

IS THE CANON COMPLETE?

by

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The question of the completion of the canon of Scripture is one that has received very little scholarly attention in biblical studies. Revelation 22:18-19, 1 Corinthians 13:10 and Jude 3 have all been used to defend a completed canon of Scripture. Exegetical and contextual analysis of these passages fails to yield any evidence that they support a completed canon of Scripture. Rational and logical considerations cannot produce sound conclusions in defense of a completed Christian Bible.


Before the initial question can be answered, one must first ask what made an Old Testament or New Testament book canonical. Evidence from the Old Testament, New Testament and other historical sources points to the conclusion that the criterion for canonicity for an Old Testament book was its prophetic origin. Evidence from John 13-16 and Matthew 10, as well as a clear understanding of the background and meaning of ἀπόστολος strengthen the conclusion that apostolicity is the criterion for New Testament canonicity. Mark, Luke, James, Jude and Hebrews are to be considered apostolic, in that they were either written by an apostle or under the direction and scrutinization of an apostle. Viewed as a whole, the criterion for canonicity can be understood to be the credentials of the writer. The Word of God was penned by those who were authorized by God to represent Him.

Since the criterion for canonicity has been established the next step is to determine if any work has met the standard since John laid down his pen nearly 2,000 years ago. False prophets and apostles have come upon the scene, but none have fulfilled the two basic tests to determine a genuine spokesman of God. Deuteronomy 18:17-22 and Deuteronomy 13:1-3 state that a genuine spokesman for God must be able to verify his authenticity by fulfilled prophecy or other miracles, and his teaching must be in line with previous revelation. The Bible does point to a time yet future when God will again speak through prophets (Rev 11:3-13). These prophets will have authority from the Lord (Rev 11:6) and it would seem that if their messages are recorded and preserved, they will have the same divine imprimatur that the rest of Scripture has, "Thus saith the LORD."

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AF	<i>Apostolic Fathers</i>
ANF	<i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
ATR	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
b.	<i>Babylonian Talmud</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAGD	Baur, Arndt, Gingrich and Danker, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
Ber.	<i>Berakoth</i>
BETS	<i>Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
B.Kam.	<i>Baba Kamma</i>
BM	<i>Baba Mezia</i>
DNTT	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
DSD	<i>Dead Sea Manual of Discipline</i>
EBC	<i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>
EvQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
Git.	<i>Gittin</i>
HDB	<i>Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
H.E.	<i>Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	<i>International Critical Commentary</i>
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
Int.	<i>Interpretation</i>
ITL	<i>International Theological Library</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
KHAT	<i>Lisowsky, Konkordanz Zum Hebraischen Alten Testament</i>
LCL	<i>Loeb Classical Library</i>
LSJ	<i>Liddell, Scott and Jones, A Greek English Lexicon</i>
LXX	<i>Septuagint</i>
m.	<i>Mishna</i>
n	<i>footnote</i>
NCB	<i>New Century Bible</i>
NICOT	<i>New International Commentary on the Old Testament</i>
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
PTR	<i>Princeton Theological Review</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
1Qp Hab	<i>Pesher on Habakkuk from Qumran Cave 1</i>

INTRODUCTION

Several years ago while the author was engaged in a stimulating discussion with a rather intelligent and very devoted charismatic individual, this question surfaced: Is the canon of Scripture complete? This writer, like many others, had always assumed that the answer to the question was yes, but had no real basis for his answer. The writer began to research the question for an answer and to his surprise found nothing of any essential value or length written on the issue. Even today after nearly two years of research only one work of substantial magnitude has been found which directly addresses itself to the question at hand.¹ The need for such a work like this one is clear.

The purpose of this thesis is to submit an answer to this question: Is the canon of Scripture complete? There are three basic areas of investigation. Passages of Scripture which are traditionally used to support a completed canon need to be investigated. The criterion for a book being accepted as canonical must be determined, and then one must ask whether or not any authoritative works have been written since the New Testament apostolic age.

¹Daniel R. Lockwood, "A Theological Defense for the Closing of the Canon" (Th.M. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976).

The sixty-six books which make up the present English Bible are the present canon of Scripture. They are those books which are authoritative and have the divine imprimatur "Thus saith the LORD." Of course the question of the divine authority of the Bible has validity only on the grounds of Christian theism and supernaturalism. Both are presupposed in this work.

The author did not consider a discussion of the Old Testament apocryphal books within the scope of this thesis. They clearly are not canonical. The basic reason no attempt was made to include any of the material on this subject is because the writer did not feel he could contribute anything of value to the excellent discussion on it in chapter eight of R. Laird Harris' *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*.

CHAPTER I

CONSIDERATIONS FOR A CLOSED CANON

Revelation 22:18-19

Canon Interpretations

A general view among many is that this passage is a proof text or a supporting text for a completed canon. The line of reasoning from it is that Revelation is the last book in the Bible, both chronologically and positionally. Revelation 22:18-19 says clearly that no one is to add or delete anything from "this book" without the threat of serious consequences. Advocates of this persuasion interpret this verse to mean that this passage is teaching that the canon is complete, and that one cannot add or take away from this completed canon without severe repercussions. William Tong put it this way:

He that adds to the words of God draws down upon himself *all the plagues written in this book*; and he who takes anything away from it cuts himself off from all the promises and privileges of it. This sanction is like a flaming sword, to guard the canon of the Scripture from profane hands. Such a fence as this God set about the Law (Deut. 4:2), and the whole Old Testament (Mal. 4:4), and now in the most solemn manner about the whole Bible, assuring us that it is a book of the most sacred nature, divine authority, and of last importance, and therefore the peculiar care of the great God.¹

¹William Tong, "Revelation," in vol. 6 of *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), p. 1188.

There are at least two interpretations of this passage which point to a completed canon. The first interpretation understands the words "this book" in the passage to have reference to the entire Bible. The words "this book" equal the sixty-six books of the English Bible. As John wrote the words of this passage, he was saying that this final book of Revelation would be the final chapter in the book of the Bible.

Several advocates of this interpretation include H. A. Ironside, W. A. Criswell, W. Tong, and Robert Thomas.¹ It appears that Lewis Sperry Chafer might be included in this group as well. He remarks clearly on at least two occasions that "the formal closing of the New Testament is at least intimated in Revelation 22:18."² Chafer's argument is that the Old Testament ended with much unfulfilled prophecy. The New Testament "articulates" the prophecies of the Old Testament. Chafer further states,

But no continued revelation is impending as the New Testament is terminated; rather the announcement is made that the Lord Himself will soon return and the natural conclusion is that there would be no further voice speaking from heaven before the trumpet heralds the second advent of Christ.³

¹H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1920), p. 366; W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Revelation*, 5 vols. in 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962-66), 5:164; Robert L. Thomas, "Tongues . . . Will Cease," *JETS* 17 (Spring 1974): 82.

²Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), 1:93; Lewis Sperry Chafer, "Canonicity and Authority," *BSac* 95 (April-June 1938):142.

³Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:93.

The second interpretation of Revelation 22:18-19 is that the term "this book" refers specifically to Revelation, but in general to the rest of the Bible. Advocates of this view understand that the passage has specific reference to what the apostle John had written, but they feel that it can be applied and interpreted to defend a completed canon. Thomas Scott, a commentator of the last century, expressed this understanding of the passage in these words,

This seems primarily meant of "the book of Revelation;" with which as much liberty has certainly been taken, as with any part of Scripture. But as the Lord doubtless intended this for the conclusion of the Sacred Canon . . . it may fairly be applied to the whole written word. . . .¹

Evaluation of Canon Interpretations

An evaluation of the interpretations of Revelation 22:18-19 as presented above is in order. Does the passage point to a closed canon, either in general or by specific reference? There are at least three reasons why the passage should not be used to support a completed canon.

Grammatical Considerations

The problem here is to determine the identity of τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου (v. 18) and τοῦ βιβλίου τῆς προφητείας ταύτης (v. 19). A key ingredient in the identity of the above elements is the identity of the antecedents of the demonstrative pronouns. Which book and which prophecy

¹Thomas Scott, "Revelation," in vol. 6 of *The Holy Bible*, 5th ed., 6 vols. (New York: Samuel T. Armstrong, and Crocker and Brewster, 1831), p. 790.

are being spoken of? Do they find their reference in the completed Bible?

The use of the demonstrative pronoun οὗτος refers to someone or something at least conceptually present. It may refer to something actually present. Turner states that it is ". . . not necessarily referring to the noun which is nearest, but to the noun which is most vividly in the writer's mind. . . ." ¹ Dana and Mantey seem to concur with Turner by saying, "Thus it does not necessarily denote that which is physically adjacent, but that which is immediately present to the thinking of the writer." ² What book is most vividly in the writer's mind? Verses seven, nine, and ten all have τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου in them and along with verse eighteen all seem to have reference to the same book. The closest reference to a clearly identified book other than this one is in 21:27, τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἁγίου. The context will not allow the reference of verse eighteen to be found in 21:27. It appears that the book most vividly in the writer's mind here is not the Lamb's book of life. Being found in the conclusion of a book, one would expect it to be referring to the book he was in the process of completing. John was told to write what he saw in a βιβλίον (Rev 1:11). The book of Revelation is that βιβλίον John had most vividly in his mind

¹Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, in vol. 3 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, by James Hope Moulton, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), p. 44.

²H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 129.

in his use of the demonstrative pronoun used with βιβλίον in 22:18.

A similar argument could be made for τῆς προφητείας ταύτης in verse nineteen. The book of Revelation is also called "the prophecy" (Rev 1:3). It can be concluded that τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου (v. 18) and τοῦ βιβλίου τῆς προφητείας ταύτης (v. 19) are identical, the former emphasizing the content of the book (i.e. prophecy) and the latter emphasizing the form the prophecy was recorded in.

Canonical Sanction Formula

It was not uncommon for writers in biblical times to use an inscriptional curse, or a canonical sanction to protect their writings from intentional errors of a copyist. Examples of this formula, "You shall not add or take away" have been traced back as far as 2450 B.C. in Egypt.¹ The basic import of canonical sanction is that copiers were to be careful and faithful in their transcription of the text. It is a warning against willful distortion of the message.²

¹G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, in *New Century Bible*, New Testament works ed. by Matthew Black (Greenwood, SC: The Attic Press, 1974), p. 347. For further information on the use and development of this formula, see the following works, both by Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972). The writer does not agree with all of Kline's conclusions, but he has given a good overview of the phenomenon of canonical sanction.

²Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan and Company, 1907), p. 311; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), p. 388.

It was noted earlier that the use of this formula has been traced in historical writings. Deuteronomy 4:2 uses it: "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it. . . ." Nearly identical words are repeated elsewhere in the same book (Deut 12:32). Other places where this formula is used include 1 Enoch 104:10, 11, Josephus' *Against Apion* 1:8, and Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* 5:20. The text in Deuteronomy 4:2 makes it plain that this injunction does not prevent further revelation, only distortion of or addition to the already written text.¹ Such is the case in Revelation 22:18-19. It has already been demonstrated that the nouns with the demonstrative pronouns clearly find their antecedent in the book of Revelation itself. But even if a general application of this passage could be applied to the whole Bible, it need not imply that nothing else canonical can be written. It would simply be stating that one cannot add non-canonical literature to what is canonical, or subtract from the canon that which belongs there without serious consequences.

The Date of Revelation

Those who appeal to Revelation 22:18-19 to support a completed canon usually assume that chronologically it was the last canonical book to be written. It is necessary to assume this if all twenty-seven books presently in the canon

¹Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, in NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), p. 130.

are to be included. However, the exact date of Revelation is difficult to determine, and there is no positive evidence that it was the last of the twenty-seven to be written.¹

Guthrie states, "In all probability this epistle (3 John) and 2 John were the latest Johannine writings and the latest of all New Testament literature; but some would concede this position to the Fourth Gospel."²

The point here is that if John consciously intended to close the canon by his words of Revelation 22:18-19, then Revelation must have been the last written book in order to include all the others, and this is certainly not an established fact.

Conclusion

It should be clear to the readers that one should not appeal to Revelation 22:18-19 to defend a completed or closed canon. Grammatical considerations do not support this conclusion and neither does the canonical formula data. The exact date is problematic as well to any who would use this text to support a closed canon.

¹William Henry Simcox, *Revelation*, in *The Cambridge Bible for School and Colleges*, ed. J. J. S. Perowne (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1891), p. 129.

²Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 899.

1 Corinthians 13:10

Numerous writers (including this writer at one time) have suggested that this text supports a closed canon.¹ The argument is that the gifts of prophecy and knowledge (vv. 8-9) are revelatory gifts. They are also said to be "in part," ἐκ μέρους. When the perfect thing comes (v. 10) the partial revelatory gifts will cease. Advocates of this view argue that the flow of context would seem to indicate that the reason the partial revelation has ceased is because the perfect revelation, the completed canon of the Bible, has come. Since τέλειος can have the idea of come to completion or having attained the end,² it is argued that "that which is perfect" (KJV) is the completed canon of scripture.

It is not within the scope of this chapter to deal with all of the alternative interpretations of τὸ τέλειον in 1 Corinthians 13:10. There are some problems with the canon view of 1 Corinthians 13:10 which would seem to relegate that interpretation to a questionable status, however. The major problem comes when one tries to harmonize the time when "that which is perfect" (KJV) has come with the time of the "face to face" experience. Smith has explained the issue well:

¹A few of the advocates of this view include: Robert G. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1967), pp. 125-27; George W. Marston, *Tongues Then and Now* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack Publishing Company, 1974), pp. 39-40; Merrill F. Unger, *New Testament Teaching on Tongues* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1971), p. 95.

