

The Original Bible Restored

Ernest L. Martin (1984)

Notes by Bob Evely, including some additional comments. Scriptural references displayed in the Concordant Version. Numbers in (parentheses) denote page number from the Ernest Martin book.

Order and number of the Old Testament books

The current order of books found in our modern Old Testaments originated in Egypt in the second and third centuries A.D. (10) But the original Old Testament reckoned as official by the Jews for their synagogue services is as follows:

- I. THE LAW (TORAH)
 1. Genesis
 2. Exodus
 3. Leviticus
 4. Numbers
 5. Deuteronomy

- II. THE PROPHETS
 6. Joshua/Judges
 7. The Book of Kingdoms (Samuel/Kings)
 8. Isaiah
 9. Jeremiah
 10. Ezekiel
 11. The Twelve (Hosea to Malachi)

- III. THE HOLY WRITINGS (or THE PSALMS)
 12. Psalms
 13. Proverbs
 14. Job
 15. Song of Songs
 16. Ruth
 17. Lamentations
 18. Ecclesiastes
 19. Esther
 20. Daniel
 21. Ezra/Nehemiah
 22. The Book of Chronicles

The original order observes the principle of eldership. The supreme position was given to the first five books called the Law (Torah). First rank after the Torah belonged to the Prophets. Among the prophets themselves there were degrees of rank ... the Former Prophets, then the Major Prophets, and

finally the Minor Prophets. (65-66) The 11 books of the third division were intended primarily for priests, kings and other rulers within a Temple (not synagogue) background. (76)

The order shows a deliberate design put into play by the canonizers. (65-66).

Those referring to the 22 books

Josephus writes:

“We have not a countless number of books, discordant and arranged against each other; but only two and twenty books, containing the history of every age, which are justly accredited as divine.”
(Against Apion 1.8)

Sixtus Senensis, a medieval Jewish scholar, saw significance in there being 22 divine books, as there were 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

“As with the Hebrew there are twenty-two letters, in which all that can be said and written is comprehended, so there are twenty-two books in which are contained all that can be known and uttered of divine things.”
(William H. Green, “A General Introduction to the Old Testament,” vol. I, p. 87)

Others who also made reference to the 22 books in their writings: (37-39)

- The Book of Jubilees (theological opinions of Jewish sectarians of the Dead Sea community)
- Melito (170 A.D.)
- Origen (210 A.D.)
- Hilary of Poitiers (360 A.D.)
- Athanasius (365 A.D.)
- The Council of Laodicea (343-391 A.D.)
- Cyril of Jerusalem (386 A.D.)
- Gregory of Nazianzus (390 A.D.)
- Epiphanius (400 A.D.)
- Rufinus (410 A.D.)
- Jerome (410 A.D.)
- Synopsis of Sacred Scriptures (500 A.D.)
- Isidore of Seville (600 A.D.)
- Leontius (610 A.D.)
- John of Damascus (730 A.D.)
- Nicephorus (9th century A.D.)
- Jesudad, Bishop of Hadad, Syria (852 A.D.)
- Hrabanus (9th century A.D.)
- Moses of Chorene, Armenian historian (1000 A.D. or early 6th century)
- Peter of Cluny (1150 A.D.)
- John of Salisbury (1180 A.D.)
- Hugh of St. Victor (12th century)
- Richard of St. Victor (13th century)

Whereas the 12 Minor Prophets (Hosea to Malachi) were formerly written on one scroll and counted as one book (as Luke does in Acts 7:42 and 13:40), each of the 12 is today counted separately. (56)

Why 22 books makes sense ... the “Acrostic”

A literary device used in the Old Testament was the “acrostic” ... where the first letter of a sentence begins with the first letter of the alphabet, the second sentence begins with the second letter of the alphabet, and so on. (40)

In complete Hebrew acrostics there are always 22 sentences, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

When one realizes the significance of the acrostic style for emphasizing a completeness and perfection, it is an easy step to acknowledge that the 22 books of the Old Testament canon represent (in a symbolic sense) a complete and perfect canonical acrostic. (42)

A change to 24 books in the Old Testament?

Sometime in the late first century or early second century the Jewish authorities re-divided the Old Testament into 24 books. It appears that the Jews in Babylon were the first to devise this new number. They simply divided two of the original books to arrive at the new number. There may have been political and religious reasons to make this change. When the New Testament books were being accepted as divine, all could see that the 27 New Testament books added to the 22 Old Testament books would result in the significant total of 49 books ... a powerful indication that God’s complete revelation was found with the addition of the New Testament books. It could have been that the Old Testament re-numbering was done so as to bring the total to 51 ... an insignificant number. (44)

E.W. Bullinger presents the 24 book arrangement in the Companion Bible ... with Joshua-Judges split into two books, and the Book of Kingdoms split into two ... Samuel and Kings. (Appendix, pg 5) Despite this re-division, Bullinger does maintain the original ordering of the Old Testament, unlike our modern Bibles.

