 1957 ...

'A thorough account in English of the discoveries beneath St. Peter's was now available ... by British archaeologists Jocelyn Toynbee and John Ward Perkins. The authors were not members of the excavating team, but scholars Toynbee (a Roman Catholic) and Perkins (an Anglican) pored over the official Vatican reports painstakingly and examined the diggings. Their careful independent conclusions fell short of the Pope's flat statement.' (The Pope's statement that the remains of St. Peter were found under St. Peter's in Rome.) The excavation under St. Peter's for the remains of St. Peter was still going on secretly, in spite of the Pope's declaration of 1950.

"Then in 1965, an archaeologist at Rome University, Prof. Margherita Guarducci, tells of a new set of bones belonging to Peter. The story was fantastic but lacked common sense and even bordered on the infantile ... the Palo Alto Times (California), May 9, 1967, came out with an article on the subject, and I quote, 'Other experts, among them Msgr. Joseph Ruyschaert, vice prefect of the Vatican Library, are not convinced by Miss Guarducci's evidence. "There are too many unknowns," he told reporters on a recent tour of the Vatican grottoes, "There is no continuous tracing of the bones. We lack historical proof. They could be anyone's bones." The Vatican would seem to be on the monsignor's side because so far it has taken no steps to officially recognize the bones as St. Peter's,' continues the article.

"... In spite of the statements by the high Papal authority above and the resultant lesson that should have been learned, the Pope, a year later claimed the Prof. Margherita bones as those of St. Peter. When the bones were found there was little importance placed upon them and they were filed away as such. But when the first set of Peter's bones turned out so tragically, there was a vacuum left, and something had to be done. Again they turned their thoughts to the filed-away bones, the only hope they had of success. In them there was a ray of hope for the bones were minus a skull, which could go along with the story of the supposed skull of St. Peter which had for centuries been guarded in the church of St. John Lateran in Rome. With a generous mixture of ideas, suppositions, theories and wishful thinking, a fairly logical story emerged. It was then declared by Pope Paul as the Gospel truth that these now were the genuine bones of St. Peter, and most of the faithful accepted them as such. For a while all was well until another hitch developed. This time, as fate would have it, the bones in connection with the skull which was guarded for centuries as that of St. Peter, were found incompatible to the more recent bones of St. Peter. The dilemma was terrible....It was a choice of claiming these bones championed by Prof. Margherita as fake, or claiming as fake the skull accepted by hundreds of Popes as that of St. Peter. They rejected the past rather than expose themselves to the ridicule of the present.' Prof. Margherita claims in this article, which appeared in the Manchester Guardian in London, as well as the S. F. Chronicle of June 27, 1968, concerning the long accepted skull of St. Peter, as 'it is a fake.' Then the article continues, 'The hundreds of Popes and millions of Roman Catholics who have accepted and venerated the other skull were innocent victims of another early tradition.'

"But the most astounding statement in the long article found in the above mentioned newspaper was, 'The professor did not submit them to modern scientific tests, which would

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have determined the approximate age, because, she feared the process would have reduced them to dust.' How could any scientific study of bones be carried out without first scientifically determining the age of the person, or bones? This would be of the greatest interest and the most important for further research. Also any scientist or chemist knows that you do not have to submit the whole skeleton for testing to determine the age. A part of the shin bone or a rib would be sufficient. It appears that she was protecting her 'Peter's bones' from another possible disaster, which a wrong age would have caused. The Vatican and others have calculated through all existing evidence that Peter lived to be around 80 and 82 years and that he died around the years 62 to 64 A.D. These figures go along perfectly, as does everything else in the case, with the remains found in the Christian burial ground on the Mount of Olives and in the ossuary on which was clearly and beautifully written 'Simon Bar Jona' in Aramaic....

"The great historian, Schaff, states that the idea of Peter being in Rome is irreconcilable with the silence of the Scriptures, and even with the mere fact of Paul's epistle to the Romans. In the year 57, Paul wrote his epistle to the Roman church but does not mention Peter, although he does name 28 leaders in the church at Rome (Rom. 16:7). It must, therefore, be concluded that if the whole subject is faced with detached objectivity, the conclusion must inevitably be reached that Peter was never in Rome. Paul lived and wrote in Rome, but he declared, 'only Luke is with me.'"

Appendix V

Alexandrian Text: A Prestige Text

The Alexandrian (Egyptian) text originated in a region known for its great center of learning. The two most well-known manuscripts of this text type are Vaticanus and Sinaiticus. Textual scholar Dr. Edward F. Hills described this local prestige text: “The Alexandrian text has received its name from the fact that it is that form of the New Testament which was used by Origen (182-251) in many of his writings and also by most of the other Church Fathers who, like Origen, lived at Alexandria. This Alexandrian text is found in *B* (Codex Vaticanus) and *Aleph* (Codex Sinaiticus), two manuscripts which date from the first and second half respectively of the fourth century and are the oldest complete (or nearly complete) manuscripts of the Greek New Testament known to be extant. About 25 other Greek manuscripts are Alexandrian in text, and so are the Bohairic (Northern Egypt) and Sahidic (Southern Egypt) versions. Hort (1881) distinguished between the text of *B* and that found in other Alexandrian documents where they agree with *B*. He believed that *B* contained a remarkably pure (Neutral) text which had been preserved somewhere in the West and that other documents represented a scholarly revision of this pure (Neutral) text which had been at Alexandria. Present day scholars, however, reject this distinction and attribute an Alexandrian origin to the texts of all the manuscripts of the Alexandrian class, including *B*” (Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 1956 ed., p. 40).

According to scholar Gordon Fee, the evidence from the early papyri (P⁷⁵, P⁷², P⁴⁶) and the Alexandrian scholar Origen places the origins of the Alexandrian text in “all its particulars squarely in the second century [100s AD] ... as early as Christianity was known in that city” (Harrison, *Biblical Criticism: Historical, Literary and Textual*, p. 135). Hence, our historical reconstruction of the Alexandrian text is mainly confined to the late second and the early third century AD.

Historical Need for a Local Text: The immediate task faced by Demetrius, the first bona fide bishop of Egypt (190-232 AD), and the Catechetical School of Alexandria was to correct radical Valentinian Gnostic perversions of Christianity (Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, p. 94). (See Appendix W for a historical overview of the effects of Gnosticism on early Egyptian Christianity.) One of the most effective means in halting Gnostic heresy in the Egyptian churches was to produce a church text for public reading. Unfortunately, the early theologian-scribes of the Egyptian churches relied on the textual principles of the Alexandrian library and the religious traditions of the Coptic churches in producing their text.