²BAGD, p. 809; TDNT, s.v. "τέλειος," by Gerhard Delling, 8:67-78.

If "that which is perfect" designates the completion of the canon, for the sake of consistency in logic, the interpreter must understand verse 12 as referring to a different time. "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know fully even as also I have been fully known." While a few commentators have attempted to explain this verse as also referring to the completion of the Scriptures, such an interpretation certainly offers an inadequate explanation of the phrase "face to face."¹

There are two aspects of the problem in harmonizing the 13:10 canon view with verse twelve. Smith has noticed both of them. The first consideration is that it is difficult to harmonize the completed canon with the "face to face" and "know fully," ἐπιγινώσκειν of verse twelve. Gaffin explains it this way,

We frequently overlook that all special revelation, including Scripture (with all its perfections: authority, necessity, sufficiency, clarity), is a "mirror" for the present order of "seeing dimly," a temporary aid which will pass away, along with everything else that constitutes our knowledge here, at the coming of that "seeing," which is "face to face."²

Even with the completed canon of Scripture, believers do not yet fully know (ἐπιγινώσκω) or see "face to face." Believers still see "in a mirror dimly." Barnes has correctly noted

¹Charles R. Smith, *Tongues in Biblical Perspective*, revised ed. (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1973), p. 77.

²Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1979), p. 111. It may appear from this brief quote that the Scriptures are only temporary, and that they will someday pass away. This is not necessarily the import of Gaffin. His point is that inscription as a mode of preserving revelation may someday no longer be necessary for that "face to face" and "full knowledge" experience.

that there is a difference in the manner of knowledge and not simply the extent of it.¹

A second consideration in the problem of harmonizing the 13:10 canon view with verse twelve is an eschatological one. It is a natural correlation of the above mentioned material. The first consideration had to do with the "what" of the passage, and this second aspect has to do with the "when." The point here is that the canon view cannot adequately synchronize the identification of "that which is perfect" with "face to face" and "know fully," because it seems that the latter two have reference to an eschatological period.

A partial list of advocates favoring this eschatological view is impressive. Of course, a long list of scholars in favor of a particular view does not demand the correctness of that view, but it should make one carefully rethink a contrary position. At any rate, a list of some of the scholars who ascribe to an eschatological interpretation of this passage includes Godet, Robertson, H. A. W. Meyer, Charles Smith, S. Lewis Johnson, Lenski, and Hodge.² Some

¹Albert Barnes, "I Corinthians," in *Notes on the New Testament*, ed. Robert Frew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1944), p. 256. See also Smith, *Tongues in Biblical Perspective*, pp. 77-78.

²F. Godet, *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 2 vols., trans. from French A. Cusin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957), 2:252; Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed., ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), pp. 297-99; Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-book to the Epistles to the*

understand the eschatological event to be the rapture. Some understand it to be the second coming and at least one understands it to be the glorified state. If adjustments are made for post-millennial, amillennial and pre-millennial differences and misunderstandings, most of these people could be referring to the same event.

Obviously 1 Corinthians 13:10 is a problem passage. It seems that some may be motivated to interpret τὸ τέλειον as the completed canon for the purpose of limiting the gift of tongues to the first century. It is simply not necessary to do that. It is the conclusion of this section that τὸ τέλειον does not refer to a closed canon. Even those who would disagree with this conclusion need to be aware of the difficulties in constructing a defense for a completed canon upon a problem passage. Building a theology of a completed canon upon a problem passage would doubtless be an exercise in unsound hermeneutics.

Corinthians, trans. D. Douglas Bannerman, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. H. A. W. Meyer (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884; reprint ed., Winona Lake, IN: Alpha Publications, 1974), pp. 305-6; Smith, *Tongues in Biblical Perspective*, pp. 808-81; S. Lewis Johnson, "I Corinthians," in *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, New Testament ed. Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), p. 1252; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1946), pp. 566-71; Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), p. 272.

Jude 3

There are several who have argued that the phrase in Jude 3, τῇ ἀπαξ παραδοθείσῃ τοῖς ἁγίοις πίστει supports a closed canon of Scripture.¹ MacArthur comments, "In this statement, the Holy Spirit looks forward to the complete canon of Scripture."² Frankly, this writer is at a loss to understand any argument favoring a completed canon based upon this text. Nevertheless, a brief consideration is in order at this time.

The key idea which is interpreted to defend a closed canon is the phrase "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (KJV). The word πίστις is important to this discussion. It can be interpreted in a subjective sense, meaning the faith by which one believes or, in the objective sense, the faith which one believes. The context would seem to argue for the objective sense here, as does the use of the aorist passive participle παραδοθείσῃ. "The faith" is a system of doctrine or teaching which Jude's readers had been taught. Dwight has suggested

. . . that it means not *system of doctrine*, but the *objective contents of faith*, that which Christians believe. The reference is rather to the fundamental essential truth of salvation by Christ, than to the collection of doctrines making up what is commonly called a theological system.³

¹D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Authority* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1958), p. 59; John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Charismatics: A Doctrinal Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 17.

²MacArthur, *The Charismatics*, p. 17.

³Timothy Dwight, "Additional Notes by the American Editor, The Epistle of Jude," in *Critical and Exegetical*

With this in mind, it is difficult to see how the passage could be used to support a completed canon. Jude is not speaking of γραφή here, but of πίστις. No doubt much of their doctrine came from Scripture, but one must not confuse the two items.

A second consideration involves the word ἅπαξ. Most scholarly sources want to translate this word here "once for all."¹ This word combined with the participle παραδοθεῖσα can hardly be used to describe the way first century believers received the New Testament canon. According to the date given Jude by most conservative scholars (A.D. 65-80),² the New Testament was not even complete at this time.

Rational Considerations

Several rational or logical arguments have been presented and these usually follow similar lines of deliberation. Revelation is understood to be the capstone of the Bible. As a capstone, it most naturally concludes the biblical revelation. Revelation ties up the "loose ends" of Scripture as history finds its consummation in it. No continued revelation is impending as the final New Testament book is

Hand-book to the General Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude, Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884; reprint ed., Winona Lake, IN: Alpha Publications, 1979), pp. 825, 26.

¹TDNT, s.v. "ἅπαξ, ἐφάπαξ," by G. Stählin, 1:381-83; BAGD, p. 80.

²E.g. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 909.

completed. On the basis of these rational arguments, some have concluded that the canon of Scripture is complete.¹

These rational arguments are interesting, but certainly are in no way conclusive. History does find its consummation in Revelation, but that does not prohibit God from revealing more details in the future about that consummation, or any other item he might choose. The book of Revelation itself seems to speak of a time yet future when two witnesses will prophesy (Rev 11:3, 6). It seems that this certainly ought to be considered impending revelation. Interesting as these arguments are, it is obvious that there are problems in using them to defend a closed canon.

Conclusion

It is the conclusion of this chapter that these three passages do not determine the canon of Scripture to be complete. Numerous other passages have been proposed to support a completed canon, yet this writer is unaware of any passage which either explicitly or implicitly addresses itself to the matter of a completed canon.

While some readers might fear that this initial conclusion would allow any sort of false prophet or apostle to claim his writing as authoritative and canonical, there is another issue which needs to be considered. In an investigation of the completion of the canon, one must first ask

¹Cf. Arno C. Gaebeline, "The Revelation," in vol. 4 of *The Annotated Bible*, 4 vols. (New York: "Our Hope," n.d.), p. 187; Simon J. Kistemaker, "The Canon of the New Testament," *JETS* 20 (March 1977):12; Chafer, "Canonicity and Authority," p. 142.

what made an Old Testament or New Testament book canonical.
This will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

CRITERION FOR CANONICITY

Introduction

Numerous criteria have been suggested over the years as basic ingredients for canonical books. The Roman Catholic claim is that the hierarchal church authority has decided which books are canonical and which books are not. Florovsky speaks clearly to the point when he states, "The canon of the Bible is obviously established and authorized by the church."¹ One Catholic was so bold to state that "the sacred Scriptures, without the authority of the church, have no more authority than Aesop's Fables."²

Among critical scholars, the prominent theory is that the various books acquired a canonical status because of their antiquity. Concerning the books of the Old Testament, it is said that the Jews began to treasure ancient books and these came to be regarded as sacred.³ Goodspeed has noted a similar

¹ Georges Florovsky, "Revelation and Interpretation," in *Biblical Authority for Today*, ed. Alan Richardson and Wolfgang Schweitzer (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951), p. 164; see also Daniel-Rops, *What is the Bible?* Fact and Faith Book series, ed. L. C. Sheppard (London: Burns and Oates, 1958), pp. 30, 31.

² Cited by Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4 vols. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1979), 4:416.

³ William Henry Green, *General Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons,

view of the New Testament canon. In his opinion, "the books of the New Testament were not recognized as scripture from the moment of their origin, but came only gradually to such recognition."¹ Thus a document only became authoritative after it became old, having withstood the test of time.

Meredith Kline has argued that the canon of Scripture is inherent in a covenant formula and he fits both the Old and New Testaments into this formula.² Kline's work is intriguing, but falls short of substantially proving itself. Just because some books can be made to fit a covenantal formula in no way demands their canonicity or authority. In relation to Kline's application of this formula to the New Testament, the writer is in full agreement with F. F. Bruce's evaluation of it. He remarks, "I cannot see that they (NT writers), or rather the canonmakers of the second century were 'in fact, if not consciously, adopting the model of the ancient state treaty traditions, including in particular the techniques of covenant renewal.'"³

1926), p. 34; *IDB*, s.v. "Canon of the OT," by R. H. Pfeiffer, 1:498-500.

¹Edgar J. Goodspeed, "The Canon of the New Testament" in vol. 1 of *Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick et al. (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), p. 63.

²Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 43-75, 94-110.

³F. F. Bruce, "New Light on the Origins of the New Testament Canon," in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. Richard Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 4.

The usual Protestant answer to the discussion is that inspiration determines canonicity.¹ The individual usually given credit for developing this idea is the great reformer Calvin.² The thought is that since the Spirit of God inspired the individual books, he also worked in the hearts and minds of His chosen people to testify that they were in fact the Word of God. "It was this witness, in conjunction with the conscious human response, that was evidently the ultimate determining agent in the formation of the canon."³ In various church councils, the Spirit of God revealed to the people of God which books were the inspired Word of God.

With due respect to Calvin and all who hold to this view, it simply is not a solid, biblical or historical basis for canonicity. R. Laird Harris has pointed out that this basis only removes the issue one step farther away. If inspiration was the test of canonicity, one must then ask what was the test of inspiration?⁴ Bruce has observed that this basis "will scarcely enable all to decide the precise limits

¹Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:419.

²For Calvin's own discussion on this, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:7:3-5.

³R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 284. See also E. J. Young, "The Canon of the Old Testament," in *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), p. 168.

⁴R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969), p. 155.

of the canon."¹ Ridderbos has summed up the main weakness of this argument by saying "the door is thrown wide open to a subjectivistic and existentialistic view of God's Word and the canon."² There simply is no objective test for determining the inspiration of a book.

It is the conviction of this writer that the primary objective criterion for determining the canonicity of a book is the credentials of the writer. It is the primary purpose of this chapter to historically and biblically defend this point. A secondary issue to be included in this chapter is the role the providence of God has played in the preservation of canonical documents.

The Old Testament Prophets

The Terminology of Prophetism

There are three major words used in the Old Testament to refer to a prophet. The first word is נָבִיא and it comes from נָבָא. נָבִיא is used only twelve times in the Old Testament and it means "a seer."³ The term is principally employed as a designation of Samuel.⁴ 1 Samuel 9:9 makes it clear that

¹F. F. Bruce, *Tradition Old and New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 149.

²Herman Ridderbos, *The Authority of the New Testament Scriptures*, trans. H. De Jongste, *An International Library of Philosophy and Theology: Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. J. Marcellus Kik (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1963), p. 8.

³BDB, p. 909; Lisowsky, *KHAT*, p. 1299.

⁴E. J. Young, *My Servants the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), p. 61.

the two terms, נָבִי and אֵלֵּי are synonymous, or very nearly so.¹

The second term used in the Old Testament is אֵלֵּי, and it is used eighteen times.² Like אֵלֵּי, it is usually translated "seer" and it comes from the verbal form אֵלֵּי. It seems that several observations should be made at this juncture. By observing and comparing several usages, it becomes clear that אֵלֵּי and אֵלֵּי are practically synonymous. A careful inspection of Isaiah 30:9, 10 and a comparison of 2 Chronicles 16:7 with 19:2 supports this hypothesis. Rendtorff has suggested that this term is used often as a title or a position in a court (2 Sam 24:11; Amos 7:12, 14).³

By far the most frequently used term is נָבִי. It is the principal word for prophet and in the noun form alone it is found nearly three hundred times in the Hebrew Bible.⁴ The exact derivation of the word, according to most scholars, is uncertain.⁵ Some have suggested that the word came from the Accadian *nabu* which means "to speak."⁶ Others think the derivation of the word comes from the Arabic *naba'a* "to

¹TDNT, s.v. "προφήτης, נָבִי," by Rolf Rendtorff, 6:809.