The Tripartite Division

The three divisions (referred to as “The Tripartite Divisions”) were referred to by Christ, and He designated them as “the Scriptures.” We see in this passage the only place in the New Testament where the Old Testament Scriptures are defined. (12)

“Now He said to them, ‘These are My words, which I speak to you, still being with you, for all must be fulfilled that is written in the **law** of Moses and the **prophets** and **psalms** concerning Me.’ Then He opens up their mind to understand the scriptures...” (Luke 24:44-46)

The Talmud supports the Tripartite Divisions as representing the official canon. Since the fifth century, the Jews have had a special name for the Old Testament ... the “Tanak.” This name comes from the Tripartite Divisions of the Old Testament Scriptures: (55)

T (Torah, or The Law)
N (Nebi’um – the Prophets)
K (Ketuvim – the Psalms, or Writings, Division)

Why we can rely upon the original Jewish ordering of the Old Testament

The Mosaic laws represented the civil, governmental, societal and strict religious regulators which thoroughly dominated the lives of all Jews everywhere. We can be certain that all copies of the “constitution” were the same throughout the Jewish world. No priest or king could (or would) have revised the basic words of the Temple scrolls. There was, then, a good system of checks and balances to preserve the purity of the Temple and synagogue scrolls. (33)

There may have been differing interpretations of the words contained within the scrolls, but the words themselves could not have been tampered with. (34)

This same level of purity did not extend to the texts of sectarians who wished to live outside mainline Judaism, or if they lived under the jurisdiction of Gentile governments in Egypt, Rome, etc. The Dead Sea scrolls would be an example. Those Jews who joined private communal societies outside normative Judaism were prone to adopt their own rules and regulations. The same could be said of the manuscripts of the Law maintained by the Samaritan communities. (34)

But the only texts that those in Judaea would naturally accept were the original Hebrew ones deposited in the courts (synagogues) and the Temple. (35)

Original order of the New Testament books

The overwhelming evidence from the New Testament manuscripts places the books in the following order (5-6):

- Gospels
- Acts
- Catholic (General) Epistles
- Pauline Epistles
- Apocalypse

This includes the early manuscripts which most textual critics believe to be the best (Vaticanus, Alexandrinus, Ephraem).

The following from the early Greek church also adhere to this ordering (6):

- Athanasius
- Leontius of Byzantium
- Philastria
- The clerics at the eastern Church Council of Laodicea
- Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem
- John of Damascus

E.W. Bullinger reports the same general ordering of the New Testament in the Companion Bible ...

1)The Four Gospels, 2)The Acts of the Apostles, 3)The General Epistles, 4)The Pauline Epistles, 5)The Apocalypse. Bullinger adds:

“Even the order of these five groups varies in very few cases. But these are so exceptional as not to affect the general order as given above; indeed, they help to confirm it.” (Appendix, pg 139)

Changes made to the original order

The prime difference in the arrangement of the biblical books (which has dominated all modern versions of the Bible) is that which Jerome established in the fifth century when he produced the Latin Vulgate version. (244)

E.W. Bullinger reports in the Companion Bible:

“Our English Bibles follow the order as given in the Latin Vulgate. This order, therefore, depends on the arbitrary judgment of one man, Jerome (382-405 A.D.) All theories based on this order rest on human authority, and are thus without any true foundation.” (Appendix, pg 139)

The Book of Hebrews

Modern editions have placed the Book of Hebrews at the very end of the Pauline collection of books. This is what some church officials of the Western Church (Carthage and Rome) did in the late fourth century contrary to the best manuscripts and the opinions of most officials in the Eastern Church. The proper position of Hebrews is right after 2 Thessalonians.

“In the Pauline epistles, that to the Hebrews immediately follows the second to the Thessalonians in the four great codices Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Ephraemi.” (Scrivener, “Introduction,” Vol.I, p.74) (228)

The Latin section of the church found it difficult to believe Hebrews was written by Paul, and many refused to accept it as belonging in the New Testament.

“To our own people [Christians], we must say that this Epistle, which is inscribed ‘To the Hebrews,’ is received as the Apostle Paul’s, not only in the churches of the East, but by all the ecclesiastical writers of former times. But the Latins do not receive it among the canonical scriptures.” (Whytehead, “A Handbook to the Canon and Inspiration to the Scriptures,” p.131) (229)

The current order originated in Rome and Carthage, thru the Latin speaking church authorities. This re-adjustment by the western church places the epistles of Paul, and especially the Book of Romans, in first rank among the epistles ... advancing the jurisdiction of the Roman church into a position of first rank over all other church areas. (7)

The original “Greek Church” order for the New Testament also placed the Epistle to the Hebrews among Paul’s letters ... between Thessalonians and Timothy. (9)

Peter may have referred to Paul’s epistle to the Hebrews in 2 Peter 3:15,16

“... as our beloved brother Paul also writes to you, according to the wisdom given to him, as also in all the epistles...”