The late Kurt Aland, textual scholar and Church historian, initially posited this historical reconstruction of the Alexandrian text: “Quite possibly Bishop Demetrius had manuscripts prepared for his newly reorganized diocese (now under the direction of his newly appointed chorepiscopoi) and for its churches in a scriptorium related to the Catechetical School (which probably existed despite the lack of any documentary evidence). Designating particular manuscripts (which probably were imported from other provinces of the broader church) to be master exemplars would have created a special ‘Alexandria’ text” (Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 59).

Aland quickly rejected this account, however, due to his interpretation of the textual evidence: “But this hypothesis, however intrinsically possible, does not square with the evidence of the manuscripts up to the fourth/fifth century. Thus P⁴⁵, P⁴⁶, P⁶⁶, and a whole group of other manuscripts offer a ‘free’ text, i.e., a text dealing with the original text in a relatively free manner with no program of standardization (or were these manuscripts also imported from elsewhere?)” (Ibid.). Aland’s objection was also based upon the existence of nine manuscripts (P¹, P²³, P²⁷, P³⁵, P³⁹, P^{64/67}, P⁶⁵, P⁷⁰ and P⁷⁵), dated 200-350 AD, that exhibit a “strict” text, meaning that their scribes rarely departed from their exemplar. Aland’s conten-

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tion was that a second or third-century revision that resulted in the Alexandrian text was impossible based on the coexistence of texts reflecting such a divergence of scribal habits.

However, Aland conceded the possibility of an early Alexandrian revision in his description of the distribution of early manuscripts and the rise of text types: “The more loosely organized a diocese, or the greater the difference between its constituent churches, the more likely different text types would coexist (as in **Early Egypt**)” (Aland, pp. 55-56, bold added). This description certainly applies to the atmosphere prior to and during the decade of Demetrius’ reorganization of the Egyptian churches (190-200 AD). Persecutions in the early 200s AD would have perpetuated a loose organization of the churches in this region. In short, the existence of divergent texts (free and strict) does not preclude the possibility of an Alexandrian revision of the original apostolic text because they could easily have coexisted, with the “free” type being produced in outlying areas among the more loosely organized congregations.

Furthermore, the presence of “mixed texts” among the early papyri has forced many scholars, including Aland, to rethink the theory of manuscript genealogy. In an essay entitled “The Significance of the Papyri for New Testament Research,” Aland concluded that “mixed texts” (those containing both Byzantine and Alexandrian readings) were only possible after, and not before, a recension or systematic revision of the text (Aland, “The Significance of the Papyri for New Testament Research,” *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, p. 335-337). Because Aland appealed to classical principles of textual criticism, it was difficult for him to see the significance of the textual evidence in verifying the existence of the Byzantine and Alexandrian texts before the copying of the early papyri with mixed texts (i.e., P⁴⁶ and P⁶⁶) began ca. 200 AD.

Due to his partiality for the Alexandrian text, Aland went to considerable length to interpret the evidence in such a way as to support his conclusion that Alexandria was the source of the original text of the New Testament, and the Byzantine Text was secondary, a product of ecclesiastical influence and circulation. This is a logical impossibility in that manuscripts containing the Byzantine Text were copied by many independent scribes from widely diverse geographical areas across the Byzantine Empire (cf. Robinson, “New Testament Textual Criticism: The Case for the Byzantine Priority,” *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism*, par. 98). Ironically, however, Aland’s conjecture **can** be applied to the copying of the early and later Alexandrian text.

Aland again provided the historical background: “From the fourth century it [Egyptian church] had a well-defined text (known as the Alexandrian text type) because the administration of the Alexandrian patriarchs was effectively centralized....Eventually the Alexandrian text produced the Egyptian text. The circulation of this Egyptian text then became increasingly limited by the growing popularity of the Coptic versions....Athanasius, the powerful bishop of Alexandria, whose authority was felt far beyond the borders of Egypt as early as 328 [AD], governed his church with a tightly centralized administrative structure. We do not know precisely what manuscripts he designated for use as a model, but it must have been of the type represented by Codex Vaticanus or P⁷⁵. Naturally any errors in the model manuscript, whether real or imagined, would have been corrected” (Aland, *The Text*, pp. 56, 65).

Aland further described how Athanasius and the philologically trained theologians of the fourth century AD corrected and revised the earlier Alexandrian text: “What they apparently did was to take those manuscripts which they regarded as reliable—for Luke and John a manuscript such as P⁷⁵—and to correct text errors and corruptions or what they thought to be such. That is, they carried out a revision of the texts of selected manuscripts. At least the Egyptian text appears to have originated from a local text. Or, rather it seems that from the existing local texts one was selected, revised, and, through the production of copies of the revised manuscript, enforced as the dominating text in this particular ecclesiastical province. ...The text thus favored and put into circulation did not, of course, immediately become the dominating text, if in fact it ever did” (Aland, “Significance of the Papyri,” p. 336).

Appendix V

It is very probable that Athanasius and this group of revisers conducted their textual work due to the destruction of many manuscripts during the Diocletian persecution (303-313 AD). This conclusion is warranted if the claims of New Testament scholar and author Philip Comfort are true that Palestine, Egypt and North Africa were the areas where persecution was the most severe (Comfort, *The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament*, p. 13).

This review shows why an honest and accurate account of historical considerations must take precedence in the reconstruction of the Alexandrian text.

School of Alexandria: Bishop Demetrius began the process of producing an “official” text for the Egyptian churches by utilizing the textual methods used at the library of Alexandria. With its reported 600,000 volumes, the library and museum were renowned for their scientific studies, critical study of Homeric texts and editing of other classical works (Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 149). The accents used in modern Greek and the first Greek grammar were developed at Alexandria (Bromiley, p. 92).

The scriptorium at the Catechetical School of Alexandria, called the *Didaskaleion*, was the main vehicle in producing this official text. The school was instituted in ca. 180 AD as a “Christian university” for “the propagation of the Christian faith among the more cultural classes....Side by side with the Christian faith, the profane sciences were taught. The School had great influence on the development of Christian theology alongside the University (Museum) of Alexandria and attracted many Christians from distant parts” (Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 248).