²Lisowsky, KHAT, p. 472.

³Rendtorff, "προφήτης, נָבִי," 6:809, 10.

⁴Lisowsky, KHAT, pp. 890-92.

⁵Cf., "The original meaning of the Hebrew word *nābhi'* may now be considered settled. . . ." Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 742. There are many who disagree with Harrison's opinion.

⁶Rendtorff, "προφήτης, נָבִי," 6:796.

announce."¹ Theodore Robinson has asserted that the term has reference to ecstatic behavior.² In the final analysis, it seems that there is no possible way to ascertain the precise meaning of נִבִּי on the basis of philological grounds alone.³

The best way, and perhaps the only way to determine the meaning of נִבִּי, is to examine the actual usage of it in several key passages in the Old Testament. Exodus 4:16 and 7:1-2 show the relation between Moses and God, and between Moses and Aaron. There was to be a relation between Moses and Aaron like the one between God and His spokesman, with the spokesman being characterized as a "mouth" (cf. Jer 23:16; Ezek 3:17). Thus a נִבִּי was "one who spoke in the place of another."⁴

There are other passages which help to solidify this point. After saying in Deuteronomy 18:18 that the LORD would raise up a prophet, a brief job description is given of him. The text says, "and I shall place My words in his mouth, and he will speak unto them all which I command him." It seems clear from this text that the primary function of a prophet is that of declaring the Word of God which He has given.

¹Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, p. 56.

²Cited in Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, p. 56.

³Rendtorff, 6:796; Young, p. 57; Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), p. 39; Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), p. 60.

⁴Wood, *Prophets of Israel*, p. 61.

Hosea 6:5 is another passage which helps develop the meaning of a נָבִיא of Yahweh. The speaker of verses four through six clearly is Yahweh.¹ The first two clauses יִצְחָק וְיִשְׂרָאֵל and נְאֻמֵּי יְהוָה נְאֻמֵּי יְהוָה apparently stand in synonymous parallelism to each other. This means that the second clause is basically a repetition of the idea contained in the first. The words that the prophets spoke were considered by Yahweh to be the words of His own mouth. This verse shows that the prophets were instruments of Yahweh in that they proclaimed the words of His mouth.²

The conclusion from these passages is that the primary function of a נָבִיא of Yahweh is that of declaring God's Words. When a prophet spoke on behalf of Yahweh, his words were considered by Yahweh to be equal to the words of His own mouth. Other passages which help to illustrate this meaning include Jeremiah 1:7, 2 Chronicles 36:12, Zechariah 7:12 and Ezekiel 2,3.

Office Versus Function

There are some who would distinguish between the office of a prophet and the function of acting as a prophet. Young cites Daniel as an example of one who had the "prophetic gift" but nevertheless did not have the status of a

¹Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea*, trans. Gary Stansell, ed. Paul D. Hanson, Hermeneia, ed. Frank Moore Cross et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), p. 120.

²Ibid.; James Luther Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library, ed. G. E. Wright et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 97.

prophet in Israel.¹ Kline and Green would both agree with such a dichotomy in this area.²

It is not within the scope of this chapter to give an in depth discussion of this issue, but Harris has given a satisfactory response to this imagined dichotomy. His observations on this point are worthy to be reproduced here at length.

It will not do to say that these men were non-prophets who prophesied. The Bible knows nothing of the distinction between the gift of prophecy and the office of a prophet as given by Green. Furthermore the authors of the Old Testament are indiscriminately and repeatedly called prophets in the New Testament (Heb 1:1; Mt. 11:13; 26:56; Lk. 18:31; 24:25; Acts 3:21; 13:27; James 5:10; Rom. 11:26; to name only a few). The very designation "Moses and the prophets" emphasizes that all the books were written by Moses the prophet *par excellence* and his prophetic successors. Finally it is to be noted that there is no Biblical way to identify a non-prophetic inspired man. The tests given are tests for prophets (Deut. 18, etc.).³

Even if there was a difference between the prophetic gift and the prophetic office, from the list of passages cited by Harris above it is obvious that for the New Testament writers all of the writers of the Old Testament were in one way or another considered prophets whether they held such an office or not.

¹E. J. Young, "The Canon of the Old Testament," p. 166.

²Kline, *Biblical Authority*, pp. 57-59; Green, *Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon*, p. 85.

³R. Laird Harris, "Factors Promoting the Formation of the Old Testament Canon," *BETS* 10 (Winter 1967):25, 26.

Writing Prophets

It has already been pointed out that the primary function of a prophet is that he *speaks* the Word of God, but obviously, the Bible as the Word of God is a written document. It is important to understand that of all the prophets who spoke God's Word, many either wrote their words down or directed others to do it. These written words were just as authoritative as their spoken words.

The Bible speaks of many who were evidently prophets of Yahweh who never, as far as can be determined, left any written record (1 Kgs 13; 14:18; 16:7, 12; 2 Chr 15:8). If any of these did write, the writing has not been preserved in any individually identifiable form. If Abel and Abraham can be considered prophets in the same sense, then they would be included in the list of non-writing prophets as well (Gen 20:7; Luke 11:47, 49-51).

The suggestion has been made by some from the older liberal school of thought that the messages uttered by the prophets were messages concerned only for the peoples of their own times. Their words had no real enduring value. A. B. Davidson has noted, "The prophet is always a man of his own time, and it is always to the people of his own time that he speaks, not to a generation long after nor to us."¹

Upon a close examination of the Scriptures, this view of the Old Testament can be demonstrated to be incorrect.

¹HDB, s.v. "Prophecy and Prophets," by A. B. Davidson, 4:118.

The words of the prophets were spoken to the people of their own time, but they also were put in written form for generations to follow to profit from. It is clear from the Pentateuch and other passages that Moses wrote it (Exod 34:27; Num 33:2; Deut 31:9; Josh 1:7; 1 Kings 2:3) and that what he wrote was written to benefit and warn future generations (Deut 17:18-19; Exod 12:14, 24). The same could be said of other writing prophets. Isaiah's example in Isaiah 2:2-4 speaks clearly of "the last days." These words are a written prophecy which will be fulfilled by people from another generation. Another text which clearly shows Isaiah was not writing simply to people of his own time is Isaiah 30:8. This passage states, "Write it before them on a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come forever and ever" (see also Jer 30:1-3).

As Young and others have observed, the statements concerning the writing down of the prophecies are very few.¹ Very little is known concerning the method and technique of the recording of the Old Testament books. It is possible that many prophets had scribes or amanuenses to record the events and prophecies. It is clear that Jeremiah used Baruch in exactly this manner (Jer 36:4-6, 27-28; 45:1; 30:1-2). The "sons of the prophets" were in some cases probably instrumental in assisting the prophets and recording God's

¹Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, p. 159.

Word.¹ The seventy elders of Moses may have acted as scribes by helping Moses investigate and record the books of the Pentateuch (Num 11:24-25).

To say much more about the act of writing the Old Testament is difficult to do. Liberals and evangelicals alike admit that the evidence is scanty. Young has suggested that there is a good probability that Jeremiah's example is normative.² The prophets spoke the words of God and were well aware of it.³ They knew their message was not one to be uttered and forgotten. It seems clear from the evidence available that the writing of the material was for the purpose of preserving the message that had been declared by God.

Criterion for Old Testament Canonicity

Scaer has observed that the concern for the canonicity of the Old Testament Scriptures was the writings that were of prophetic origin.⁴ There is both biblical and historical evidence that shows that the criterion for canonicity was prophetic authorship.

¹For a further discussion on the sons of the prophets, see Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, pp. 83-94; Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), pp. 28-34.

²Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, p. 160. See also J. Philip Hyatt, "The Writing of an Old Testament Book," *BA* 6 (February 1943):71-73.

³For an example of Isaiah's awareness of his message, see *ibid.*, pp. 170-75.

⁴David P. Scaer, *The Apostolic Scriptures* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), p. 40.

Biblical evidence

Old Testament

The Pentateuch. The Old Testament speaks of the prophetic origin of the Pentateuch in numerous places. The principle for the canonization of the Pentateuch was the prophetic authorship of Moses. The Old Testament is filled with passages that clearly identify it as coming from the hand of Moses. There is ample internal evidence that Moses wrote, that he wrote a book, and that he wrote it according to God's direction. In Exodus 17:14; 24:4-7 and 34:27, 28, Moses is represented as writing the book. Numbers 33:2 states clearly that Moses wrote "their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the LORD." A study of Deuteronomy 31:16, 19, 22 and 24-26 points out the fact that God directed Moses concerning what should be written and the preservation of the written material.

There is also internal evidence in the Pentateuch that what was written earlier in the scope of the Pentateuch was authoritative and canonical. Most scholars assume that the term "book of the covenant" in Exodus 24:7 (cf. 24:4) refers to the laws recorded in Exodus 20:22-23:33. This "book of the covenant" is presented in 24:7 as already having canonical status.¹ Again, the modern consensus is that Deuteronomy 17:18-19 and 31:9-12 all refer to Deuteronomy itself or at least to previous parts of it. These references

¹Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1976), p. 19.

present the book of Deuteronomy as being canonical during the lifetime of Moses.¹ Deuteronomy, the last book of the Pentateuch to be written, presupposes the existence of earlier canonical literature. An example of this would be Deuteronomy 24:8, which presupposes Leviticus 13:1-14:57.²

There is evidence external to the Pentateuch which will also lead to similar conclusions. Passages in Joshua point to Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and canonical authority (Josh 1:7-8; 3:4; 8:31-34; 23:6), as do passages from Kings (1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Kgs 14:6; 18:6; 21:8; 23:2, 25), Ezra (7:6), Psalms (103:1ff.) and the prophets (Dan 9:11-13; Mal 4:4).³

It is clear from the foregoing that regardless of what one may believe concerning the authorship of the Pentateuch, the opinion of ancient Israel was that Moses wrote it as a spokesman for God. Harris has observed that Moses was a prophet *par excellence*.⁴ Numbers 12:6-8 and Deuteronomy 34:10 state it clearly. Other prophets were communicated to by dreams and visions, but Moses received revelation from the LORD mouth to mouth (Num 12:8) and the LORD knew Moses face to face (Num 12:8; Deut 34:10). The definition of a prophet plus the fact that Moses clearly was a prophet (Deut 18:18; 34:10; Num 12:7-8; Hos 12:13) are the reasons

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 22.

³Ibid., pp. 14-21.

⁴Harris, "The Formation of the OT Canon," p. 25.

why ancient Israel accepted the Pentateuch as authoritative and canonical.

The rest of the Old Testament. Before Moses died the LORD made it clear through his servant that other prophets would arise and carry on his work. Deuteronomy 18:15-22 describes the divine origin of the prophetic institution. It is evident from several New Testament passages that some did understand a Messianic interpretation of this text (Acts 3:20-25; John 1:21, 25; 6:14; 7:40).¹ But on the other hand, it does describe the institution as well. Craige has observed that in the context, the singular נָבִיא is a collective form indicating a succession of prophets.² The context of verses twenty through twenty-two, which virtually excludes the *exclusively* Messianic interpretation of the passage, makes it clear that this is the origin of the prophetic institution.³

In the light of this evidence, it is not surprising to see prophets of Yahweh come upon the scene throughout the history of Israel. It has already been demonstrated that many of the prophets left written records. Some, however, have questioned whether all of the Old Testament books can be ascribed to prophets. It is true that evidence to support

¹TDNT, s.v. "Μωυσης," by J. Jeremias, 4:857-59.

²Peter C. Craige, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), p. 202, n18.

³For a further discussion, see Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, pp. 29-37; E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the*

this thesis from the Old Testament itself cannot be cited for each Old Testament entry. But on the other hand, the Old Testament gives its readers no reason to deny such a thesis, either. Concerning the traditional threefold Hebrew canon of Scripture,¹ many conservative evangelical scholars include the books of the second division, the Prophets, in the canon because they were written by prophets. E. J. Young holds to this view, even though the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings) in themselves claim nothing of prophetic authorship. Young states, "The authors of these books, whoever they may have been, were men who occupied the office of prophet."²

Young and others, however, do not think that the writers of the third division, the Writings, were prophets.³ There are at least two problems with this concept. It should be noted first that the traditional threefold canon division is not fixed or sacred. Upon careful investigation one can discover that these divisions of the Hebrew Bible were not

Old Testament, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1956), p. 115; Ralph A. Smith, "An Exegetical Analysis of Deuteronomy 18:14-22" (M.Div. Thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1978).

¹Alfred S. Geden, *Outlines of Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), pp. 118-19.

²Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), p. 41.

³*Ibid.* It should be remembered that Young marks a distinction between the function of a prophet and the office of a prophet.

fixed and rigid, but fluid and flexible.¹ This is to say that just because some books are not in the traditional division known as the Prophets does not mean that they were not of prophetic authorship.