This implies that Paul had written to the same group that Peter addressed concerning the Day of the Lord. We remember that Paul was commissioned to preach not only to the Gentiles, but also to the Israelites (Acts 9:15). And this reference to Paul’s letter that preceded 2 Peter, directed to the Israelites, could have been the epistle to the Hebrews. (242)

Seven Churches (“Ecclesias”)

Paul wrote nine epistles to seven different churches (ecclesias) ... Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians. It is interesting to note that just as John wrote to seven ecclesias in the first few chapters of Revelation, Paul also wrote to seven ecclesias.

“The apostle Paul himself, following the example of John, wrote by name to Seven Churches. True, he wrote twice to the Corinthians and Thessalonians for their correction, but he shows thereby the unity of the Church; for John also in Revelation, though he writes to seven churches only, yet speaks to all.” (Muratorian Canon, written about 180 A.D.) (231)

Victorinus, who wrote about 290 A.D. also observed the fact that Paul wrote specifically to seven churches, and thereby to the “one general church.” (231)

Cyprian of Carthage (roughly 250 A.D.) also recognized the symbolism in Paul’s writing only to Seven Churches ... as did Jerome (roughly 400 A.D.) and Isidore of Seville (roughly 600 A.D.) (231)

Reasons why the original order makes sense

Are we to imagine that the canonizers of the Bible would disallow the principle of “elder supremacy” when positioning the books of the Bible? Even Paul recognized that “they” were ministers before him (Galatians 1:17) and that the gospel went first to the Jews and only thereafter to the Gentiles. (20)

Keeping in mind the principle of superior rank, first place in order went to James ... the leader of the Jerusalem church ... followed by Peter, and then John. This is the order Paul observed:

“... James and Cephas and John, who are supposed to be pillars...” (Galatians 2:9)

We also note that Peter’s name always preceded John’s in passages involving both. (20)

It also makes sense for the order to move from general to specific. The seven “General Epistles” dealt with large groups of people (mostly Jewish) who were still adhering, in many cases, to the national concept of Judaism. This is why these epistles were placed before those of Paul. They present teachings for an “infant” stage to the understanding of Christian doctrines and church discipline. (219)

Canonization

Canonization is the determination as to which writings were inspired by God and intended to be set apart as divine Scripture. Many believe these decisions were made by a church council several centuries after the apostles had died. But the Bible as well as early church history recognize that canonization was actually completed by certain prophets and apostles, especially Ezra (Old Testament) and John (New Testament).

King Hezekiah’s “Canonization”

When Hezekiah ruled, Judah was in danger of being destroyed. The emergency prompted Hezekiah and Isaiah to place their seal of authority upon certain sacred books found in Israel. They sought to

preserve all Temple books because it appeared that the Temple services and all physical components of Judah's religion might soon be extinguished. (85)

Proverbs 25:1 reveals some of the canonization activities of Hezekiah and his helpers. Here a new section of the Book of Proverbs begins with these words: "These are also the proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out." So Proverbs 25 to 29 were added to the Temple collection which had already been set in order by Solomon. (87)

Hezekiah brought up-to-date the canonical literature for use in the restored Temple services. One of the most striking evidences of Hezekiah's canonization is his "sign-manual" ... a series of three Hebrew letters (HZK) that occur at the end of every Old Testament book with the exception of the five books of the "Megilloth" (Festival Scrolls) ... Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther. These five books were positioned in a special section in the Temple liturgy by Ezra. (88)

The "sign-manual" has not been translated in any of the English versions, but was Hezekiah's means of "confirming" or "binding" the various Old Testament books. (88)

When later writers (such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel) had their prophecies placed among the sacred writings of the Old Testament, the same sign-manual was affixed to the end of these books. And Ezra, at the final canonization, carefully placed the sign-manual on all books which he and the Great Assembly recognized, omitting it only from the five Festival Scrolls which were being regularly read by the priests in the Temple. (90)

Of the sign-manual, E. W. Bullinger writes:

"The use of this tri-grammaton is uniform and continuous at the end of each book, until we come to the death of Hezekiah ... [after which] we find a different formula. Instead of the simple sign (HZK), we find two words, making a sentence – instead of forming the initials. At the end of Kings, we have 'Be bound, and we will bind.' This looks as though the subsequent editors, whether Josiah, Ezra, or others, understood the tri-grammaton as a solemn injunction transmitted to them; and they took up the work and carried it out in the same spirit in which it had come down to them, and said, 'Be bound,' and they responded. 'We will bind.' The same form [of two words] is used after Ezekiel, at the end of the Minor Prophets, the Psalms, Proverbs and Job. We do not find it after the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, or Esther. We meet with it again after Daniel, and after Ezra-Nehemiah." (Bullinger – The Song of Degrees, Things To Come, XIII (1907), page 112.)