The school’s intent, however, went beyond the mere propagation of Christianity to the cultural classes. Its true goal was to spread a philosophy of biblical interpretation, namely, the allegorical method: “Thus there was a fairly well-developed scholarly discipline of textual and literary criticism in antiquity, localized chiefly at Alexandria and directed primarily toward the epics of Homer. **It is common knowledge that Philo Judaeus and many Church Fathers, influenced by the philological scholarship current at Alexandria,** utilized in their interpretation of the Scriptures the methods of allegorical exegesis which had been applied to certain stories of the gods and goddesses included in the Homeric cycle” (Metzger, p. 150, emphasis added).

The school was headed by Pantaenus (180-190 AD), Clement (190-202) and Origen (202-231), respectively. Later, it came under the direct supervision of the bishop of Alexandria. The blending of Platonic and Christian thought began with Clement and Origen. Platonism specifically focused on “forms” or “ideas,” rather than on sight and experience. It was believed that by grasping the forms, a person could be perfected or attain a true well-being (Cross, p. 1101). Thus, words were no longer as important as the attainment of a purer or clearer sense behind the words. This impacted not only biblical interpretation but also the copying of the text.

The Alexandrian theologians at the school’s scriptorium were thoroughly trained linguists, grammarians and textual critics (Comfort, p. 22). Comfort explained the techniques used by scholars at the Alexandrian library and followed by theologians at the scriptorium: “The Alexandrians were concerned with preserving the original text of literary works. Textual criticism was applied to Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* because these ancient texts existed in many manuscripts. The scribes would make text-critical decisions concerning the original wording and then produce an archetype, a manuscript produced officially and deposited in the library. Whenever necessary, further manuscripts were copied from and collated against this archetype (Birdsall 1970:312). We can presume that the same kind of textual criticism was applied to the New Testament text by Christian scribes in Alexandria. From the second century to the fourth century, the Alexandrian scribes worked to purify the text from textual corruption. Speaking of their efforts, Günther Zuntz writes (1953:271-72):

“The Alexandrian correctors strove, in ever repeated efforts, to keep the text current in their sphere free from many of the faults that had infected it in the previous period and which tended to crop up again even after they had been obelized [i.e., marked as spurious]. These labors must time and again have been checked by persecutions and the confiscation of

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Christian books, and counteracted by the continuing currency of manuscripts of the older type” (Comfort, p. 22).

Aland’s earlier description along with the readings of the early Egyptian papyri indicates that the Alexandrian scribes (theologians) must have traveled to other parts of Egypt and the Roman Empire to collect manuscripts. Some of these manuscripts chosen were corrupt at various points (O’Neill, “The Rules Followed by the Editors of the Text Found in the Codex Vaticanus,” *New Testament Studies*, vol. 35, pp. 227-228). The presence of 150 distinct Byzantine readings in the early papyri (cf. P⁵, P¹³, P³⁷, P⁴⁵, P⁴⁶, P⁴⁷, P⁶⁶, P⁷² and P⁷⁵) shows that the Alexandrian theologian-scribes also worked from manuscripts containing the apostolic (Byzantine) text (Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism*, pp. 140-159).

In their effort to achieve clearness, Hills noted that the Alexandrian scribes **deliberately** removed many words, clauses and passages that were part of the original apostolic (Byzantine) text: “In applying these methods to the New Testament manuscripts, however, these Alexandrian Christians went beyond the pagan grammarians in their zeal to purify the sacred text. They not only marked clauses and whole passages which they thought were spurious but actually removed them. And, unfortunately, their judgment in these matters was not infallible. Thus it often happened that they eliminated a portion of the genuine text and left the corruption that they ought to have removed. In this manner another distinct type of New Testament text was created, namely, the Alexandrian, which also had a wide circulation, since it originated in Alexandria, the great capital of Greek learning” (Hills, 1956 ed., p. 52).

These alterations to the text were made by fallible humans who were sometimes led in their editing of the text by their personal theological persuasion: “In the writings of the great Alexandrian scholar Origen ... we find an authentic illustration of the manner in which the Alexandrian form of the New Testament was created. In his comment on Matt. 19:17-21 (Jesus’ reply to the rich young man) Origen reasons that Jesus could not have concluded his list of God’s commandments with the comprehensive requirement, *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*. For the reply of the young man was, *All these things have I kept from my youth up*, and Jesus evidently accepted his statement as true. But if the young man had loved his neighbor as himself, he would have been perfect, for Paul says that the whole of law is summed up in this saying, *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*. But Jesus answered, *If thou wilt be perfect, etc.*, implying that the young man was not yet perfect. Therefore, Origen argued, the commandment, *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*, could not have been spoken by Jesus on this occasion and was not part of the original text of Matthew. This clause had been added, he believed, by some tasteless scribe. Such were the reasoning processes by which the ancient critics of Alexandria deleted from the New Testament not only spurious readings but also many genuine ones, thus producing the Alexandrian text (found in *B* and *Aleph*), which is much shorter than the Western or Byzantine texts” (Ibid., p. 53).

While there is no proof that Origen published a critical edition of the New Testament, he was acutely aware of textual details and variations in New Testament manuscripts (Metzger, pp. 151-152). As head of the Catechetical School, Origen was in a position to influence the writing and copying of manuscripts.

Textual scholar John William Burgon confirmed this conclusion in his description of Origen’s knowledge of textual details: “Indeed Origen was a Textual Critic. He spent much time and toil upon the text of the New Testament, besides his great labours in the Old [i.e., Hexapla], because he found it disfigured as he says by corruptions ‘some arising from the carelessness of scribes, some from evil license of emendation, some from arbitrary omissions and interpolations.’ Such a sitting in judgment, or as perhaps it should be said with more justice to Origen such a pursuit of inquiry, involved weighing of evidence on either side, of which there are many indications in his works” (Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*, p. 151).

Appendix V

The Influence of Atticism: Contemporary textual research has confirmed that during the second century Alexandrian scribes and grammarians corrected the New Testament text stylistically and syntactically to the Attic or Classical Greek. Atticism was specially dominant in literary circles between 100-200 AD (Elliott, *The Principles and Practice of New Testament Textual Criticism*, p. 24).

“Attic was the dialect of Athens, during the ‘golden age’ of classical Greek (4th-5th centuries BCE). In this golden age, Athens was both the political and literary center of Greece. ‘Classical Greek’ is normally equated with Attic Greek, because of the proliferation of literary works that comes from this dialect. Attic was thus a vehicle of refinement, precision, and beauty through which some of the world’s great literature was conveyed: ‘the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, the comedies of Aristophanes, the histories of Thucydides and Xenophon, the orations of Demosthenes, and the philosophical treatises of Plato’” (Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*, p. 15).