The second problem with this concept is that at least some of the books in the Writings are said to be of prophetic origin. David, Daniel and Asaph are all considered to be prophets by the New Testament (Matt 13:35, cf. Ps 78:2; Matt 24:15; Acts 2:29-30) and David and Daniel are frequently considered to be prophets in rabbinic literature as well.²

A series of verses in Chronicles cites the works of a succession of writing prophets as its source (1 Chr 29:29; 2 Chr 9:29; 12:15; 13:22; 20:34; 26:22; 32:32; 33:19). 1 Chronicles 29:29 states that the history of David was written in the books of the prophets Samuel, Nathan and Gad. 2 Chronicles 33:19 points out that a history of Manasseh's reign was recorded by unnamed seers (נביאִים). The other kings are said to have their works recorded in a book called "the book of the kings of Israel and Judah," although the names of the authors are not specified. Listed here in these passages

¹For further discussion on the flexibility of the Old Testament divisions, see J. Barton Payne, "Zechariah Who Perished," *Grace Journal* 8 (Fall 1967):33-35; Robert Dick Wilson, "The Book of Daniel and the Canon," *PTT* 13 (July 1915):352-408; Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity*, pp. 140-43; David R. Webb, "'Zechariah Who Perished' and His Relationship to the Old Testament Canon" (Advanced Bibliology Seminar paper, Grace Theological Seminary, November, 1980).

²Leiman, *Canonization of Scripture*, p. 59. See also Robert Dick Wilson, "The Rule of Faith and Life," *PTT* 26 (July 1928):437.

is a chain of writing prophets from before the reign of David to virtually the end of the kingdom in Judah.

Harris and others have pointed out that this concept of a recognized succession of writing prophets in Israel may be used to solve an old problem.¹ An objection to the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is that Moses scarcely could have written the account of his death which is found in Deuteronomy 34:1-12. The words do not claim to be nor appear to be prophetic, but rather historical. The same could be said concerning the last five verses of the book of Joshua. Ruth ends with a genealogy of David which would have to be written after David's ascension to power. 2 Chronicles ends with two verses that are identical to the beginning of the book of Ezra. This interesting phenomenon could be cited for other books of the Old Testament. After surveying the evidence, Harris comes to this conclusion:

It thus appears that in every case from the Pentateuchal history to the post-Exilic writings a historical book is given a colophon or footnote that unites it in continuous narrative fashion to the succeeding book. Deuteronomy 34:1-12 is not an exception, but part of a regularly observable phenomenon, and this is important for our purposes because it betrays the sense of continuity in Israel's written records. The chain of prophets evidently wrote a chain of histories from Genesis to Nehemiah and the writings of these prophets were accepted, one by one, through the centuries until, when the spirit of prophecy departed from Israel, the canon was complete.²

While prophetic authorship as the criterion for canonicity cannot be proven for each book of the Old Testament

¹Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity*, p. 107.

²Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity*, pp. 168-69.

using only the Old Testament itself, it appears that there is no reason except on the basis of critical theories not to believe that the entirety of the Old Testament was written by prophets of Yahweh. The evidence from the Old Testament itself is somewhat limited, but evidence from the New Testament and other historical sources will shed further light on the subject.

New Testament

At least twelve times the New Testament uses the phrase "the Law and the Prophets" or a similar phrase "Moses and the Prophets." The theory has been advanced by Albert Sundberg that the Law and the Prophets was only two-thirds of the present day Old Testament canon.¹ It was not until after the time of Christ that the third division, the Writings, became accepted as canonical.

There is ample evidence which demonstrates that the Old Testament canon was closed and completed by the time of Christ. The men and writers of the New Testament presupposed as much. In this regard, Ryle has observed

. . . that the references in the New Testament to the Old Testament Scriptures lead the unprejudiced reader to suppose, that the Jewish Scriptures were regarded in the middle of that century as a completed and finished collection, the sanctity of which would utterly preclude the idea of any further alteration. . . . Allusions and appeals to "the Scriptures," "the holy Scriptures," "the sacred writings," leave a conviction upon the mind . . . that the writers refer to a sacred national collection which had been handed down from ages past, and whose

¹Albert C. Sundberg, *The Old Testament of the Early Church*, Harvard Theological Studies, no. 20 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).

limits could never be disturbed by addition or withdrawal (e.g. Matt. 22:29, Acts 18:24, Romans 1:2, 2 Tim. 3:15).¹

After spending an entire chapter discussing the development and dating of the Old Testament canon, using such sources as the Dead Sea Scrolls, biblical and extra-biblical material, Harris came to a similar conclusion.

The evidence clearly indicates that a fully developed canon existed in the second century B.C. That this canon was accepted and approved by Christ and the apostles in the New Testament is clear from the New Testament statements. There should be no difference of opinion among those who honor Christ and the Gospels as to what books belong in the Old Testament.²

The point is that by the time of Christ, the Old Testament canon was complete, and the New Testament writers referred to this completed canon as the Law and the Prophets. If this is true, and there is no reason to believe it is not, then every time this phrase or similar ones are used in the New Testament as a reference to the Old Testament, they stand as a clear testimony to the prophetic authorship of the Old Testament. Harris has observed that the authors of the Old Testament are "indiscriminately and repeatedly called prophets in the New Testament."³ There are numerous texts which can be used to bear this out (Matt 11:13; 26:54, 56; Luke

¹Herbert Edward Ryle, *The Canon of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan and Company, 1909), pp. 163-64; see also *TDNT*, s.v. "γρᾶφω," et al., by Gottlob Schrenk, 1:756.

²Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity*, p. 154, see also F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, revised ed. (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1963), p. 104.

³R. Laird Harris, "Factors Promoting the Formation of the Old Testament Canon," *BETS* 10 (Winter 1967):24.

18:31, cf. John 19:24; Ps 22:18; Luke 24:25, 27; Acts 3:21; 13:27; Heb 1:1; Jas 5:10, 11).

Historical evidence

Perhaps the clearest historical reference to the prophetic origin of the Old Testament is found in one of the works of Flavius Josephus. In his work, *Against Apion*, several references are made to this very item. Josephus sets out to demonstrate that the Jewish Scriptures have been "preserved with scrupulous accuracy."¹ He demonstrates this by using the records of the priestly lines which were kept with great accuracy.²

After citing this example, his attention turns back to the whole Old Testament canon. He states that not anyone could write these records, but "*the prophets alone had this privilege, obtaining their knowledge of the most remote and ancient history through the inspiration which they owed to God . . .*"³ (emphasis mine).

Josephus then discusses the number of books in the Old Testament. He gives the number as twenty-two, and most scholars agree that the twenty-two he speaks of are equivalent to the thirty-nine in today's English Bibles. Concerning these twenty-two books, he concludes that nothing of "equal credit" can be added to them "because of the failure

¹Flavius Josephus, "Against Apion," in vol. 1 of 9 vols. in the LCL, 1:6, p. 175.

²Ibid., 1:7, pp. 175, 177.

³Ibid., 1:7, p. 179.

of the exact succession of prophets."¹ These words seem to be stating that the reason the canon was closed was because there were no more prophets around to continue writing it.

The caves of Qumran have yielded more evidence of the prophetic authorship of the Old Testament. The writers of the Scrolls were aware of books from the third division of the Old Testament, yet these documents frequently refer to the Old Testament as "the Law and the Prophets" and everything outside of the Pentateuch as simply "the Prophets."²

Conclusion

Both liberals and conservatives alike are well aware of the fact that apart from the Old Testament itself, there is little direct extra-biblical literature which refers to its beginning, development and canonization.³ Some liberals argued that in the centuries prior to Christ there was no concept of canonicity. Books only became canonical if they withstood the test of time.⁴ Fisher has responded by saying,

¹Ibid., 1:8, p. 179.

²DSD 1:3; 8:15, William H. Brownlee, trans., *The Dead Sea Manual of Discipline*, supplementary studies nos. 10-12, BASOR (New Haven, CT: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1951), pp. 6, 32; CDC 7:15-17, Chaim Rabin, trans. and ed., *The Zadokite Documents*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1958), pp. 28-30; 1QpHab 2:9; 7:5, William H. Brownlee, trans. and ed., *The Midrash Peshar of Habakkuk*, Society of Biblical Literature series, 24, ed. Leander E. Keck (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), pp. 53, 107.

³For example, see S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 9th ed., ITL (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913), p. 498; R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity*, p. 134.

⁴See the Introduction to this Chapter.

"there is now abundant evidence from the ancient Near East of a 'psychology of canonicity'--viz., a sensitivity to the inviolability of authoritative documents as far back as early second millennium B.C."¹

The point is that Jewish people in Old Testament times whose minds were sensitive to the Word of God knew the difference between what was an authoritative document and what was not.² They knew that what came from the mouth or hand of a prophet of Yahweh was indeed authoritative and the standard of faith and practice for their lives.

Even though there is no evidence to prove the prophetic authorship of each Old Testament book, except on the basis of critical theories, there is no reason to deny this proposition. The New Testament frequently refers to the Old Testament's prophetic origin, as does Josephus and some material found in the Qumran caves. On the basis of the evidence produced in this section, this writer has concluded that the only objective criterion for Old Testament canonicity is a book's prophetic origin.

¹Milton C. Fisher, "The Canon of the Old Testament," in vol. 1 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 387. See also W. G. Lambert, "Ancestors, Authors, and Canonicity," *JCS* 11 (1957):1-14; W. W. Hallo, "New Viewpoints on Cuneiform Literature," *IEJ* 12 (1962):13-26.

²The testing process to determine a genuine prophet of God from a false one will be discussed in Chapter III.

The New Testament Apostles

Introduction

While lecturing at Yale University in 1899, George Adam Smith made the following comment concerning the canons of the Old and New Testaments. He said, "Few realize that the Church of Christ possesses a higher warrant for her Canon of the Old Testament than she does for her Canon of the New."¹ While this writer does not completely agree with that statement, there is a sense in which it is true. Christ and His apostles have put a divine seal of approval upon the Old Testament. No one with divine authority has put similar approval upon the whole New Testament canon.

How can one determine which books belong in the New Testament canon? Are there any clear guidelines that can be followed to determine which books do or do not belong? Even though Christ did not give a list of books which would be canonical, He did not leave the early church or New Testament readers ignorant concerning who would have authority in the churches and who would speak on His behalf. With this in mind, the focus of this discussion needs to be directed to the New Testament concept of an apostle.

The Term 'Απόστολος

General considerations

In classical Greek, the term had reference to sea-faring naval expeditions and more particularly with military

¹George Adam Smith, *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1901), p. 5.

expeditions.¹ When the term was combined with πλοῖον it meant a freighter or transport ship ready for departure.² Only in isolated cases does this word have any clear relation to the meaning it has in the New Testament. In the fifth century B.C. Herodotus uses it in the sense of an ambassador, envoy or delegate.³ Liddell and Scott's *Lexicon* has noted that in this passage it is used interchangeably with κηρῦκος.⁴

In Greek Judaism, the term is not widely used. Rengstorf has suggested that the reason for this fact is that the naval sphere in which the term arose was largely closed to Judaism.⁵ There is only one clearly attested usage of ἀπόστολος in Josephus.⁶ This passage uses it in the sense of sending emissaries and apparently stands with a similar meaning to the usages in the New Testament. No occurrences of this word are found in Philo.

According to Hatch and Redpath, there is only one usage of this word in the LXX, even though there are hundreds

¹*TDNT*, s.v. "ἀπόστολος," by Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, 1:404; BAGD, p. 99.

²*Ibid.*

³Herodotus, in vol. 1 of 4 vols. in the LCL, 1:21, pp. 22-25.

⁴LSJ, p. 949.

⁵Rengstorf, "ἀπόστολος," p. 413.

⁶Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, in vol. 8 of 9 vols. in the LCL, 17:300, pp. 510-11.

of usages of its verb form, ἀποστελλειν.¹ This word is found only in 1 Kings 14:6 (LXX 3 Kings 14:6). Rengstorf comments that the LXX usage of ἀπόστολος means "the messengers of God in the technical sense, since the word expresses the fact that Ahijah is commissioned to deliver a divine message to the wife of the king."²

The word ἀπόστολος in the New Testament has basically two nuances of meaning. First, it can mean simply a delegate, envoy, or messenger and this meaning is apparently the same as the meaning used in Herodotus (Phil 2:25; 2 Cor 8:23). In certain contexts, however, the term clearly takes on a technical sense which is predominate in the New Testament. There is evidence to show that one who is known as an apostle of Jesus Christ was Christ's plenipotentiary, that is, one who could act with the very authority of Christ Himself.

אֲפֹסְטָלוֹס

Since at least the time of Jerome it has been recognized that the Christian "apostle" had its prototype in the Jewish concept אֲפֹסְטָלוֹס.³ Scaer and Dix argue that this concept can be traced to the time of Abraham.⁴ Abraham sent his

¹Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint*, 2 vols. (Graz-Austria: Akademische Druck U. Verlagsanstalt, 1954), 1:141-45.

²Rengstorf, p. 413.

³Gregory Dix, "The Ministry in the Early Church," in *The Apostolic Ministry*, ed. Kenneth E. Kirk (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946), p. 228.

⁴Scaer, *Apostolic Scriptures*, p. 38; Dix, "Ministry in Early Church," pp. 228-29.

chief servant to find a wife for Isaac. The servant contracts an agreement with Laban and Bethuel which Abraham could not disavow (Gen 24:34-51). Vogelstein has observed that Ezra acted as a נִשְׁלָח for the king (Ezra 7:12-18).¹ Ezra was authorized by the king to do a task (vv. 14-16). "Ezra's authority is clearly described and defined and is in exact conformity with the definition of the concept of the apostolate as we know it in Judaism. . . ." ² The word נִשְׁלָח which is mentioned in 7:14 is a verbal form and does not have the exact terminological significance as the noun form, but as Vogelstein has observed, the verb is employed in a pregnant and significant way.³

A study of Rabbinic literature will help develop a clearer concept of the meaning of the term נִשְׁלָח . A man can be betrothed by himself or his נִשְׁלָח , as can a woman, and a daughter can be given away by the father by a נִשְׁלָח .⁴ In such cases, the one commissioned to be a נִשְׁלָח validly performs all the ceremonies in place of the person concerned. Likewise, a divorce can take place with a נִשְׁלָח .⁵ The power of a נִשְׁלָח

¹Hermann Vogelstein, "The Development of the Apostolate in Judaism and Its Transformation in Christianity," *HUCA* 2 (1925):100-1.