After the Book of Chronicles ... the last book of the Hebrew Old Testament ... we find the final, and longer form of the sign-manual ... 'Be bound. So we will bind. The Lawgiver is not straitened (or powerless)." Thus Ezra and the Great Assembly of priests, having concluded the writing of the Book of Chronicles, finalized the Old Testament canonization. (91)

Daniel's role

Daniel was an important link in the canonization process, as he was the responsible person through whom the divine books of the Temple were preserved at Babylon. This enabled them to be returned to Jerusalem by Ezra in later years. (101)

Old Testament Canon fixed by Ezra

The efforts of Hezekiah and others to “canonize” the Old Testament only contribute to the history leading to the official canonization by Ezra and the 120 priests who comprised the “Great Assembly,” who determined exactly which writings would be included in the Old Testament of today. (101)

Early Jewish scholars agree that the Old Testament scriptures were selected and placed in an official order by Ezra the priest (with the help of Nehemiah) in the fifth century B.C. (49)

2 Maccabees 2:12-15 makes reference to Nehemiah collecting various written works:

“Solomon also kept the eight days. The same thing was related also in the records and memoirs about Nehemiah, that he founded a library and collected the books about the kings, and the prophets, and the works of David, and royal letters about sacred gifts.”

Josephus also noted that the 22 books of the Old Testament were brought together and canonized in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (Contra Apion, I.8).

“We have not a countless number of books, discordant and arrayed against each other; but only twenty-two books, containing the history of every age, which are justly accredited as divine. Of these, five belong to Moses, which contain both the laws and the history of the generations of men until his death. This period lacks but little of 3000 years. From the death of Moses, moreover, until the time of Artaxerxes, king of the Persians after Xerxes (i.e. to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah), the prophets, who followed Moses, wrote down what was done during the age of each one respectively, in thirteen books. The remaining four contain hymns to God, and rules of life for men. From the time of Artaxerxes, moreover, until our present period, all occurrences have been written down but they are not regarded as entitled to the like credit with those which precede them, because there was no certain succession of prophets ... For although so many ages have passed away, no one has dared to add to them, nor to take anything from, nor to make alterations. In all Jews it is implanted, even from their birth, to regard them as being the instructions of God, and to abide steadfastly by them, and if it be necessary, to die gladly for them.” (58-59)

In effect Josephus is saying that the Jewish people late in the first century believed the Old Testament had been put together and completed in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. No works written after the time of Ezra, including the Apocrypha, were reckoned as being inspired by God ... since no one with the prophetic spirit had come after the days of Ezra. (59)

It was the universal testimony of Jews and later Christians that Ezra and Nehemiah in the fifth century B.C. were the ones commissioned to complete the Hebrew canon. (63)

Ezra selected the books to be accepted in the canon, arranged them in proper order, and edited them to make them understandable for the readers of his time. Edits would have included the words “unto Dan” in Genesis 14:14 and the concluding sections of Deuteronomy concerning Moses’ death. (63)

Ezra's edits were not vast changes to the Old Testament text. He edited to allow the Jewish nations of his time to have the complete and full revelation of God in the Hebrew language. An example is Genesis 36:31-39 which records the names of the Edomite kings down to the time of King Saul. Moses would not have known the names of the Edomite kings living 300 years after his death. (102)

Another example would be Deuteronomy 34:5,6 which reports that Moses' burial place was not known "unto this day." It is hardly possible for Moses to have recorded his own death, and to also prophesy that his burial place was unknown "unto this day." (104)

Ezra also changed the style of the Hebrew letters from the old Phoenician script of the early prophets to the "square script" which had become common for international communication by the fifth century. This enabled Ezra's official manuscripts to be distinguished from the heretical Samaritan manuscripts which were written in the old Hebrew script. It has been supposed that Christ referred to Ezra's square script when referring to the "jot or tittle" in Matthew 5:18, since these small horn-like projections were not used in the old Hebrew script before Ezra's day. (63)

Ezra arranged the authorized scrolls into a proper order for teaching the people and deposited them with the priests in the archives of the Temple (Deuteronomy 17:18; 31:9). A group of 120 priests were ordained to be the Supreme Court of the land (the "Great Assembly") of which Ezra was the chief. These priests, also known as the "Sopherim" (i.e. "counters" of letters in manuscripts) were responsible for reproducing the authorized books for use in the synagogues throughout the land. They counted the letters in each manuscript they reproduced to insure that the exact number of letters were found, matching the number in the authorized Temple scrolls. (64)

After Ezra's death there were some genealogical additions and certain textual amendments made by the authorized Sopherim. This ceased with the advent of Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 B.C. The Book of Jubilees speaks of the final 22 books as though they were a set of standard scrolls. (64)

What motivated Ezra to canonize?