The New Testament was written in *Koiné* Greek, which was dominant after the conquests of Alexander the Great until 330 AD when it was superseded by Byzantine Greek. The late Dr. J. Gresham Machen, professor of New Testament (NT) Greek, explained the difference between NT Greek and the literary (Attic) prose centuries before and during the period in which the NT was written: “... the New Testament is written simply in the popular form of the *Koiné* which was spoken in the cities throughout the whole of the Greek-speaking world...Undoubtedly, the language of the New Testament is **no artificial language of books ... but the natural, living language of the period**. But the Semitic influence should not be underestimated. The New Testament writers were nearly all Jews, and all of them were strongly influenced by the Old Testament. In particular, they were influenced, so far as language is concerned, by the Septuagint, and the Septuagint was influenced, as most ancient translations were, by the language of the original. The Septuagint had gone far toward producing a Greek vocabulary to express the deepest things of the religion of Israel. And this vocabulary was profoundly influential in the New Testament...the originality of the New Testament writers should not be ignored” (Gresham, *New Testament Greek for Beginners*, pp. 1-6, emphasis added).

According to scholar Dr. Jack Moorman, “Importantly for us, Koine was the dialect of the New Testament. This is a remarkable evidence of God’s providence. The Attic left too much to the imagination, whereas Koine with its greater fullness could be more precise. It was simple, lucid, plain, and full...As we might expect, signs point to Alexandria being the prime mover to bring the Scripture Text into line with the Attic dialect. The manuscripts associated with that locality, certainly beyond all others, favour the Attic-like terseness.

“Koine is distinguished from the Attic by a more frequent use of pronouns and connectives, spelling changes, Hebrew or Semitic idiom, use of the historic present and future middle, not as many compound words, certain expressions, etc. For example, ‘he answered and said’ is frequently found in the Koine text of our New Testament, whereas in Attic it is merely ‘he said’” (Moorman, *Missing in Modern Bibles: Is the Full Story Being Told?*, pp. 51-52).

A technical review of the differences between *Koiné* and Attic Greek is available in Dr. Daniel B. Wallace’s *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*, pp. 19-20.

Atticism at Work: The text of the Gospel of Mark in today’s critical Greek texts, which are predominately Alexandrian in character, offers five clear examples of scribal revision to the Attic Greek. In Mark 9:12, 38; 10:20, 29; and 12:24 these texts contain the Attic word **εφη** (Eng., meaning “spoke” or “said”). At each place, the 1550 Stephens Text (Byzantine Text) contains **αποκριθεις ειπεν** (Eng., meaning “answering *and* said,” or answered *and* said,” or “answered saying”) or its close form. In Mark 14:29, the form **εφη** in the Stephens Text appears to be authentic based on usage and context.

The late George D. Kilpatrick was a pioneer in the study of Attic Greek in the New Testament and wrote many essays on the subject. Kilpatrick explained that if “we come to the New Testament from Classical Greek we soon perceive that among the distinctive fea-

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tures of the Greek New Testament are idioms which, strictly speaking, are not Greek at all. No Greek of any period, left to himself, would say or write **αποκριθεις ειπεν**. In the same way 'he answered and said' is not natural English....Hence, we are not surprised when we find that often where **αποκριθεις ειπεν** and the like occur in our Greek text there are variants designed to mitigate or remove this un-Greek expression. We may even suspect that sometimes the attempt to improve the language has been successful and that the more Greek expression is in our text and the original un-Greek wording in our apparatus [foot-notes]" (Elliott, p. 16).

He continued: "**εφη** is a good Greek word of ancient lineage but it was going out of use in the first century. As we have seen **αποκριθεις ειπεν** is not a Greek expression at all. Have the scribes changed the good Greek to the barbarous **αποκριθεις ειπεν** or the other way about? If we may assume that their intention was to improve the evangelist's Greek rather than to degrade it, then **αποκριθεις ειπεν** will be original" (Ibid.).

A comparison of the Markan readings of the Stephens Text and modern critical editions (largely Alexandrian text) verifies Kilpatrick's assertion that Alexandrian scribes revised Mark's Gospel toward the Attic prose. This unique **original** stamp of the Markan authorship of the second Gospel has been kept distinctly intact throughout the ages in Byzantine-era manuscripts. **Unable to recognize its significance and due to a preference for certain Egyptian manuscripts, the editors of the modern critical Greek texts have opted for the Attic form. In the process, they have eliminated a divine signature from the scriptural record.**

Results of Atticism: Clement came to Alexandria from Athens with Attic training. He was the second chair of the Catechetical School precisely at the time when Demetrius was producing his local church text. Some of the Atticized readings we observe in the early Alexandrian papyri are undoubtedly due to his influence as chair of the school.

In his analysis of the scribal habits of Codex Vaticanus, textual scholar J.C. O'Neill determined that Alexandrian scribes closely followed rules in copying the text they transmitted. These rules were aimed at achieving complete lucidity or clearness of thought and style, which no doubt reflected the contemporary literary influence of Attic Greek (cf. O'Neill, pp. 218-228). O'Neill summarized: "They used good rules to sort out the variants, often successfully. But sometimes their rules led them to error, and we can see the rules from their mistakes. They preferred the shorter reading—and we should watch to see that the rule did not lead them astray. And they tried to make pertinent (if difficult) sense at all times—and we should watch to see that this rule, too, did not lead them to be too neat, too clever" (O'Neill, p. 228).

In the case of the Alexandrian text, the influence of Atticism and other factors produced readings that were "terse [short], somewhat rough, less harmonized, and generally 'more difficult'" (Harrison, p. 135).

Research of scribal habits on early Greek papyri of the New Testament shows that the average Egyptian scribe "omitted more often than he added" (Royle, "Scribal Tendencies in the Transmission of the Text of the New Testament," *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research*, p. 246). A subsequent study on Egyptian papyri of the Synoptic Gospels by Peter Head verifies Royle's work: "We have shown, in support of Royle's thesis, that in fact omission is the more common scribal habit. If early scribes were more likely to omit words and phrases from their texts (for whatever reason) it follows that we should not prefer the shorter reading, but rather prefer the longer reading (other factors being equal)" (Head, "Observations on Early Papyri of the Synoptic Gospels, especially on the 'Scribal Habits,'" *Biblica* 71, p. 247). These studies verified an initial investigation of Egyptian papyri conducted by E.C. Colwell in the 1960s (Colwell, "Scribal Habits in Early Papyri: A Study in the Corruption of the Text," *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, pp. 370-389).