²*Ibid.*, p. 101.

³*Ibid.*

⁴*m.Kidd* 2:1, Herbert Danby, trans., *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 323. See also Rengstorff, s.v. "ἀπόστολος," p. 415.

⁵*m.Git.* 4:1, Danby, p. 310; *b.Kidd*: 23b, H. Freedman, trans., *Kiddushin, Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian*

was so extensive that if a man sent him to divorce the maiden he was engaged to, and if he sent a second שליט to reverse this decision, the divorce was absolutely final if the second did not get there before the first.¹ Rengstorf has observed that this same principle was true of any business transaction made by a שליט.² On occasion, a legal court could charge an individual with the conveyance or even the execution of its decisions.³ The individual who bears this commission is called a שליט.

It has been noted by Rengstorf that this term is a legal term. If the שליט has a religious significance, it is not because he is a שליט, but because the nature of his task is religious.⁴ Rengstorf's further comments on the legal aspect of the term are worthy to be reproduced here at length.

The legal element in שליט thus lies in the very nature of the matter. None can be sent but one who is under orders or who places himself under orders. Thus with the commission there goes the necessary responsibility for the one who receives it. The man commissioned is always the representative of the man who gives the commission. He represents in his own person the person and rights of the other. The rabbis summed up this basis of the שליט in the frequently quoted statement: שליטו של שליט

Talmud, new edition, ed. I. Epstein (London: The Soncino Press, 1966), p. 23b.

¹Ibid.

²Rengstorf, p. 415.

³*m.Git.* 3:6, Danby, p. 310; *m.B.Kam* 9:5, Danby, p. 344; *m.Yoma* 1:5, Danby, p. 163. Dr. L. Ginsberg, a noted Jewish Talmudist, has made a noteworthy comment on *m.Yoma* 1:5. He said, "the whole point of this passage rests on a fundamental distinction between a delegate with limited jurisdiction (*shaluach*) and one with plenipotentiary powers (*shaliach*)."
Cited by F. Garvin, "Shaliach and Apostolos," *ATR* 9 (January 1927):253.

⁴Rengstorf, p. 415.

אדם כמותו, "the one sent by a man is as the man himself," i.e.; the שליח is as good as the שלח in all that he says and does in execution of his commission.¹

The New Testament שליח

The question of what language Jesus and His disciples used in their daily lives is one of interest for the subject at hand. If Jesus did indeed speak in Aramaic, then it is possible, if not probable, that when He spoke of the apostles He used the Aramaic equivalent to the Hebrew שליח. Dix has stated that ἀπόστολος in the New Testament is a "mere translation" of the word שליח which is found in the Mishnah and Talmud.²

Whether or not ἀπόστολος is a translation of שליח, there is evidence that at least the Jewish (Semitic) concept of שליח is the basis of the term ἀπόστολος. The event in the life of Christ when He sent out His disciples two by two clearly indicates that He had commissioned them to be His שליחים (Matt 10; Mark 6:6-13, 30; Luke 9:1-6, 10). Jesus has

¹Ibid. The frequently quoted rabbinical statement can be found in the following places: *m.Ber.* 5:5, Danby, p. 6; *b.Kidd.* 41b, Freedman, 41b; *b.BMeza*, Salis Daiches and H. Freedman, trans., *Baba Meza, Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*, new edition, ed. I. Epstein (London: The Socino Press, 1972), p. 96a. *b.BK* 113b has the statement, "the שליח of a ruler is like the ruler himself."

²Gregory Dix, "The Ministry in the Early Church," in *The Apostolic Ministry*, ed. Kenneth E. Kirk (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946), p. 228; Rengstorff, s.v. "ἀπόστολος," pp. 428-29, 35. Compare this view with the view of Kirsopp Lake, "The Word 'Απόστολος,'" *The Acts of the Apostles*, part 1, in vol. 5 of *The Beginnings of Christianity*, eds. F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake (London: Macmillan and Company, 1933), p. 50; J. W. Truron, "The Hebrew Word 'Shaliach,'" *Theology* 51 (May 1948):166-67.

done to the $\Pi^{\prime}\eta\psi$ is done as to him. Hence the saying is only possible if there has already been an authorisation of those addressed.¹

It is important to understand in the context of these passages that "the matter is wholly as we have learned to see it in the legal discussions of the Rabbis concerning the $\Pi^{\prime}\eta\psi$."²

The Apostles as Writers of Scripture

New Testament evidence

Earlier it was noted that there are basically two uses of the term ἀπόστολος in the New Testament. It can mean any envoy, delegate or ambassador, but even in this New Testament usage, the $\Pi^{\prime}\eta\psi$ concept is still present to at least some degree. The phrase ἀπόστολοι ἐκκλησιῶν is used by Paul of men who were to accompany him to Jerusalem with a collection (2 Cor 8:23). These apostles were commissioned representatives of the local church. Epaphroditus was also a commissioned representative of the church in Philippi to minister to Paul in their behalf (Phil 2:25).

It is the second usage of ἀπόστολος that is germane to this study. This consideration has to do with an apostle who is commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ to be His representative here on the earth. In the previous section it has already been demonstrated how the twelve were the officially commissioned representatives of Jesus Christ and were sent by Him with full authority.

¹Ibid., p. 426.

²Ibid.

An important part of the apostle's commission to be a *נְלִיץ* was the proclamation of a message. At least five times in the Gospels the commissioning of an apostle is mentioned in juxtaposition with the proclamation of the Gospel (Matt 10:7; Mark 3:14; 6:12; Luke 9:2, 6). If indeed "the one sent by a man is as the man himself" (*m. Ber.* 5:5 *et al.*), then it follows that the words spoken by the *נְלִיץ* of Jesus Christ were equivalent to the words of Christ Himself. Rengstorf stated it earlier, ". . . the *נְלִיץ* is as good as the *נָלִץ* in all that *he says* and does in the execution of his commission"¹ (emphasis this author's).

That the apostles of Jesus Christ were the *שְׁלֵחִים* of God and Jesus Christ should not be doubted based upon the evidence presented.² But there is more evidence found in the upper room discourse which will cement more firmly these concepts of their authority to write as God's representatives.

Even though scholars disagree with the exact sequence of events during the night before the crucifixion, it is quite clear that only the twelve were present with Christ

¹Ibid., p. 415.

²The writer is aware that there are those who do not agree with this conclusion concerning the apostles and the *נְלִיץ* function. However, this writer is fully convinced that Rengstorf's basic position is correct. A careful investigation of the Talmudic, Mishnahic and New Testament evidence, some of which has been presented in this thesis, supports Rengstorf's view. For further information, see the material in the bibliography by Rengstorf plus the following: Gregory Dix, "The Christian Shaliach and the Jewish Apostle--A Reply," *Theology* 51 (July 1948):249-56; J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), pp. 92-94; J. Andrew Kirk, "Apostleship since Rengstorf: Towards a Synthesis," *NTS* 21 (January

during the upper room discourse (Matt 26:20; Mark 14:17; Luke 22:14; John 13-16).¹ Judas Iscariot was not there long, for shortly after the footwashing he departed (John 13:26-31). The important task of interpretation is to decide what from John's account of the discourse applies to the apostles only, and what applies to all believers.

While Chafer believes that these words spoken in the upper room were specifically applicable to the apostles, he also stated that there is a general application to all believers.² He makes an interesting comment in this respect concerning John 16:13. "In John 16:13," Chafer comments, "it is recorded that complete instruction is ever being given to each yielded believer by the indwelling Spirit."³ There are, of course, those of charismatic persuasion who hold this to be the primary interpretation of the passage.

Though verses in John 13-16 are frequently taken by Christians to apply to the church at large, there is clear

1975):250-51; *DNTT*, s.v. "Apostle," by D. Müller and C. Brown, 1:136-37; BAGD, pp. 99, 100.

¹Some would insist that all of the events of John 13-16 took place in the upper room, while others believe that after 14:31 the group leaves the room and proceeds to Gethsemane. No matter which view is held, there is no reason to include any more people in the audience of the Lord than the twelve (eleven) apostles. Compare the following: Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, eds., *A Harmony of the Gospels* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 215, note r; A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), p. 198.

²Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947-48), 1:85.

³*Ibid.*, 5:275.

evidence to show that much of this text is only directly applicable to apostles. For example, Engle has cited several reasons why the promise of John 16:13 is exclusively addressed to apostles.¹ First, he notes that the Paraclete sayings are so worded that they include only a select company.² Among other arguments which support his first premise is the three-fold repetition of ἀναγγελεῖ ὑμῖν (verses 13-15). The antecedent of the personal pronoun is obviously the eleven apostles. Another point made by him is the wording used in 16:12, especially the word ἄρτι. The usage of this word in its context argues that the immediate intent of the passage is basically for the men present.³

It seems the part of better hermeneutical logic to state that those passages which are specifically addressed to the apostles (e.g. Matt 10; John 13-16) are only specifically applicable to the apostles. This is not to say that believers of the church age cannot benefit from a reading and understanding of these passages. It is the opinion of this writer that one of the main reasons these passages were included in the canon is to show believers of the church age the unique function and position that only the apostles had. The Gospels clearly point out the fact that Jesus was training His disciples and preparing them for a time when He would

¹Richard W. Engle, "John 16:13: Interpretation and Implications" (Postgraduate Seminar on New Testament Theology, Grace Theological Seminary, 1977), p. 21.

²Ibid., pp. 16-18, 21.

³Ibid., p. 17.

no longer be present (Mark 9:9-11, 31-33; Luke 9:44, 45; 18:31-34). Here in the upper room discourse Christ gives these men the authority and the enablement to carry on His work and to proclaim His message and teaching by tongue and pen after His departure.¹

What specific statements indicate that Christ gave the eleven the enablement to be authorized representatives of His message? First John 16:13 states that the Spirit of Truth would guide the eleven into all of the truth and that He would reveal to them things to come. The Holy Spirit would guide (ὁδηγέω) the thought processes of the apostles to correct judgments and interpretations in the sphere of all of the truth as it relates to their commission by Christ. In addition to this, He would disclose (ἀναγγελλῶ) to them things to come. The context here seems to refer to divine revelation concerning future events.

John 14:26 sheds light on this process as well. The passage states that the Holy Spirit would teach the apostles all things and bring to their memory what Christ said to them. Whether or not this teaching process involved special revelation is uncertain. But it is clear from the context

¹It is true that there are promises in this passage which are applicable to anyone who meets the conditions (John 14:6, 9, 12, 21, 23; 15:5, 6). While it is probably true that there is a general application to any believer of some of the material explicitly addressed to the apostles in these verses, it ought to be clear that one dare not stand on these passages alone to defend the validity of such claims for all believers. Such claims need to be developed from other passages which clearly apply to all believers.

that this work of teaching is not the same as the Spirit's work of illumination for believers in general.

The apostle Paul, of course, was not present during the upper room discourse. Nevertheless, he speaks of his apostolic authority on a par of equality with the rest of the apostles (e.g. Gal 1:17; 2:8). The twelve were called by Christ, so was Paul (Rom 1:1, 5; Gal 1:1). Some of the apostles received divine revelation from Christ, so did Paul (Gal 1:11-12; Rev 1:1-2). In short, Paul was as much an apostle as any of the rest, and even though he was not present in the upper room there is no reason to doubt that he too had the authority and enablement of the Holy Spirit to do the work and proclaim the message just like the rest of the apostles had.

From the above discussion it is only a short step from the authoritative speech of the apostles to their authoritative written documents. The New Testament Scriptures are the written words of some of the apostles. The apostles were God's authorized ׀ַןִּלְוִיִּם and what they wrote represented God's Word and in fact was God's Word. There are statements in several New Testament passages which further substantiate this. Paul told the Corinthian believers that the mark of a spiritual man was the acknowledgement "that the things which *I write* to you are the Lord's commandment" (1 Cor 14:37). In 2 Corinthians, Paul again states that whether he speaks to the Corinthians in person or by letter, both carry the same authority (2 Cor 10:8-11). It is the apostle Peter who

places Paul's *letters* on an equal level with "the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Pet 3:15, 16).

Problem books

The apostles were the people whom Jesus Christ authorized to speak His message. This statement leads the discussion to the so-called problem books of Mark, Luke, James, Jude, and Hebrews. If apostolicity is the criterion for New Testament canonicity, then special consideration is due these books.

There is ample evidence from patristic sources that Mark wrote his gospel under the direction of the apostle Peter and that Luke wrote his two ascribed works under the direction and authorization of the apostle Paul. Papias states that the words of Mark's Gospel were Peter's, and Tertullian clearly states that Luke wrote under Paul's direction on his behalf.¹ When one investigates the patristic literature, it becomes obvious that the reason Luke and Mark were included in the canon is because they were considered to be apostolic books even though strictly speaking, they did not come from the hand of an apostle.²

¹H.E. 3:39:15, in *Eusebius, The Ecclesiastical History*, in vol. 1 of 2 vols. in the LCL, p. 297; Tertullian, "Against Marcion," 4:2, 5, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (hereafter referred to as *ANF*), vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), pp. 347, 350.

²Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity*, pp. 243-44, 249-57; Scaer, *Apostolic Scriptures*, pp. 54-57; Justin Martyr understood all four gospels to be of apostolic origin, Justin Martyr, "The First Apology," 66, *ANF*, 1:185.

The problems connected with the Epistle of James and the Epistle of Jude are interesting to say the least. As Harris has observed, there are at least two people called James and two people called Jude in the New Testament, and maybe even three of each.¹ There were two people called James and two people called Jude who were apostles (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13). If the James and Jude who were "brothers" of Jesus are different than the two who were not sons of Zebedee, then there are three sets (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3).²

Most scholars agree that James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John could not have written the epistle of James because he was killed in A.D. 44 before the epistle was written (Acts 12:2). In this case, there remains at least one and most likely two other candidates, one of which clearly was an apostle, being one of the twelve (i.e., James the son of Alphaeus, Luke 6:16). Most non-Roman Catholic scholars believe that there was a third James, a half brother of the Lord Jesus (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3; Gal 1:19). This James also might claim apostolic authority according to Lightfoot, Burton, Howard and Rengstorf (cf. Greek text Gal 1:19; 1 Cor 15:7).³ The point here is that of the two people besides the son of Zebedee called James who were prominent in

¹Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity*, p. 261.

²This is the normal Protestant position.

³Lightfoot, *Galatians*, pp. 84-85, 95, n4; Ernest DeWitt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), pp. 60-61; George Howard, "Was James an Apostle?" *NovT* 19 (January 1977):63-64; Rengstorf, "ἀπόστολος," pp. 422, 431, see also footnotes.

the New Testament Church, one clearly was an apostle (the son of Alphaeus) and the second one, the Lord's half brother probably was an apostle. While this data is not absolutely conclusive, there is considerable evidence to support the apostolic authorship of the Epistle of James.¹

The argument for the apostolic authorship of the Epistle of Jude follows a similar pathway. Obviously Judas Iscariot did not write this epistle, but two candidates remain. The first candidate is Judas, the son of James who was numbered among the twelve (Luke 6:16) and the second is Judas, the half brother of Jesus (Matt 13:55).

In the introduction to Jude's epistle, the author states that he is the brother of James (Jude 1). Since the only other James-Jude brother combination mentioned in the New Testament is the James-Judas half brother of the Lord combination, this fact may argue in favor of the author of Jude being the half brother of the Lord. Tertullian, who was in a position to know much about the early New Testament books, wrote a brief tract in A.D. 202 in which he referred to the writer of the Epistle of Jude as the Apostle Jude.² Origen,

¹All of the material presented in this discussion assumes that James is a genuine first century document. For further investigation on this subject, see David R. Webb, "Some Early Witnesses to the Authenticity of 1 Peter, James, Jude and 2 Peter" (a paper presented for the course History of Theology, Grace Theological Seminary, April 1981), pp. 15-24.

²Tertullian, "On the Apparel of Women," 1:3, *ANF*, 4:16.

who wrote almost contemporaneously with Tertullian also referred to this epistle as the work of the Apostle Jude.¹

It is difficult to know how to interpret some of this evidence. Are Tertullian and Origen both saying that they thought the author of Jude was the apostle who was numbered among the twelve? Or, are they saying as Lightfoot and others have suggested, that Jude, the half brother of the Lord, might also be considered an apostle in the same way James the half brother of the Lord was? The answer is not clear, but whoever the author was, he was considered by these two men to have been an apostle.

Some might question whether or not the third James and the third Judas could legitimately be called apostles, because that would mean that there were more apostles than the original twelve. Schaff thinks that the choice of Matthias was null and void, and that Paul was the twelfth apostle whom the Lord selected.² There is no reason to insist that the number was to be limited to twelve even when Revelation 21:14 is considered. It was noted earlier that there is exegetical support for James, the Lord's brother being an apostle (Gal 1:19; cf. 1 Cor 9:5). Barnabas may well have been an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is mentioned as an apostle twice (Acts 14:4, 14), he is associated with Paul and the apostleship of the Gentiles (Gal 2:9); and in

¹Origen, "De Principiis," 3:2:1, *ANF*, 4:328.

²Philip Schaff, *History of the Apostolic Church*, trans. Edward D. Yeomans (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1853), p. 233.

1 Corinthians Paul seemingly claims for his fellow-laborer the privileges of an apostle and says he is doing the work of an apostle (1 Cor 9:5, 6).

The book of Hebrews presents some interesting problems as well. From the outset, it must be admitted that not a great deal of progress has been made in determining who the author was since the days of Origen. He stated concerning the authorship of Hebrews, "But who wrote the epistle, in truth God knows."¹ This writer is convinced that Paul did not write this epistle.² On the other hand, however, this writer is equally convinced that someone who knew Paul and was closely associated with him did write it. There is both internal and historical evidence to substantiate this point.

While there are many affinities between Hebrews and Pauline epistles to suggest that the writer of Hebrews knew Paul, these are mostly of a subjective nature. There are similarities in theology, similarities in phrases used and similarities in vocabulary used.³

The historical evidence is more objective. Eusebius recalls Origen's comments upon the authorship.

But as for myself, if I were to state my own opinion, I should say that the thoughts are the apostle's, but that the style and composition belong to one who called to mind the apostle's teachings and, as it were, made short

¹H.E. 6:25:14, LCL, 2:79.

²For this writer's reasons, see David R. Webb, "The Authorship and Canonicity of the Epistle to the Hebrews" (Postgraduate Seminar on New Testament Theology paper, Grace Theological Seminary, March, 1981), pp. 3-12.

³Niel R. Lightfoot, *Jesus Christ Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), pp. 20-22.

notes of what his master says. If any church, therefore, holds this epistle as Paul's, let it be commended for this also. For not without reason have the men of old time handed it down as Paul's. But who wrote the epistle in truth God knows.¹

Tertullian was more specific than Origen, implying that it was common knowledge in North Africa that Barnabas wrote the epistle.² Indeed, Barnabas may have written the epistle. He was intimately acquainted with Paul (Acts 9:20ff), the two went on missionary trips together (Acts 11:30; 12:35; 13; 14) and they were entrusted with the ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 11:20-30; 15:12; Gal 2:9). Tertullian states that Barnabas learned his doctrine from apostles and taught it with apostles.³

Origen also suggested the names of Luke and Clement of Rome in association with the epistle.⁴ Clement of Alexandria understood that Paul wrote the book in the Hebrew language and Luke translated it into Greek.⁵ While there are problems with Clement's theory, his statement is one more witness to the book's association with Paul. Other references could be cited,⁶ but one point is clear: the early church fathers who addressed themselves to the issue did not

¹H.E. 6:25:13-14, LCL, 2:77-9.

²Tertullian, "On Modesty," 20, ANF, 4:97.

³Ibid.

⁴H.E. 6:25:14, LCL, 2:79.

⁵H.E. 6:14:2, LCL, 2:47.

⁶Webb, "Authorship and Canonicity of Hebrews," pp. 3-8; Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity*, pp. 263-70.

usually ascribe the work to Paul personally, but they speak with unity when they place the book in close association with the Apostle Paul in one way or another. Therefore, it would seem that as both Mark and Luke qualify as apostolic books, so does the Epistle to the Hebrews.¹

Patristic evidence

While this writer is unaware of any father who clearly states that apostolicity is the criterion for New Testament canonicity, there are several statements which do give credibility to this position. Irenaeus makes it clear that it was the apostles and their works which were the final authority of truth in the church.² Both Justin Martyr and Polycarp place the words and commandments of the apostles on an equal par with the prophets of the Old Testament Scriptures.³ Papias' record concerning Peter's relationship to Mark has already been mentioned. In the statement of Papias on Peter's relationship to Mark, Papias seems to imply that the second Gospel is accepted because of its relationship to the apostle Peter, not because it came from the pen of Mark.⁴

¹Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity*, p. 270; Scaer, *Apostolic Scriptures*, pp. 57-58.

²Irenaeus, "Against Heresies" 3:3:4; 3:4:1; 3:11:9; *ANF*, 1:416, 429.

³Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho" 119, *ANF*, 1:219; Polycarp, "To the Philippians" 6:3, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2 vols. (hereafter referred to as *AF*), trans. Kirsopp Lake, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 1:291.

⁴*H.E.* 3:39:15, LCL, 1:297. Harris calls Papias' statement explicit, but it is only implicit. Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity*, p. 239.

Finally, the fathers never placed themselves on an equal plane with the apostolic office. According to Irenaeus, Clement of Rome was acquainted with some of the apostles and was said to have "the preaching of the apostles still echoing in his ears and their tradition before his eyes."¹ Yet Clement never claims apostolic authority, and clearly places himself and his teachings below their authority.² Ignatius knew that he could not command the church in Rome in a certain matter, he could only beseech them (cf. 1 Thess 3:6).³ He is well aware of the reason he could not command the church at Rome, and confesses, "I do not order you as did Peter and Paul; they are apostles, I am a convict. . . ."⁴

Pseudepigraphical corroboration

The origin of the pseudapostolic literature had very diverse causes and motives. Some pseudapostolic literature came from heretics, some was written to combat heretics and heresy, and some was written because people wanted to learn more about the apostles and the life of Jesus Christ.⁵ The

¹Irenaeus, "Against Heresies" 3:3:3, *ANF*, 1:416.

²I Clement 42; 5; 44; 47:1-4, *AF*, LCL, 1:79-81, 17, 83-85, 91-92.

³Ignatius, "To the Romans," 6:1-2, *AF*, LCL, 1:231.

⁴*Ibid.*, 6:3.

⁵Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 1, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. R. McL. Wilson, English ed. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 31ff.

reason people wrote literature and tried to pass it off as the work of an apostle is obvious. The word of an apostle, or in this case, a letter from an apostle, was the absolute authority in the churches.¹

Conclusion

The Bible frequently is called the Word of God. The element which makes the New Testament God's Word is that God's authorized representatives wrote it. The men who were Christ's plenipotentiaries and enabled by the Holy Spirit to write it were known as apostles. No one else is ever given the authority or the enablement to write the New Testament Scriptures. Mark, Luke and Hebrews are not exceptions to the rule, for all evidence points to the fact that they were each written under the direction of an apostle.

Some might question the role of the New Testament prophet in this discussion. It seems that they had a two-fold role of predicting the future (Acts 11:27-28; 21:10) and of teaching (Acts 15:32).² Even though the gift of New Testament prophecy was a God-given gift (Eph 4:11), nowhere in any literature are they ever referred to as נביאים. They did not have the authority or the enablement to write Scripture.

¹Ibid.

²W. Harold Mare, "Prophet and Teacher in the New Testament Period," *BETS* 9 (Summer 1966):147.

All of the assembled evidence points to one conclusion: the apostles were the men Christ authorized to write New Testament Scripture.

Divine Providence

Before concluding this chapter, there is one more issue which needs to be considered. It may be that there is literature from both the Old Testament and the New Testament that was written by prophets and apostles respectively which has not been preserved and is not available today.

The Old Testament speaks of the record of Nathan the Prophet (1 Chr 29:29; 2 Chr 9:29), the prophecy of Alijah the Shilonite (2 Chr 9:19) and the history of Shemaiah the Prophet (2 Chr 12:15) to mention just a few which are not available today. There are two acceptable approaches to this phenomenon. The first is to simply understand that God in His divine providence did not see fit to preserve these books. In some cases, the prophet himself may have been responsible for the material which was lost. Some of a prophet's writings may have been so strictly applicable to local situations that he made no effort to preserve them. On the other hand, there is no evidence that believers in Israel who treasured God's Word ever discarded any of it. Harris has observed, "As far as our evidence goes, the contemporary and succeeding believers in Israel venerated, treasured and preserved all the prophetic writings."¹ But doubtless not every oral

¹Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity*, p. 176.

proclamation was preserved and it may not be necessary to insist that every written document was preserved.

It is also possible in at least some Old Testament cases that these so-called lost books are not actually lost. Through the work of a writing prophet it may be that the pertinent material from the lost book has been incorporated into the larger extant book. Such a thing did happen in New Testament times. The letter of the apostolic council in Jerusalem to the believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia was at least partly preserved in Acts 15.

The discussion of New Testament missing documents is a moot one. It seems that there were Pauline letters which did not survive (1 Cor 5:9; Col 4:16), but this is not altogether provable. Henry has noted that Paul's reference to an earlier letter (1 Cor 5:9) might refer to an earlier correspondence from the Corinthian community (1 Cor 7:1; cf. Acts 18:27), or to earlier material in the apostle's present letter (1 Cor 9:15).¹ It is well known that some think the letter to Laodicea (Col 4:6) is a reference to the present Ephesians document.

While there is no solid proof that any apostle wrote any book outside the twenty-seven received in the present New Testament, it is also difficult to prove the contrary position.² No clear early patristic evidence exists that

¹Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:407.

²Ibid. See Henry's discussion concerning the possibility of private letters of apostles.

proves any genuine apostolic letters have been lost. Everything that the early church was aware of and could demonstrate to be genuinely apostolic was included among the sacred books.¹

One thing believers can be assured of is that God in His sovereignty has preserved for modern day Christians all of His Word that He intended for them to have. God's Word is sufficient for the needs of God's people.