The main difficulty facing Ezra was the false religious beliefs and customs entering Judaic society because of the intermarriage of Jewish men with heathen women. Ezra was horrified as to where this might lead, and thought it prudent to write the Book of Chronicles as a history of what happened in the past when such things had occurred. We note the examples given of Solomon's rebellious son Rehoboam, and the "many wives" of Solomon (2 Chronicles 11:21-23). (68-69)

The books were arranged in the various divisions to teach all facets of Old Testament life in a proper and harmonious fashion. The order was not understood by the later Greeks and Romans who changed the order into a more subject-oriented or encyclopedic fashion. (71)

The need for a New Testament

The apostles did not believe it was necessary to record revelation for future generations until they came to the realization that Christ was not returning in their generation. The epistles written after 61 A.D. shift from Christ's imminent return to matters that imply a longer period of time would take place. (106)

In 1 Timothy 5:14 Paul began to encourage widows to marry and bear children. This is the reverse of what he had said earlier in 1 Corinthians 7:25-35. He wrote to Timothy about the church organization, as if Christ would not be immediately returning. (120)

Likewise Peter, who said that these are “the last times” in 1 Peter 1:20, later spoke of the last days as futuristic (2 Peter 3:4). He even explains why the expected coming did not materialize ... “that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years” ... and “the Lord is not slack concerning his coming.” (2 Peter 3:8,9) (121-122)

At Passover in 62 A.D. the martyrdom of James, leader of the Jerusalem church, could have caused the others to see that Christ may not return in the immediate future.

Also consider Christ’s prophecy in Matthew 24:6,7 ... of wars, and a revolt of the various kingdoms within the Roman dominion. But in 63 A.D. just the opposite was occurring ... Rome was stronger than ever. (136)

Beginning in the Autumn of 62 A.D. Joshua ben Ananias prophesied the fall of Jerusalem, continuing for seven years and five months. Since Christ himself had said that Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed (Matthew 24:1,2 and Luke 21:20), many Christians left Palestine at this time. (145)

Eusebius reported that the apostles, not long after the death of James in 62 A.D., “were driven out of Judea.” (145)

In 64 A.D. when Rome burned, the fire was blamed on a Messiah figure trying to establish a world government by overthrowing the Roman Empire. (147) Christians were persecuted throughout the Roman Empire. 1 Peter 5:9 makes reference to the fiery trial then occurring upon many Christians throughout the world. (148)

Paul’s teaching was viewed as so revolutionary and counter to the traditional Jewish teachings that “all the men in Asia have turned away from me” (2 Timothy 1:15). The Jewish Christians were zealous for the law (Acts 21:20,21) and were careful to keep all of the Mosaic customs. But Paul insisted that the sabbaths, holy days, new moons and food laws of the Mosaic Law were no longer essential ... not even for Jews. (Ephesians 2:14-22). But the original apostles were zealous for retaining the Mosaic Law within the doctrinal teachings of Christianity. (152)

Josephus records three major miraculous occurrences dealing with the Temple over a two month period in the Spring of 66 A.D. ... just a few months before the major Roman/Jewish War broke out and the Temple and city of Jerusalem were destroyed. (154-156)

- A brilliant light around the altar at 3:00 a.m. that lasted for half an hour (interpreted by the scribes as a signal that God was moving away from Mount Moriah ... as when the light moved in the wilderness days to signal the movement of the Tabernacle)
- The eastern gate of the inner court opened of its own accord at midnight (interpreted that the temple was a gift to the enemy, pointing toward its impending desolation)
- The voice of a great multitude was heard by all 24 priests representing the 24 orders of the Aaronic priesthood ... saying, “We are departing hence.”

Josephus reports one more supernatural occurrence.

- “Before sunset, throughout all areas of the country, there were seen in the air many chariots and armed battalions coursing through the clouds and encircling the cities.” (158)

Christ had told His disciples that, “when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.” (Luke 21:20)

All of this may have led Peter and John to realize that Paul’s teaching was indeed correct ... that the Temple would be destroyed ... that Paul had been given special revelations concerning the fulness of the Gospel ... and that it was necessary to leave future Christians with a divine library of authorized books to preserve the Christian truths. (159)

Turning Away

A key to the apostles seeing the need to preserve the inspired writings for future generations was the turning away of many from the teachings of the apostles.

Within 3-4 years of James’ death John reported that many rebels were emerging from within the church itself (1 John 2:18,19). They were beginning to deny Christ (1 John 4:1,2) and were no longer listening to or submitting to the original apostles (1 John 4:6). Some elders within the church were rejecting John’s authority (3 John 9,10). (162)

Peter had said that destructive sects would soon rise from within the church, committing abominable acts and denying Christ’s return (2 Peter 2:1,2,13; 3:3,4). (162)

Destruction of Jerusalem

2 Peter also prophesied of the coming war between the Jews and the Romans. Peter describes an apostasy from the truth, and a widespread lapse of former Christians into a rebellion against God and against all constituted authorities, no matter who they were. Peter told his readers that he was giving them advanced knowledge of the sedition so they would be on guard against the coming errors (2 Peter 3:17) (166)

Peter said there “will be false teachers” (2 Peter 2:1) who “will bring in destructive sects” (v 1); and that the many “will follow their acts of loose conduct” (v 3), and that “they will make their way into your midst” (v 3), and that people “will be corrupted” (v 12). When Jude later wrote his letter, these things had already begun. (166)