The influence of Atticism, though not consistently applied to all Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, is particularly strong in the Alexandrian witnesses Papyrus 75 (third

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century AD) and the fourth-century Sinaitic and Vatican manuscripts (Elliott, pp. 26, 46). The Alexandrian text on average omits 2,600-3,000 words, which is roughly equivalent to the number of words in I and II Peter (Moorman, p. 41). Modern critical Greek texts, such as the Westcott-Hort, Nestle-Aland and United Bible Societies editions, have mostly been based on these Alexandrian witnesses and their allies.

What this means is that texts that are fuller and more complete (e.g. Textus Receptus and Byzantine Text) can no longer be considered secondary and inferior in quality. The longer and fuller apostolic *Koiné* text (i.e., Byzantine Text) was stylistically edited by Alexandrian scribes to produce a shorter text. This establishes the *Koiné* text as older and closer to the original. Therefore, modern critical texts that are largely Alexandrian in nature can no longer be considered reliable witnesses to the original apostolic text.

In the nineteenth century, Dr. F.J.A. Hort, a textual scholar whose theory forms the basis of modern New Testament textual criticism, echoed the sentiments of the second-century Church scholars who wrongly appealed to the Attic brevity as a marker of quality: “Think of that vile *Textus Receptus* leaning entirely on late MSS.; it is a blessing there are such early ones” (Hort, *Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort*, vol. 1, p. 211). This background allows us to understand Hort’s misguided partiality toward the earlier Sinaitic and Vatican manuscripts.

Influence of Egyptian Church: The oral religious traditions and beliefs of the early Egyptian church influenced many readings of the Alexandrian text. These traditions were transferred to the Greek manuscripts through the Coptic language, specifically the Egyptian Sahidic dialect. Hills explained: “Coptic is the latest form of the language of ancient Egypt. At first it was written in native Egyptian characters, but after the beginning of the Christian era Greek capital letters were mainly employed. At least a half a dozen different Coptic dialects were spoken in ancient Egypt, but the most important of these were the Sahidic dialect spoken in southern Egypt and the Bohairic dialect spoken in northern Egypt. At a very early date the Greek New Testament was translated into Sahidic, and some of the distinctive readings of this Sahidic version are found in Papyrus 75, thus supporting the contention of Hoskier (1914) that the Alexandrian text was ‘tremendously influenced’ by the Sahidic version” (Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, p. 128).

The research of Hebraic scholar P.E. Kahle also shows that “Sahidic was the official dialect of the native population of Egypt and the official language of Alexandria long before the spread of Christianity” (Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, p. 100).

Most scholars date the Sahidic version to the 200-300s AD (Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament*, p. 127). Others have placed its origins in the second half of the second century, making it possibly one of the earliest versions of the New Testament (Ibid.). Nonetheless, the research of Rodolphe Kasser, who has an intimate and broad knowledge of Coptic texts, shows that the history of the Coptic dialects is intricately linked to the history of the Coptic versions. This development took place in several stages, the first being the most important for the formation of the Alexandrian text. Kasser’s research shows that even before formal translations were produced (ca. 150-200 AD), numerous liturgical traditions were circulating among Egyptian Christians in Sahidic. During the next 50 years, as the number of Coptic Christians increased, Sahidic translations of biblical books and a proto-Bohairic version of the Gospel of John would be made (Ibid., pp. 129-130).

Hills offered a few examples of how the Sahidic version affected the early Alexandrian papyrus manuscripts: “... in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19) Papyrus 75 says that the Rich Man’s name was *Neves*. The Sahidic version says that the Rich Man’s name was *Nineve*. Why was the Rich Man given this name? Metzger (1964) says that it was because there was a wide-spread tradition among the ancient catechists of the Coptic Church that the name of the Rich Man was *Nineveh*, a name which had become the symbol of dissolute riches. Grobel (1964), on the other hand, argues that this name was derived from an old Egyptian folk-tale and that the name *Nineve* in Sahidic means *Nobody*. But, however this may be, it is obvious that this reading was taken early into the text of Pa-

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papyrus 75 from the Sahidic version.

“Another Sahidic reading that found its way into the text of Papyrus 75 occurs in John 8:57. Here the majority of the New Testament documents read, *Hast thou seen Abraham?* But Papyrus 75, *Aleph, T.* Sahidic, Sinaitic Syriac read *Hath Abraham seen thee?* In John 10:7 Papyrus 75 agrees with the Sahidic version in reading, *I am the shepherd of the sheep*, instead of, *I am the door of the sheep*. In John 11:12 Papyrus 75 agrees with the Sahidic version against all the rest of the New Testament documents. In the other documents the disciples say (referring to Lazarus), *Lord, if he hath fallen asleep, he will be saved*. Papyrus 75 and the Sahidic version, however, read, *he will be raised*” (Hills, pp. 128-129).

We do not know precisely where, when and by whom codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus were made. However, these Greek manuscripts exhibit detectable scribal tendencies. Herman C. Hoskier made the most complete collation of these two Greek manuscripts. He concluded that both uncials were copied in an Egyptian scriptorium and brought into conformity in 78 passages with the early Coptic versions (e.g., Bohairic and Sahidic dialect) (Hoskier, *Codex B and Its Allies: A Study and Indictment*, pp. 7, 317-325).

One example involves John 1:18. The authentic reading is “the only begotten Son” found in the Textus Receptus (Byzantine Text). The Alexandrian text and its allies (*Aleph, B, P⁷⁵* and *P⁶⁶*) read “the only begotten God” or a form thereof. While a scribal error of the uncial letters for the *nomina sacra*, scribal abbreviations for divine names, offers a plausible explanation for the Alexandrian reading, the textual *and* historical evidence points to another conclusion. Burgon traced this reading back to its earliest source, the Gnostic Valentinus (Burgon, pp. 215-218). In this passage, Hoskier confirmed a link between the Bohairic version and the Alexandrian reading; the Sahidic reads “God did not any see ever; God the only son” (Hoskier, p. 317). In an article entitled “The Prologue of John and the Egyptian Manuscripts,” textual scholar Theodore Letis documented “a possible Gnostic influence ... via the use of Coptic versions by Gnostic communities” in this passage (cf. Letis, *The Ecclesiastical Text*, pp. 107-132).

Thus all textual and historical evidence connects Gnostic scribes in Egyptian scriptorium to this corruption of John 1:18 in the early Alexandrian papyri, based on Gnostic associations with the early Coptic versions. This reading was then perpetuated by Egyptian scribes because it matched their own theological positions.