Conclusion

F. F. Bruce argues that the reason a book is canonical is because it has the marks of authority. He remarks that it is sufficient for modern day believers to accept the Old Testament as divinely authoritative because Jesus and His apostles did.² He further admits that apostolic authorship was an important factor for New Testament canonicity, but for him, the test for canonicity was the books which were accepted by the early church as authoritative.³

Now there is no doubt that the books of the Old and New Testament are authoritative. But one must ask these questions, "What gave these books authority? What gave these books the right to be called the Word of God?"

This chapter has produced biblical and historical evidence to demonstrate that the Bible is the authoritative

¹Heretics did reject some apostolic books.

²F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, revised ed. (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1963), p. 104.

³Ibid., pp. 110-11.

Word of God because it was written by men who were authorized and commissioned by God to do it. The criterion for canonicity is the credentials of the writer. Concerning the Old Testament, the question to ask was which writings were of prophetic origin and concerning the New Testament, the question was which writings were of apostolic origin.

CHAPTER III

PROPHETS AND APOSTLES SINCE THE FIRST CENTURY

Introduction

While it may seem like the second chapter is divergent from the central thesis topic, in fact the material discussed in it is essential in determining whether or not the canon is complete. The criterion for canonicity has been established. Now it is necessary to query if any author's work has met the criterion since the apostle John laid down his pen nearly 2,000 years ago, or if the Bible speaks of a time yet future when this criterion might be met again.

Before this discussion takes place, it is important to realize that since the time of Moses false prophets and apostles have come upon the scene and have tried to pass their works and messages off as genuine. The Bible gives specific tests to determine the true spokesman of God from the false one.¹ At this juncture, an investigation of these tests will be made.

¹In this discussion, the apostles and Old Testament prophets are treated as essentially equal. Nowhere in the New Testament is the apostolic office clearly made equal to the prophetic office of the Old Testament. There is ample evidence to demonstrate that at least in respect to the writing of Scripture and the proclamation of the message they have essentially the same function. Peter places the commandment of the Lord spoken by the apostles on a par of equality with the words spoken before by the Holy prophets (2 Peter 3:2),

Tests for Spokesmen of God

While Deuteronomy 18:17-22 doubtless has a Messianic interpretation (Acts 3:17-22), it is also clear that this same passage speaks of the origin of the prophetic institution in Israel.¹ In this passage and Deuteronomy 13:1-2 there are some basic tests for a true prophet. Yahweh tells Israel that He will raise up prophets for them, and Israel inquires how they can discern between the true prophet and the false one.

There are several points that will be considered in this discussion, but the most basic points are found in these two Deuteronomy passages. Craige translates וְלֹא-תִהְיֶה הַדְּבָרִי in 18:22 as "the word is not true or does not come to pass."² His comments on the meaning of this phrase are helpful.

The criteria for distinguishing the true words of God are expressed very succinctly in two clauses. (a) *The word is not true*--the Hebrew rendered literally is "the word is not." The implication seems to be that the word has no substance, or that what the prophet says simply "is not so." That is, the word supposedly spoken by God through the prophet was not in accord with the word of God already revealed and it was therefore automatically

and Jesus promises the same reward to both prophets and apostles (Matt 10:41). For further discussion, see the following works: Scaer, *The Apostolic Scriptures*, pp. 41-42; Rengstorf, "ἀπόστολος," pp. 419-20, 439-41; Jacob M. Myers and Edwin D. Freed, "Is Paul Also Among the Prophets? *Int.* 20 (January 1966):40-53; David Hill, "Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation of St. John," *NTS* (July 1972):401-18; *TDNT*, s.v. "προφήτης, πρῶτος," by G. Friedrich, 6:849-50.

¹Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, pp. 24-30.

²Craige, *Deuteronomy*, p. 261.

suspect. (b) . . . Or does not come to pass--this clause describes prophetic words of a judgmental or predictive nature. The truth of the words would lie in their fulfillment.¹

The words of Deuteronomy 13:1-2 are a further commentary upon this test of a prophet and his message. Kline has observed that in the context the words "sign" (אֵימָה) and "wonder" (מִוִּפְיָא) here apparently refer to a predicted event, not necessarily miraculous, which coming to pass is claimed as a sign of genuine prophetic vocation and authority.² But clearly even if a prophet predicts future events accurately, he is not to be obeyed or followed if he teaches Israel to abandon their God.

As these two passages are studied, two criteria come to the surface as tests for prophets. The first one has to do with the verification of one's claim to be a prophet. If one claims to be God's spokesman, he ought to be able to prove it by performing an act which is normally reserved for God to do. This supernatural sign is a prophecy which must come to pass on apparently a short range basis so its truthfulness can be easily verified.³ But since a lesser supernatural power like Satan might be able to temporarily manipulate events to make his prophecies come true, there needs

¹Ibid., p. 263.

²Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), p. 100.

³The supernatural sign which verifies a prophet may not always have to be a fulfilled prophecy. The example here of prophecy may be a metonymy, that is, any supernatural work may verify a prophet's authenticity as long as it is an act normally reserved for God (e.g. 2 Kgs 2:11-15).

to be a second test of authenticity. This second test pertains to the agreement of the would-be prophet's theology with what has been previously revealed by God. If a prophet's prediction does not come completely true, he is not God's prophet (Deut 18:21-22). He has not spoken in the name of Yahweh. Even if his prophecy does come true, his message must be in accord with the Word of God already revealed and obviously it must not lead them astray after other gods (Deut 18:22; 13:1-2).

Some might question whether or not every prophet had to authenticate himself with short range verifiable prophecy or with other supernatural signs. It is true that examples cannot be cited for every Old Testament prophet,¹ but this is an argument from silence and does not prove anything either way.

It may be that not every prophet of Yahweh had to verify himself or his message. The mood of the first clause in Deuteronomy 18:21 is that of condition of contingency, which may indicate that only if the words of a prophet were doubted did they have to be authenticated. Verse 22 states that a test of a true prophet is fulfilled prophecy. This implies that any true prophet ought to be able to verify his message by performing such an act.

Moses was afraid that his people would not believe he was Yahweh's messenger, so God gave him the authority to

¹Such is not the case with the New Testament apostles. See 2 Corinthians 12:12.

perform miracles so "that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers . . . has appeared unto you (Moses)" (Exod 4:5). Psalm 74:9 is an important passage on this subject and again an appeal is made to Hebrew parallelism to demonstrate a point. Three clauses of this verse stand parallel to each other, each one expressing the same basic idea while adding a slightly different concept to the main idea. Clearly when Israel did not see any of their miraculous signs (אֵימֹתָיִם¹) they understood that no prophets were present among them. Chantry's observations on this passage are worth noting.

In other words, the absence of signs is equivalent to the absence of a prophet, which in turn is the same as having no authoritative answer to their question, "How long will God be absent from us?" This is a striking endorsement of the principle that only prophets work miracles. . . . When there is no prophet, there are no signs.²

Based upon this evidence, it seems that one must insist at the least that all true prophets *could* predict a future event or perform some other miracle in order to authenticate themselves to a doubting audience.³ While there is one more test worth considering, Weaver has observed that these two basic tests were sufficient to distinguish genuine divine prophets from false ones, and these tests are still readily applicable today.⁴

¹BDB, p. 16.

²Walter J. Chantry, *Signs of the Apostles*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), p. 14.

³For another example, see 2 Kings 20:1-11.

⁴Gilbert B. Weaver, "Apologetics and the Gift of Prophecy in the Contemporary Church" (Siloam Springs, AR:

Another characteristic used to distinguish between the true prophets of Yahweh and false prophets is the moral character of a prophet. False prophets were frequently characterized by their low morality. Freeman's notations on this point are helpful.

The false prophet was a mercenary who prophesied for hire (Micah 3:5, 11); he was a drunkard (Isa. 28:7); he was profane and wicked (Jer. 23:11); he conspired with others to deceive and defraud (Ezek. 22:25); he was light and treacherous (Zeph. 3:4); he committed adultery, walked in lies and supported the evildoers (Jer. 23:14); and he was generally immoral in life and conduct (Jer. 23:15).

The false prophet was, moreover, a religious opportunist, prophesying only what the degenerate people wished to hear (Isa. 30:10-11; Micah 2:11); he proclaimed an optimistic message of peace and prosperity (Ezek. 13:1-15; Jer. 14:13; 23:17; Micah 3:5); he often practiced divination (Ezek. 22:28; Jer. 14:14), and prophesied lies out of his own heart (Ezek. 13:3; Jer. 23:16). Thus in a real sense, the moral character of the prophet himself would attest to his authority. He who professed a divine commission from the holy God of Israel must reflect conduct and character consistent with that claim (cf. Matt. 7:15-20).¹

Pseudoprophets Since the First Century

Introduction

Even before the apostles died, false apostles and false prophets had appeared upon the scene (Rev 2:2; 2 Cor 11:13; 1 John 4:1). One cannot read the biblical record without realizing their presence throughout it (1 Kgs 22 et al.).

John Brown University, n.d.), p. 3. Both Freeman and Wood apparently disagree, not seeing these two tests as basic and sufficient. See Freeman, *Introduction to Old Testament Prophets*, pp. 101-17; Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), pp. 108-14.

¹Freeman, *Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, p. 105. See also Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), pp. 110-13.

Obviously an extensive investigation of all the false prophets and apostles is not possible. The purpose of this section is to investigate briefly several pseudoprophets and to explain why these do not qualify as genuine spokesmen for God, and hence why their works cannot be accepted as canonical. These examples are test cases to show the two previously mentioned basic tests at work.

A Non-Christian Prophet

Many non-Christian religions claim to have had Prophets of God speak to them and claim to have sacred revelations given to them which they have written down. Perhaps one of these better known religions is Islam with its prophet Mohammed. While the writer is unaware of any specific text in the Koran where Mohammed claims to be a prophet of Allah, there are numerous evidences of his prophetic calling which parallel the calling of some of the Old Testament prophets.¹

Mohammed made no forecasts of future events² and performed no authenticating miracles. The Koran is in obvious conflict with the sixty-six canonical books of the Bible and on the basis of both basic texts this work clearly is not to be considered the work of a true prophet of Yahweh.

¹Henry Preserved Smith, *The Bible and Islam*, in the series *The Jewish People* (New York: Arno Press, 1973), pp. 184-89. These pages list and explain the references to the Koran on this issue.

²*Ibid.*, p. 191.

Pseudochristian Non-Pentecostal Prophets

Joseph Smith and Mormonism are nineteenth-century examples of an attempt to supplement the canon of Scripture. The story of Joseph Smith and his golden plates is easily available and need not be repeated here.¹ According to the Book of Mormon the Bible was not complete and the Book of Mormon now completes it (2 Nephi 29:3, 6, 9, 10). The Book of Mormon, it is claimed, was not actually written by Joseph Smith, but merely translated from the golden plates from "Reformed Egyptian" by Joseph Smith with the aid of the Urim and Thummim (Mormon 9:32, 33).² Joseph Smith was the prophet who was to come according to the Inspired Mormon Version of the Bible and the Book of Mormon (Gen 50:33; 2 Nephi 3:15). Because Joseph Smith was a prophet he had the authority to translate the Bible "correctly" and to translate the Book of Mormon.³

When examined in the light of the tests of Deuteronomy 13 and 18, Joseph Smith fails the prophetic test. He never performed any miracles and clearly his doctrine does not agree with previously written Scripture.⁴ In order to justify

¹Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), pp. 9-18.

²*Ibid.*, p. 10, n4.

³James E. Talmadge, *The Vitality of Mormonism* (Boston: Gorham Press, 1919), p. 127. See also Robert J. Matthews, *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: A History and Commentary* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975).

⁴For a discussion on the differences between the Bible and Mormon doctrine see Hoekema, *Four Major Cults*, pp. 33-74.

the doctrinal differences between the Bible and Mormon theology the Book of Mormon states that by the hands of "the great and abominable church . . . many plain and precious things [have been] taken away from the book [Bible]" (1 Nephi 13:28).

Jeane Dixon is a modern day prophetic phenomenon. Some might look at her prophecies in a disparaging light because she is a woman, but this fact ought not to be the basis for rejecting her as authentic. Women prophets (prophetesses) were active in both the Old and New Testament economies. Josiah the king sent Hilkiah and his band to go and inquire of Yahweh concerning a certain matter (2 Kgs 22:12-13). Hilkiah the priest and his followers went to Huldah a prophetess to inquire of Yahweh and received a response, "Thus saith the LORD" (2 Kgs 22:14-20). Deborah, a prophetess (Judg 4:4), along with Barak were the composers of one chapter of the book of Judges (Judg 5).¹

Jeane Dixon expressly claims to be a prophet of God.² She must be judged on her claims and prophetic work, not on the fact that she is a woman. Her "track record" as a prophet is not very good. She has made numerous errant prophecies which identifies her as one who is not a prophet of

¹See Freeman, *Introduction to Old Testament Prophets*, pp. 33-36.

²Jeane Dixon, *The Call to Glory* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1972), p. 42; Jeane Dixon, *My Life and Prophecies* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1969), pp. 8-10.