Peter was speaking of the upcoming Jewish war against the Romans. (167) Both Peter and Jude wrote to warn true Christians not to take part in a war with Rome because it would lead to utter destruction. And it did. (171)

Since Peter gave advance knowledge of what would happen, we can date Peter’s letter to about Autumn 66 A.D. (171)

Peter and Jude were warning the true Christians not to take part in the national revolt against the Roman Empire. But Peter prophesied that many would relinquish their faith in Christ and begin to participate in the war against Rome. (2 Peter 2:1). These revolutionaries denied Christ ... saying that Christ was not coming back to earth (2 Peter 3:4). (168)

The revolutionaries were crying, “Come over to the cause of liberty” (Josephus – War,IV.282); fight for the “defense of liberty” (IV.273); become “the champions of liberty” (IV.272). This is exactly what Peter prophesied ... that they were “promising them liberty.” (2 Peter 2:19) (169)

Peter warned the Jewish Christians not to participate in the rebellion as they would come to “swift destruction” (2 Peter 2:1) and a “judgment of desolation” (v 3). He said their cities would be turned to ashes as Sodom and Gomorrah (2 Peter 2:6). This is exactly what happened. (171)

With the destruction, the apostles understood that Paul’s teachings were correct, and that no longer was the outward physical worship of the Temple the Christian way to righteousness. (171)

Events leading to New Testament Canonization

It was becoming apparent to the apostles that Christ was not returning to earth in their generation. (173)

The church was being bombarded from within by teachers of many different false doctrines. (173)

The apostasies mentioned by Peter and John were in full swing (2 Peter 2; 1 John 2:18,19; 1 John 4:1) (245)

Many were turning away from Paul. (245)

“All the men of Asia have turned away from me.” (2 Timothy 1:15)

Ministers were abandoning the authority of John (3 John 9,10), including Diotrephes who liked to have first place among those in the church and who did not accept John’s authority. (245)

It became essential for the apostles to provide the future church with the purity of truth entrusted to them. (See 2 Timothy 3:1-7; 4:2-4; 2 Peter 3:3) (174)

When Paul wrote to Timothy, it was clear that his main desire was that sound doctrine be continually preached after his death because there was going to be a great falling away from the truth, and people would begin to believe fables (See 2 Timothy 4:1-8).

To preserve the truth it was necessary for the apostles to produce some official document before their deaths. Does it seem sensible that the apostles would simply die and let others (whom they knew nothing about) formulate an official set of standard scriptures? If they couldn’t trust the doctrines of many in their midst, how could they depend on those in future times that they didn’t know at all? (174)

Many were composing Gospels (Luke 1:1). Since they were being written in a time of growing rebellion, how could one be certain these Gospels were providing an accurate account? (175)

Gospel of John

The Gospel of John could have been written quite late, perhaps not long before his death. Many accounts had been written about the life of Jesus (Luke 1:1). When John prepared the final inspired account to counter the fables that were destined to be put forth (2 Peter 1:16; 2 Timothy 4:4), long after the events he wrote about had taken place, the holy spirit was active, just as Jesus had promised. (269)

“These things have I spoken to you, remaining with you. Now the consoler, the holy spirit, which the Father will be sending in My name, that will be teaching you all, and reminding you of all that I said to you.” (John 14:25)

Canonization took place before the “Church Councils”

When the early church fathers began to talk about the canon of the New Testament near the end of the second century, it is assumed that it was already in their midst. (182)

“When at last a Council – the Synod of Carthage in A.D. 397 – listed the twenty seven books of the New Testament, it did not confer upon them any authority which they did not already possess, but simply recorded their previously established canonicity.” (Bruce, “The Books and the Parchments,” p 111) (182)

Augustine believed that the New Testament canon came into existence in the time of the apostles:

“Distinguished from the books of later authors is the excellence of the canonical authority of the Old and New Testaments; which having been established in the time of the apostles, hath through the succession of overseers and propagators of churches been set as it were in a lofty tribunal, demanding the obedience of every faithful and pious understanding.” (Contra Faustum Man. 11.5) (185)

Another witness to this fact:

“The striking fact that the early councils had nothing whatever to do with the forming of the Canon of the New Testament, has been so emphasized by a number of writers that one is astonished that it is not more widely known.” (Urquhart, “The Bible,” p. 37) (186)

In the writings of Papias (about 115 A.D.), it seems clear that there were already a set of books which were regularly being consulted concerning the teachings of Christ and the apostles. (266)

Paul’s letters

Peter knew that many were highly suspect of Paul’s teachings. But in this epistle Peter reminds his readers that Paul’s letters were also reckoned as divine Scriptures (178):

“And be deeming the patience of our Lord salvation, according as our beloved brother Paul also writes to you, according to the wisdom given to him, as also in all the epistles, speaking in them concerning these things, in which are some things hard to apprehend, which the unlearned and unstable are twisting, **as the rest of the scriptures** also, to their own destruction.” (2 Peter 3:15-16)

So Peter recognizes the letters of Paul (no doubt a particular set of letters) as being as inspired as the Scriptures of the Old Testament. (179)

Paul’s role in canonization

“... the heralding of Christ Jesus in accord with the revelation of a secret hushed in times eonian, **yet manifested now and through prophetic scriptures...**” (Romans 16:25)

Paul did not mean that this revelation could be found in the earlier prophets of the Old Testament. If that were the case it would not have been a secret, but would have been revealed previous to Paul. (189) Paul did not simply proclaim from the Scriptures already in place. He received revelations from God.