While such connections cannot always be proven beyond all doubt, Dr. Hills offered the best remedy for these heretical features of the Alexandrian text: “Thus we see that it is unwise in present-day translators to base the texts of their modern versions on recent papyrus discoveries or on *B* and *Aleph*. For all these documents come from Egypt, and Egypt during the early Christian centuries was a land in which heresies were rampant. So much was this so that, as Bauer (1934) and van Unnik (1958) have pointed out, later Egyptian Christians seem to have been ashamed of the heretical past of their country and to have drawn a veil of silence across it. This seems to be why so little is known of the history of early Egyptian Christianity. In view, therefore, of the heretical character of the early Egyptian Church, it is not surprising that the papyri, *B, Aleph*, and other manuscripts which hail from Egypt are liberally sprinkled with heretical readings” (Hills, p. 134).

Summary: History and modern textual research have shown that the witness of the Alexandrian text can no longer be presumed to be original. The habits of its early theologian-scribes undoubtedly mirrored the theology of the early Egyptian (Coptic) church and the textual principles practiced at the Alexandrian library.

The intent of the Catechetical School of Alexandria was to spread its philosophy to other scribes and Church scholars. In its attempts, the school was successful in that a significant number of Christian scholars became ensnared by the appeal of the Alexandrian text because the stylistic and syntactical nature of the apostolic text was not reflective of the literary quality they had become accustomed to. And since these scholars were often wealthier than common Christians, they were able to purchase manuscripts containing this text. For this reason, manuscripts of the Alexandrian type circulated outside of Egypt, which explains

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how distinct Alexandrian readings appear in the New Testament citations of the early Christian scholars (Church Fathers).

Byzantine Nature of Alexandrian Text: In spite of the appeal to the Alexandrian text, the Byzantine was the dominant text in the period before, during and after the formation of the Alexandrian text. Writing posthumously for textual scholar John Burgon, Edward Miller tabulated the number of times the Greek/Latin Church Fathers quoted from either the apostolic (Byzantine) or prestige texts (Alexandrian/Western). Miller summarized: “As far as the Fathers who died before 400 A.D. are concerned....the results of the evidence, both as regards to the quantity and quality of the testimony, enable us to reply, not only that the Traditional Text [Byzantine Text] was in existence, but that it was predominant, during the period under review. Let any one who disputes this conclusion make out for the Western Text, or the Alexandrian, or for the Text of B and **Σ** [Vaticanus or Sinaiticus], a case from the evidence of the Fathers which can equal or surpass that which has been placed before the reader” (Burgon, p. 116). Of the 4,383 citations from the 76 writers Miller studied, the witness favored the traditional Byzantine Text 2,630 to 1,753 times, on a ratio of 3:2 (Burgon, p. 116).

Twentieth-century critical editions of patristic writings have only slightly affected Miller’s results; therefore, his conclusions that the Byzantine Text was predominantly used by the Church Fathers before 400 AD are still valid. Unfortunately, scholars compiling these editions have had a bias against the Byzantine Text as explained by textual scholar Dr. Maurice Robinson: “If the Byzantine readings now summarily dismissed in the early Fathers were legitimately included, the Fathers’ overall text would be seen as more ‘Byzantine’ than current scholarly opinion claims. This was Burgon’s original contention, which was dismissed out of hand, due to his use of ‘uncritical’ editions of the Fathers. Current ‘critical’ editions of the Fathers, however, follow the above-mentioned practice of eliminating distinctive Byzantine readings where unconfirmed by direct comment. Were this not so, the text of the Fathers would be recognized as far more Byzantine than current opinion allows” (Robinson, *The New Testament in the Original Greek according to the Byzantine/Majority Textform*, www.skypoint.com, p. 7).

Virtually 90 percent of the Alexandrian text is the autographic or original form of the New Testament text (Robinson, “New Testament Textual Criticism: The Case for the Byzantine Priority,” par. 107, n. 9). The remaining percentage is a combination of stylistic changes and theologically-influenced readings.

Despite the textual differences between the Alexandrian and Byzantine texts, Robinson observed: “... the earliest surviving copies [Egyptian papyri] show a very wide range of difference among themselves, yet with a ‘backbone’ of general consistency running quite strongly all along, in spite of their plain blunders and/or deliberate alterations. The pre-existing ‘backbone’ thus served as some sort of standard which provided that relative consistency in the midst of some rather wild local deviation. Yet almost suddenly, from the late fourth century onward, a quite solid and consistent Textform [i.e., Byzantine Text] is seen in almost all quarters. This near-universality can be explained only because the Textform already had been present all along, or a ‘legislated’ and forced imposition of a revised text was almost simultaneously adopted in nearly all quarters without complaint. Since there is no hard evidence for the latter option, the former necessarily commends itself as the best way in which to account for the data we now possess. This is a strong argument, based upon evidence that, even in the ‘wild’ early manuscripts, this great ‘universal’ type of text was already in existence. This evidence appears in the commonly-shared text of each of those early papyri” (Robinson, n. 29).

Besides confirming the existence of 150 distinctly Byzantine readings in the early papyri, the research of textual scholar Harry Sturz also documented an additional 496 Byzantine readings in the early papyri that are supported by either the Alexandrian or Western texts. Most importantly, the data affirmed that “1) the Byzantine readings are early, and 2) the Byzantine text is unedited in the Westcott-Hort sense” (Sturz, p.130). **This means there**

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was no fourth-century Church revision of the original apostolic text as mistakenly contended by Westcott-Hort.

Textual scholar Dr. Wilbur N. Pickering described the significance of these Byzantine readings found in the early Egyptian papyri: “The magnitude of this vindication can be more fully appreciated by recalling that only about 30 percent of the New Testament has early papyrus attestation, and much of that 30 percent has only one papyrus. Where more than one covers a stretch of text, each new MS discovered vindicates added Byzantine readings. Extrapolating from the behavior of those in hand, if we had at least 3 papyri covering all parts of the New Testament, almost all of the 5000+ Byzantine readings rejected by the critical (eclectic) texts would be vindicated by an early papyrus” (Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, 1980 ed., p. 77).