Yahweh.¹ Lindsey has made several points worth considering which can be summarized here.² Many if not all of her prophecies have nothing to do with the Lord's work or His purposes. She makes predictions on fashion changes, horse races and prominent celebrities. Her predictions have no godly exhortations nor do they warn people to turn from their sin. She is nothing more than an opportunist prophesying what degenerate people want to hear. Her message is exactly like the message of the false prophets Isaiah and Micah spoke about (Isa 30:10-11; Micah 2:11; 3:5-7). She fails both primary tests plus the secondary test mentioned earlier by Freeman.

Christian Pentecostal Prophets

Since the charismatic renewal began in the early 1900's, many have claimed that the gift of New Testament prophecy is again active, and some have even claimed that there is essentially no major difference between a New Testament prophet and an Old Testament prophet.³ While there are some obvious parallels between the two offices, there are some obvious differences as well.⁴ Friedrich has observed

¹Hal Lindsey, *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), p. 122.

²Ibid., pp. 122-24.

³Bruce Yocum, *Prophecy* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1976), pp. 34-35. Yocum states that the dispensation has changed, but the prophet is still the same.

⁴TDNT, s.v. "προφῆτης, κ'λλ," by Gerhard Friedrich, 6:849; Hill, "Prophecy and Prophets," p. 407; Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, pp. 55-73, 93-102.

that the New Testament prophet does not enjoy unlimited authority as the Jewish prophet did. The New Testament prophet is not an unrestricted ruler over the church (as the apostle is); he is subject to its judgment (1 Cor 14:24-33).¹ While there were tests to determine the genuineness of an Old Testament prophet (Deut 13:1-2; 18:20-22), once he was determined to be a true prophet his prophecies were subject to no judgment but Yahweh's.

With this in mind it must be that Christian charismatic prophets who want to claim prophetic or apostolic authority in the church cannot claim the New Testament prophetic gift in order to be authoritative in the churches today. They must speak on the same level as the apostle and Old Testament prophets and be able to authenticate their word through genuine prophecy or other miraculous acts which God normally reserves for Himself.

Finding a modern day prophet who claims to meet these standards is not an easy thing to do. Gilbert Weaver wrote several modern day so-called prophets and asked them concerning their prophetical status. Several who were thought to have claimed the position of prophet denied it to Weaver through personal correspondence. Among those who denied it were Oral Roberts, Corrie ten Boom and Bill Bright.² David Wilkerson's position was not made crystal clear, but Weaver

¹Friedrich, "προφήτης, κ'ἔτι," p. 849. Yocum admits this. *Prophecy*, p. 107.

²Weaver, "Apologetics and the Gift of Prophecy," pp. 8-9.

determined that Wilkerson was not completely in line with the tests of Deuteronomy 18 and with this conclusion Wilkerson halfheartedly agreed.¹

Among those who responded to Weaver who claimed to be prophets were Kenneth E. Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Charles Youngbrant and Cliff Collins.²

Hagin could not respond to Weaver's challenge to produce some short range verifiable prophecy.³ Copeland responded with testable predictions dated September 19, 1976. He said,

In the spring of 1977, you will begin to see in meetings such as this, amputated limbs put back, missing sockets replaced. I have said this before, saith the Lord and I'll say it again: In the presence of man, you will see a complete, full head of hair grow on a bald head. Those are the acts of God. Those are the acts of the Lord.⁴

One would think that if such predictions came true Copeland would have been quickly willing to produce documentation of such evidence, but after a reasonable time period elapsed, documentation was never produced.⁵ Weaver has cited similar unfulfilled prophecies by the other men mentioned listed above.⁶

¹Ibid., p. 10.

²Ibid., pp. 10-13.

³Ibid., p. 10.

⁴Kenneth Copeland, "The News Before It Happens," *Believer's Voice of Victory* 4 (November 1976), cited in Weaver, p. 11.

⁵Weaver, Ibid., p. 11.

⁶Ibid., pp. 10-13.

Modern day prophecies and modern day prophets do not match up to their biblical counterparts. Yocum cites an example of the Lord's prophecy in speaking to Christians during a civil war in Beirut, Lebanon in 1975. The Lord told these people through prophecy to leave their homes and shortly after this prophecy their homes were destroyed.¹ Does this qualify as a true prophetic utterance? No real event happened in this "prophecy" which could not be charged to circumstantial happening. During a civil war, one might expect homes to be destroyed. Many if not all modern day charismatic prophecies which are "fulfilled" might be explained by similar means. It is no great feat of prophecy to predict economic hard times or upcoming fighting in the mid-east.

While some biblical prophecies are general (e.g. Matt 24:5-7) there are many which are very specific (Gen 40). Many modern day prophets seem to predict what is likely. Biblical prophets frequently predicted what was very unlikely (Gen 37:7-10, 20; cf. Gen 42:6, 9; 43:26, 28; 44:14).²

Similar observations can be made in reference to modern day miracles performed by would be prophets and faith healers. Close examination in many if not every case will show that no miracle of healing has actually been performed. These prophets and faith healers either over-emphasize the sickness or over-emphasize the "cure." It is easy to have

¹Yocum, *Prophecy*, p. 37.

²J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 107.

someone "healed" when nothing was ever wrong, or the problem was only in the sick one's head in the first place. On the other hand, many times the cure is not complete. The writer once had an encounter with an elderly couple who were "healed of all their sicknesses," yet each Sunday had to hurry home from church to take their insulin shots. At any rate, today's authenticating miracles do not measure up to the miracles which Christ and the apostles performed. Consider the following observations:

1. The miracles of Christ and the apostles were abundant, Matthew 14:14; Luke 6:19; Acts 5:12-16.
2. They were spectacular, John 9:32; Luke 22:50; John 11:34-44.
3. They were undeniable, John 3:2; John 11:47; Acts 4:16.¹
4. They were instantaneous, Mark 2:12; Mark 6:29; Acts 3:2-8.²
5. They healed totally, no progressive healing was evident and there was never any need for a period of recuperation, Luke 4:38-39; Matthew 8:15; Acts 3:6-10.
6. They healed organic and not functional diseases, which shows genuinely supernatural rather than psychotherapeutic healing.
7. They raised the dead, and while charismatic prophets often claim to have done this, actual proof is always lacking, John 11:39-44; Luke 7:11-16; Mark 5:22-24, 35-43; Acts 9:36-42.³

¹Numbers 1-3 are taken from John C. Whitcomb, Jr., *Does God Want Christians to Perform Miracles Today?* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1973), pp. 7-8.

²In several cases, there was some delay in healing, but the delay involved *minutes*, not days or weeks. See Mark 8:22-26; Luke 17:11-14 and John 8:1-7.

³Numbers 4-7 are adapted from John F. MacArthur, Jr.,

When one compares the prophecies and miracles of modern day charismatic prophets and apostles, it becomes quite evident that they do not pass the tests mentioned in Deuteronomy 18. Their words and works are not authoritative and cannot be placed on an equal basis with the canon of Scripture.

Conclusion

An exhaustive investigation of every false prophet and apostle is obviously not within the scope of this thesis. Such a task would be virtually impossible to perform. These examples have helped to demonstrate that there is every reason to believe that nothing canonical has been written since John laid down his pen nearly 2,000 years ago.

Future Prophets of God?

Does the Bible speak of a time in the future when God's authorized spokesmen will again be active upon the earth? The answer depends upon one's chronological approach to the book of Revelation. As Tenney has indicated, there are four basic chronological approaches to the book of Revelation.¹ The preterist, historicist and idealist interpreters would not interpret the portion of the book from chapter four and following as actual events which will transpire in a time of the future.

The Charismatics: A Doctrinal Perspective (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), pp. 143-49.

¹Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), pp. 136-46.

The futurist interpretation seems to do the most justice to the data recorded in Revelation. This view is usually limited to conservative individuals. It regards the events beginning with chapter four (cf. Rev 1:1, 19; 4:1) as futuristic and therefore subject to future fulfillment. If this interpretation is correct, meaning that the events and people are to be understood in a literal non-allegorical way, then there will be a time in the future when God will again speak through authorized spokesmen.

Revelation 11:3-13 speaks of a time during the future tribulation period when two prophets of God will again be active. The text explicitly states that these two witnesses will prophesy (i.e. proclaim an authorized message, vv. 3, 6) and it clearly labels them as prophets (v. 10). The passage makes it plain that these two witnesses who are called prophets belong to the Lord (μάρτυσιν μου, v. 3; ὁ κύριος αὐτῶν, v. 8). The fact that fire proceeds (ἐκπορεύεται) from their mouths (v. 5) is reminiscent of acts and descriptions of Old Testament prophets (Jer 5:14; 2 Kgs 1:11-12). They are said to have ἐξουσία,¹ obviously from the Lord to perform miracles which are strikingly similar to miracles performed by other Old Testament prophets (v. 6, cf. 1 Kgs 17:1; Exod 7:14-11:10). These two prophets will doubtless pass the tests of Deuteronomy 13 and 18. All of the evidence leads one to conclude that these two prophets are indeed the authorized spokesmen of the Lord.

¹TDNT, s.v. "ἐξουσία," by Werner Foerster, 2:569-70.

Any prophecy of theirs which they proclaim in line with their commission as prophets will incontestably have the divine imprimatur, "Thus saith the LORD." The text does not say whether or not any of their prophecies will be recorded or preserved. Any comment in this area is purely speculative, but the possibility needs to be considered. In times past when prophets and apostles spoke, the only means of recording their messages was by writing them down. Today, this is not so. Through the means of magnetic recording tape and a recording device, one may preserve a message and the voice almost indefinitely. It seems reasonable that these two prophets might commit at least some of their messages to be recorded, or that they might direct others to do so. Speculation? Yes, but it seems that all of this is within the realm of possibility.

In an earlier chapter, it was noted how Chafer stated that the New Testament canon was closed based in part upon intimations from Revelation 22:18.¹ He has observed that there was an "unfulfilled expectation" in the Old Testament and that the last verses of it give the assurance of the coming of another prophet.² His argument that Revelation closed the canon of Scripture is as follows:

But no continued revelation is impending as the New Testament is terminated; rather the announcement is made that the Lord Himself will soon return and the natural conclusion is that there would be no further voice

¹Chafer, "Canonicity and Authority," p. 142.

²Ibid.

speaking from heaven before the trumpet heralds the second advent of Christ.¹

While this writer disagrees with Chafer, there is a point to be drawn from his statement. The point is that just as the Old Testament canon closed with unfulfilled expectations of future prophetic utterance, so the New Testament closes with the expectation of future prophetic utterance. Just as the church age dawned with authorized spokesmen to guide it along, so too may the millennial kingdom age dawn with works from two authorized spokesmen. The millennial Bible may have more books in it than the present day Bible, and if this is true, all of it will carry the divine imprimatur "Thus saith the LORD" because of the credentials of the writers.

Conclusion

It has been determined that there are two basic tests which can be used to determine the authenticity of a true spokesman of God and that these tests are readily applicable today. Based upon these tests, there is no evidence that any genuinely canonical book has been written since the apostles faded off the scene near the end of the first century. It does appear possible that two prophets of God who will be able to pass the tests may during the tribulation period commit parts of their divinely authorized messages to writing, thus becoming canonical Scripture.

¹Ibid.

CONCLUSION

A careful investigation of the three traditional texts used to demonstrate that the canon of Scripture is complete resulted in the conclusion that these texts cannot be used to defend a completed canon of Scripture. While this thesis has not discussed many logical arguments for a completed canon, these all break down somewhere along the way.¹ Bruce has realized that historical and philological lines of approach "cannot establish the Christian claim that the New Testament completes the inspired record of divine revelation."² It appears that there is no dogmatic evidence anywhere to prove that the canon of Scripture is complete.

With these conclusions in mind, the writer deemed it necessary to investigate the question, "What is the criterion for canonicity?" The conclusion was that the criterion for canonicity is the credentials of the writers. This means that only men who are the authorized spokesmen of God can write authoritative Scripture. If indeed the Bible truly is the Word of God, it must be that it was authored by those who God authorized and enabled to speak His word. In the Old

¹For example, see Chafer's argument in the previous chapter.

²F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), p. 5.

Testament, these men are known as prophets and in the New Testament, they are known as apostles.

The writer is aware that the evidence presented in the chapter on criterion for canonicity does not guarantee beyond any doubt the validity of its conclusions. The reason for this is that the evidence is not 100 percent complete and it probably never will be. When working with incomplete evidence, no amount of historical demonstration or exegetical skill can unquestionably verify one's conclusions. While the evidence is not complete, it is sufficient to enable the researchers to draw some reasonably strong conclusions from it. As much as can be determined by the evidence presented in the chapter, the conclusion seems to be sound and logical.

Some fear the conclusion from chapter one that there is no scriptural proof that the canon is complete. The item they fear is that profane literature since the first century might somehow find its way into the canon of sacred Scriptures. But the Old Testament has given two basic tests by which even modern day prophets and apostles can be judged as authentic or non-authentic. It is evident that no literature since the apostolic literature of the first century has been produced with any claim of canonicity.

Since the criterion for canonicity is the credentials of the authors, it seemed that another investigative question was in order. Does the New Testament refer to a time yet future when such accredited men will again be active? If one holds to any sort of literal futuristic approach to

the book of Revelation, the answer must be yes. The two witnesses of Revelation 11 will proclaim divine prophetic revelation. If their message is recorded and preserved, it will carry the same divine imprimatur that the rest of the Bible does. It will be the Word of God.

Is the canon complete? Possibly not.

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