“Wherefore also, lest I should be lifted up by the transcendence of the revelations...”
(2 Corinthians 12:7)

“...by revelation the secret is made known to me ... which, in other generations, is not made known to the sons of humanity as it was now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets...” (Ephesians 3:3,5)

Paul realized that he was proclaiming a word from God. (190)

“... what I am writing to you is a precept of the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 14:37)

“And therefore we also are thanking God unintermittingly that, in accepting the word heard from us, from God you receive, not the word of men, but, according as it truly is, the word of God, which is operating also in you who are believing.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

Paul even realized that he was responsible for preaching the full and final teachings of God. (190)

“... I became a dispenser, in accord with the administration of God, which is granted to me for you, to **complete** the word of God – the secret which has been concealed from the eons and from the generations, yet now was made manifest to His saints...”
(Colossians 1:25,26)

When Paul realized his death was near, asked Timothy to meet him in Rome. (248)

“Endeavor to come to me **quickly**, for Demas, loving the current eon, forsook me and went to Thessalonica, Crescens to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke only is with me. **Taking Mark**, lead him back with you for he is useful to me **for service**.” (2 Timothy 4:9-12)

Paul wanted John Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark, to come with Timothy to perform a “service.” Though John Mark was often an associate of Paul in his ministry among the Gentiles, history and tradition attest to his closer relationship with Peter. Peter refers to Mark as “my son” (1 Peter 5:13). The Gospel of Mark could very well have been the “Gospel of Peter,” with Mark assisting with the writing and other ministerial duties. (249)

Besides asking Timothy to bring Mark along, he also made a specific request:

“When you come, bring the traveling cloak which I left in Troas with Carpus, and the scrolls, especially the vellums.” (2 Timothy 4:13)

“Cloak” could also refer to a receptacle for the scrolls and vellums (parchments) ... much like a book cover or case. (250) This thought is conveyed by the Syriac Version of the New Testament, and by the writings of Chrysostom and Jerome. (251)

The definite article preceding each of the three items (cloak, scrolls, vellums) reveals that Paul was speaking of certain specific items that Timothy and Mark would know about. (252)

Knowing his death was approaching, it would make sense that Paul summoned Timothy and Mark to Rome, with the scrolls and vellums (probably certain specific writings). And with Mark being a close associate or Peter’s, the service Paul may have had in mind for him was to take Paul’s inspired writings to Peter for inclusion in the Scriptural canon. (253)

Not every writing was canonized

Not everything Paul (or the others) wrote was inspired and intended to be recognized as Scripture. Peter and John determined which were to become a part of the canon. Paul, for example, makes reference to at least one additional letter which was not included (1 Corinthians 5:9). (295)

New Testament Canonization by Peter

Maintaining purity of doctrine required the apostles to provide a canon of New Testament scriptures which would last “until the day dawn” (2 Peter 1:19). This appears to have prompted Peter to journey to Rome in the Summer of 66 A.D. to see Paul concerning this matter. (165) Dionysius, the minister in charge of the Corinthian church, mentioned in 170 A.D. that both Peter and Paul “taught together in Italy and were martyred about the same time.” (Eusebius, Eccl. Hist. II.25.8) (165)

The historical evidence suggests that Peter went to Rome in 66 A.D. (165)

It appears to be after Paul’s execution, and recognizing that his own execution was near, that Peter wrote 2 Peter. The first chapter speaks of the canonization of the New Testament. (166)

“Wherefore I shall **ever** be about to be **reminding you** concerning these things, even though you are aware of, and have been established in, the present truth.” (2 Peter 1:12)

“Now I am deeming it just, for as much time as I am in this tabernacle, to be rousing you by a reminder, being aware that my tabernacle is to be put off swiftly according as our Lord Jesus Christ, also makes evident to me.” (2 Peter 1:13)

“Yet I shall endeavor to have you, after my exodus, to make mention of these things, ever and anon, also.” (2 Peter 1:15)

“For not by following wisely made myths do we make known to you the power and presence of our Lord, Jesus Christ, but by becoming spectators of His magnificence.” (2 Peter 1:16)

The writings sanctioned by Peter and John were not going to be like the fables of others because Peter and John had “the word of prophecy more confirmed.” (188)