Dutch textual scholar Dr. Jakob Van Bruggen best summarized the textual evidence from early Egypt: “From the 2nd and 3rd centuries we only have papyri at our disposal. Due to climatic conditions these can practically only come to us from Egypt. For this period we, therefore, only possess representatives of Egyptian editions of the New Testament. Here we should bear in mind that Egypt was not the most flourishing part of the Church at that time. Centres like Syria, Asia-Minor, Greece, [and] Italy have left us no Greek manuscripts from these centuries. Furthermore, regarding the papyri we should bear in mind that they are not representative library-copies from Alexandria, but cheaper editions circulating in Egypt. A number of them were rediscovered more or less accidentally. These finds are very important: also the scarce data have scientific value. But the fact that the finds are incidental and restricted to certain areas, prevents us from generalizing about *the* New Testament in the first centuries on the ground of this material [alone]. It is not even possible to generalize about *the* Egyptian text of those days on the basis of this material” (Van Bruggen, *The Ancient Text of the New Testament*, pp. 25-26).

The major criticism against the Byzantine Text has been the supposed lack of support among the early Alexandrian papyri and uncials manuscripts. Once we understand that the Egyptian papyri are not representative of the textual evidence in the early apostolic churches, it becomes recognizable that at least two text types circulated in Egypt during the early centuries: The Alexandria and Byzantine texts. The work of Miller, Robinson, Sturz, Van Bruggen and others has proven that a backbone, the apostolic (Byzantine) text, served as the basis for the Alexandrian revision from the very beginning.

Appendix W

Gnosticism in Alexandria, Egypt

The interpretation of Church history plays a key role in how a textual critic views the manuscript evidence. In his book *The Text of the New Testament*, the late Kurt Aland, a leading European textual scholar during much of the twentieth century, conceded that Gnosticism dominated the Egyptian church before 200 AD: “**Egypt was distinguished from other provinces of the Church so far as we can judge, by the early dominance of gnosticism; this was not broken until about A.D. 200**, when Bishop Demetrius succeeded in reorganizing the diocese and establishing communications with other churches. Not until then do we have documentary evidence of the church in Egypt, although undoubtedly not only the gnostic but also the broader Church was represented there throughout the whole period. At almost the same time the Catechetical School of Alexandria was instituted as the first ‘Christian university’” (Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 59, bold added).

Later in his discussion of the Coptic versions of the New Testament, Aland wrote: “The lack of any reference to the church in Egypt **before 180** [AD] is probably to be explained by the predominantly gnostic character of the churches, **which hindered their recognition by official churches elsewhere**” (Ibid., p. 200, bold added).

Aland, who is partial to the Alexandrian text, appears unclear as to when the Greek church actually began in Egypt. Churches that are predominately Gnostic in character cannot be considered apostolic or orthodox by any definition. Aland reluctantly concedes this point when he states that the Egyptian churches were not recognized by “official churches elsewhere.” Further, by stating that the cycle of Gnosticism in Egyptian churches was not broken until 200 AD, Aland reaffirms his earlier conclusion that Gnosticism continued as a dominant force until ties to official churches were established.

One can presume from Aland’s comments and history that there was no presence of a broader church in Egypt before 200 AD. The only real **trace** of some sort of quasi-Christian presence in Egypt before this date was the Catechetical School of Alexandria and possibly the beginning of Demetrius’ bishopric.

No Evidence of Apostolic Faith: The book of Acts records that Egyptian Jews were present in Jerusalem for Pentecost in 30 AD (Acts 2:10). The account in Acts shows that newly converted Egyptian Christians remained in Jerusalem for a time to become part of the Christian community (Acts 2:42-47). Later in Acts we meet the orator Apollos from Alexandria (ca. 53 AD), who had been instructed in the way of the Lord, but his knowledge of Christianity *was lacking*, for he knew only of the baptism of John (Act 18:24-28).

There is no biblical record of evangelistic outreach to Alexandria, Egypt. The Greek historian Nicephorus stated that the apostle Simon the Zealot journeyed to Egypt and North Africa as he made his way to Britain, where he was crucified and buried (cf. Cave, *Antiquitates Apostolicae*, p. 203). However, Nicephorus’ narration quickly unravels amidst other testimony that indicates Simon’s crucifixion occurred in Syria (Bracht, *Martyrs Mirror*, p. 91).

In addition to Nicephorus’ conjecture regarding Simon the Zealot, the Church historian Eusebius claimed that John Mark, secretary to the apostle Peter, proclaimed the Gospel in Egypt and established the first churches at Alexandria (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2:16). A closer examination of Eusebius’ account of Mark’s evangelistic campaign in Egypt reveals that it is erroneous. The early Church historian mistakenly designated the Egyptian Jewish monastic community, known as the Therapeutae, as a Christian sect (Eusebius 2:16:2, 17:2-5). The description of this group living near Alexandria as a rigidly disciplined ascetic sect hardly distinguishes it as Christian (cf. Philo, *On a Contemplative Life*).

Most sources, including Eusebius, place Mark’s martyrdom in Alexandria in the

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eighth year of the Roman emperor Nero (62 AD). This depiction of Mark's death is chronologically impossible because when Peter wrote his First Epistle in ca. 63-64 AD, he mentioned that Mark and Silvanus were with him in Babylon (I Pet. 5:13). This dating places Mark alive a year or more after his alleged death.

In his history of the Church, Eusebius listed 11 Alexandrian bishops in a line of succession beginning after Mark's alleged death in 62 AD and ending with Demetrius in 190 AD. Since Mark was not in Egypt at the beginning of this period, it is *impossible* to determine when and if the remaining bishoprics ever existed. Eusebius described the first bishop Annianus as "a man distinguished for his piety and admirable in every respect" (Eusebius, 2:24). Oddly, he offers **no** character sketches for any of the other nine bishops. Demetrius (d. 232 AD) is the only other bishop whose biography can be found in most theological resources. Marcus, the seventh bishop listed by Eusebius, could just as well have been the famed disciple of the second-century Gnostic Valentinus. Both were in Egypt at the same time.

If these sources are unreliable in providing details concerning early Christianity in Egypt, their testimony concerning any apostolic outreach to this area must also be viewed with skepticism.

No Fertile Ground for the Gospel: It is improbable that a Christian Church could have taken root in the hostile soil of Alexandria in the early history of the Church. Alexandria was the location of the single largest Jewish community outside of Palestine in this period. Estimates place the Jewish population at one million people (Yonge, *The Works of Philo*, p. xii). The Bible offers clues to the general spiritual condition of Egyptian Hellenistic Jews in the sixth chapter of Acts. It is recorded that Stephen, full of faith and power, worked wonders and great signs among the people, especially among the Hellenistic Jews whom he was set apart to serve (Acts 6:1-6). During his ministry, there was a synagogue in Jerusalem that specifically served Hellenistic Jews, including those from Alexandria.