“For He got from God, the Father, the honor and glory of the voice, being

carried to Him in such a way by the Glory Magnifical: “This is My Son, the Beloved, in Whom I delight!” And this voice we hear being carried out of heaven, being together with Him in the holy mountain.” (2 Peter 1:17)

There were three human beings with Christ when these words were uttered. James was the first of the apostles to be killed. This left Peter and John who witnessed Christ’s transfiguration. (177)

“And we are **having the prophetic word more confirmed**, which you, doing ideally, are heeding (as to a lamp appearing in a dingy place, till the day should be breaking and the morning star should be rising) in your hearts...” (2 Peter 1:19)

Note that Peter is not referring to just his own writings. Considering the previous verse, “we” seems to include John, the other surviving apostle who witnessed the transfiguration, and who had the prophetic word “more confirmed.” (177) Despite the fact that there were other Gospel accounts being circulated, Peter and John had the prophetic word “more confirmed.”

“... knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture at all is becoming its own explanation. For not by the will of man was prophecy carried on at any time, but, being carried on by holy spirit, holy men of God speak.” (2 Peter 1:20)

Peter now indicates that this “prophetic word more confirmed” is scripture, and not of man’s origination (178) ... unlike other writings being circulated in that day.

The second epistle of Peter is actually the key to the first canonization of the New Testament. It is an official statement to show how he and John (not long before Peter’s death) gathered together some written records which the apostles themselves either wrote, had authorized to be written, or sanctioned already existing works into a position of canonicity. Peter’s second epistle was written, among other things, for the express purpose of showing that the apostle John and himself were the ones ordained of God to leave Christians with the canon of the New Testament. It is not the later church who collected the 27 books of the New Testament ... it was the apostles themselves who canonized the New Testament. (180)

Probably with Paul’s writings in hand, Peter then wrote his second epistle ... sending it along with the writings he and Paul had collected to John ... who would be the last remaining apostle ... and who would perform the final canonization. And most likely Peter was martyred in Rome not long afterwards. (255)

Final New Testament Canonization by John

The final canonization by John took place long after Peter and Paul were dead. (207)

Before his death, John finalized the writing, arranging, and editing of the New Testament canon and presented it to the Christian elders who lived in the area of Ephesus. It was thus at Ephesus near the end of the first century (not Jerusalem or Rome) where the canonization was completed. (215)

John was the last to write his Gospel. His work is more of a summing-up of events that the others skimmed over or did not feel important to relate. And even the fact that John’s Gospel separates Luke’s Gospel from the Book of Acts is a sure sign that his Gospel was written last. It also helps to show that the final canonization of the New Testament was accomplished by the apostle John. (213)

Peter and John were the last remaining alive who had witnessed the Transfiguration of Christ. They had “the prophetic word more confirmed” (2 Peter 1:19) so as to be a “lamp appearing in a dingy place, till the day should be breaking...” (2 Peter 1:19).

As John worked, he had assistance. (259)

“This is the disciple who is testifying also concerning these things, and who writes these things. And **we** are aware that his testimony is true.” (John 21:24)

We also note in John’s epistles his moving from the singular “I” to the plural “we” at times. (1 John 1:1-4; 1 John 4:11; 3 John 12) Whoever these men were, they figured prominently in the writing of John’s three epistles. And from what John wrote we see that they were men from Palestine who had been personal acquaintances of Christ and were witnesses of His resurrection. (262)

In the writings of Papias (around 115 A.D.) we see reference to certain Elders who were disciples of John who succeeded him at Ephesus. (265)

Manuscript differences

The period when no full canon was yet available, but where some manuscripts were being circulated by the apostles, could account for a great deal of the differences between manuscripts. For instance, the original Gospel of Mark which Peter most likely dictated to John Mark in Rome (and that Mark left with the Roman church) probably did not contain the long conclusion (16:9-20) or even a short conclusion of one verse which followed Mark 16:8. Thus, for a 30 or 35 year period some manuscripts were circulating without the long conclusion. Yet when John and his assistants finally canonized the New Testament, twelve verses were added to the Gospel of Mark to complete it. Even the Book of Acts has come down to us in two distinct types of manuscript versions – one which is more replete with historical and geographical information. (271)

Significance of the number of books in the Bible

We see that the original Old Testament consisted of 22 books (the same as the 39 we recognize today, but divided and ordered differently). Added to the 27 books in the New Testament, there were a total of 49 books ... 7 times 7 which would represent completion. (13)

Compare this with our current Bibles consisting of 66 books (albeit the same writings) ... 6 being the number of man.

References

“The Original Bible Restored” by Ernest L. Martin
Copyright 1984 Ernest L. Martin
Foundation For Biblical Research
Pasadena, California & Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, England
www.askelm.com

Concordant Literal New Testament
Concordant Publishing Concern
15570 Knochaven Road
Santa Clarita, CA 91387
661/252-2112
www.concordant.org

The Companion Bible
Kregel Publications
Grand Rapids, MI 49501