These Hellenistic Jews strongly resisted Stephen's preaching: "Then certain [people] arose among those of the synagogue who were called Libertines, and of the Cyrenians and **Alexandrians**, and of those from Cicilia and Asia; *and* they were disputing with Stephen. But they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke" (Acts 6:9-10). They had Stephen arrested and brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin for trial on false charges of blasphemy. Men were bribed to offer perjury against him (Acts 6:11-15). A guilty verdict evoked a punishment of death by stoning (Acts 7:54-8:1).

Thus, the Hellenistic Jewish population, being highly antagonistic toward the growing Christian church in Jerusalem, would have been equally antagonistic toward the establishment of a Christian church at Alexandria.

Textual Evidence: There is evidence that copies of the Scriptures were in Egypt before 200 AD. Papyri 52 and 90 are two small fragments that have been found containing 17 verses from the Gospel of John chapters 18 and 19. They are all that have survived from this period.

Alexandrian Hellenism sought to unite Greek philosophy and Platonic thought with the beliefs of the Jewish religion. A key historical figure behind this interpretative blend was Philo Judaeus, the famous Jewish commentator of the first century AD. A hallmark of his commentaries was his endeavor to discover allegorical meanings where they were not intended (Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, p. 485).

Most significant was Philo's use of the concept of *Logos* (Word). The late A.M. Renwick, professor of Church history at Free Church of Scotland College, explained that Philo believed "the Logos was merely an impersonal power of God, although He is the only firstborn of God, the chief of the angels, the viceroy of God, and the representative of mankind. According to Philo the creation of the universe was a gradual molding out of matter; thus evil arose. He also taught the preexistence of the soul, which is not imprisoned in the flesh. To secure salvation, therefore, mankind must break the thralldom of the flesh and rise by a sort of ecstasy to the immediate vision of God. It is clear that

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the various Gnostic sects were deeply indebted to Philo” (Ibid.).

Scholar David Scholer wrote of how Philo’s beliefs affected his writings: “These issues pervade Philo’s writings and illustrate the depth of Philo’s utilization of Hellenistic philosophical traditions in his understanding of God and the created universe. Philo’s discussions here are vital to understanding the nature of Middle Platonism, of **Hellenistic Judaism and probably part of the pre-history of gnosticism and its view of God and the cosmology**” (Yonge, p. xiv, emphasis added).

Honest evaluations of Philo’s writings show that he was not a Gnostic. However, as Renwick noted, Philo’s studies served as fuel for the growth of Gnosticism in Alexandria. One element so common among many of the Alexandrian forms of Gnosticism was the denial of the incarnation and work of Christ. A key aspect to genuine salvation as presented by the Gospel of John is that God (the *Logos* or Word) became flesh and tabernacled among men to redeem them from their sins (John 1:14, 29). The concept of sin was something quite different to Gnostics. For them it was “only a physical fact or quality inherent in the body and in matter everywhere” (Bromiley, p. 488). As a result, the Gnostic view of redemption or salvation was “simply each person’s efforts to secure emancipation from the flesh—from physical evil” and it had little need of Christ and “no place for redemption in the Christian sense of that term” (Ibid.).

Gnostic codices discovered in December 1945 in Upper Egypt near the town of Nag Hammadi reveal that early Gnostics, like the Valentinians, adopted the writings of the apostle John and used them in formulating their heretical beliefs (Ireneaus, *Against Heresies*, 3:11:7). Gnostics, like Valentinus and Basilides, were known to have written their own “gospels” to support their own biblical interpretations (Burgon, *The Causes of Corruption of the Traditional Text*, pp. 198-199).

Four of the 13 codices found at Nag Hammadi contain the *Apocryphon of John*, a pseudopigraphic Coptic Gnostic writing that describes the beliefs of the early Barbelo-Gnostics. The beliefs of this heretical group as found in the *Apocryphon of John* are almost identical to those described by early heresiologist Ireneaus in his *Against Heresies*, a work devoted to refuting the various Gnostic sects that prevailed in the latter half of the second century (Bromiley, vol. 3, p. 474). In his account, Ireneaus listed the words *Logos* (the Word) and *monogenes* (the only begotten), terms that are unique to John’s authentic Gospel, especially his prologue, and the Gnostic *Apocryphon of John* (Ireneaus, *Against Heresies*, 1:29:2, 4).

It should not be surprising, therefore, that fragments of the Gospel of John were present in Egypt before the establishment of an official Christian church. This finding concurs with other historical evidence, which shows that Papyri 52 and 90 can rightly be viewed as remnants from the Alexandrian Gnostic community.

Summary: A review of the evidence before 200 AD reveals that the Egyptian church was no church at all, but a contingency of Gnostic sects. After 200 AD and through at least 231 AD, Gnosticism continued to have some influence in the official Alexandrian church. Bishop Demetrius’ appointment of the famed Alexandrian scholar Origen (182-251 AD) as head of the Catechetical School at Alexandria confirms this conclusion. By all historical accounts, Origen was a pseudo-Christian Gnostic, which is verified by the condemnation of his teachings by both the Council of Alexandria (400 AD) and Council of Constantinople (553 AD) (Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, pp. 1008-1009). It was in this Gnostic-Christian setting that the Alexandrian text first took form during the late second and early third centuries AD.

Appendix Y

Recommended Reading List

The titles and sites that follow will be helpful in gaining a broad background of this subject. This list does not constitute an endorsement of these publications, websites and publishing outlets. The reader is encouraged to obtain these publications first through the interlibrary loan process at a public library.

| <u>Title</u> | <u>Author</u> | <u>ISBN#</u> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>The Ancient Text of the New Testament</i> | Dr. Jakob Van Bruggen | 0-88756-005-9 |
| <i>The Canon Debate</i> | Lee McDonald, ed. | 1-56563-517-5 |
| <i>The Causes of Corruption</i> | John William Burgon | 1-888328-03-7 |
| <i>The Ecclesiastical Text</i> | Dr. Theodore Letis | 0-9658607-0-1 |
| <i>Evaluating Versions of the New Testament</i> | Everett W. Fowler | 0-937136-03-4 |
| <i>A History of the Bible as Literature:</i> | | |
| <i>From antiquity to 1700, vol. 1</i> | David Norton | 0-521-33398-9 |
| <i>From 1700 to the present day, vol. 2</i> | David Norton | 0-521-33399-7 |
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