

Is the “New Testament” the Divine Word of YHVH?

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(This article is a small portion of a more comprehensive 33-page work *Can You Trust the New Testament Scriptures As YHVH's Divine Word?*, which is available at www.hoshanarabbah.org. The bulk of the material in this paper is a synopsis of the research done by Dr. Ernest L. Martin, and is from his book, *Restoring the Original Bible*, available at www.askelm.com.)

The Uniqueness of the Bible

THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN over a span of 1500 years and 40 generations by 40 authors from kings to peasants, and written from palaces to jail cells. It was first translated into a foreign language circa 250 B.C. and has since, in whole or in part, been translated into several thousand languages or dialects. Though its enemies have tried to eradicate the Bible, and though printed on perishable materials, this book has proliferated.

Many have willingly given their lives to translate it, smuggle it, distribute it, preach its message or even simply possess a copy of it. More than two billion people on earth today, about one-third of earth's population, claim to be followers of the Bible. Nearly 50,000 people are currently martyred each year for refusing to budge from their faith in the Bible's message. Regardless of the language into which the Bible has been translated, the redemptive and salvation message of the Bible always comes through. It is a life-changing message of hope resulting in eternal life. Its pages contains words that have the power to change lives dramatically for good, for eternity. Why? Because these words are not the words of men, but of the Creator of men—of YHVH Elohim, the God of the Bible, and as such, they carry the full force, power and the anointing of divine origination. If not, how else can one explain the biblical phenomena? There is no human explanation for it other than that the divine hand of YHVH Elohim has been on the Bible from its beginning until this very moment. So why mess with the Bible? It has a proven track record!

These facts have not stopped some from questioning the divine inspiration of the New Testament (Apostolic Scriptures). In this brief work, we will show that you can trust the Apostolic Scriptures as YHVH's divine Word because the apostles themselves, under direct orders from Yeshua, canonized what the Christian world calls “The New Testament” (NT).

Derivation and Meaning of the Word *Canon*

The term *canon* relates to the list of books in the Bible that are considered inspired and of divine origination. There is the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures (OT) and that of the Apostolic Scriptures (NT). The word *canon* originally derives from the Hebrew *qaneh* meaning *reed* or *cane*. “The word was used of an instrument made of reed or other material, and denoted especially such an instrument used as a rod or ruler, as an aid in making straight lines or accurate measurements. Thus the word canon came to mean a standard of straightness or accuracy” (Filson, p. 15-16). Eventually, the Greek word *kanon* came to denote “the rule of faith, the standards by which we are to measure and evaluate everything that may be offered to us as an article of belief” (Bruce, p. 95).

The Distinction Between Authority and Canonicity

There is confusion, however, between the terms *canonicity* and *authority* of Scripture, but there is a distinction to be made between these two terms. Its canonicity is dependent upon its authority (Bruce, pp. 95-96). This is a very important point! The 27 books of the Apostolic Scriptures would not have been acknowledged as being “Canon” if they had not first been recognized by the apostles of Yeshua and the body of Believers in the first and second centuries A.D. as having the same authority as the earlier Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament), and the latter Christian

church would not have accepted these books as canon, and subsequently affirmed their canonicity if they had not felt that these books carried the weight of apostolic authority. So why shouldn't we? Historical records from the first and early second-centuries show us that the early Believers had faith in the same NT that we have today.

The NT Was Recognized as an Authoritative Canon by the Earliest Church Fathers

From the beginning, the writings of the apostles were successively gathered into one collection, which was respected by the primitive Christians equally with the OT. The early church fathers referred to the NT canon as,

- *Sacred Scriptures* (*Epistle of Polycarp*, chap. 12, written by Polycarp, a disciple of John, A.D. 65–155)
- *The Scriptures* (*Papias*, chap. 1, A.D. 70–155)
- *The New Testament* (Origen [185–254 A.D.], as quoted by Eusebius, *Ecc. Hist.* 6.25)
- *The Divine Instrument* (Tertullian [150–220 A.D.] *Adv. Marcion*, 5.13)
- *The Sacred Digest* (*Ibid.*, 4:13)
- *The Divine Oracles*; (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 7 pp.706, 757; Ignatius, *Epis. to the Philad.* chap. 5; *Epis. to Dignet.* chap 11; Justin Martyr, *Great Apol.* chap. 67)

The NT Was Canonized In the First Century by the Apostles and Others Helping Them

Peter Takes Charge in Initiating the Work of Preserving the Canon

After his resurrection, Yeshua instructed Peter to feed his sheep. Peter spent his life fulfilling his Master's command. Near the end of Peter's life (in the mid sixties of the first century), he was concerned with preserving the true and precious Gospel message for posterity. The principal subject of Peter's Second Epistle was "the precious and exceeding great promises" of Messiah (2 Pet. 1:12). In 2 Peter 2:12–21, Peter makes reference to this commission. Let's note certain key phrases in this passage that show this:

12 Wherefore I will not be negligent *to remind you of these things* [the Gospel message],... 13 Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, *to stir you up by putting you in remembrance*; ...15 Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able *after my decease to have these things always in remembrance*. (emphasis added)

This passage has four basic themes:

- Peter speaks about his imminent death.
- He speaks about the need to leave a literary legacy concerning the message of the Gospel.
- This need arises in light of the false teachers' cunningly devised fables that had arisen.
- Yeshua himself had commissioned Peter and others to accomplish this divine mission (as we shall next see).

Yeshua Commissions Peter, James and John to Canonize the NT

In Peter's second epistle we read, "And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with [Yeshua] in [the Mount of Transfiguration]" (2 Pet. 1:18). The brothers, James and John were with Peter on the mount. What did the three receive from Yeshua while they were there? Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:19–21, "And so we [Peter, James and John] have the prophetic word [*prophetikos*, Strong's H4397 meaning *a discourse emanating from divine inspiration and declaring the purposes of Elohim*] confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Know this first that no prophecy of Scripture is of one's own interpretation, for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of Elohim spoke as they were moved by the Set-apart Spirit." What Peter is saying is that the documents that he and John (James was already dead) were leaving to the community of Believers were to be considered like any other prophecy of Scripture (i.e., the OT). The use of the word *Scripture* brings the matter of inspired writings into the picture. In simple language, Peter was saying that the two remaining apostles to the Transfiguration had the divine authority to collect a set of official works which would have their apostolic approbation and that these documents were to be considered by Christians as "more confirmed" than any others in circulation. And besides that, these documents were to remain in the presence of Christians to be consulted "at each time" the Christian community needed the occasion in order to learn the truth of "the great and precious promises" of [Messiah]. These official writings (documents) were to last until the second advent of [Messiah] and to be esteemed as being on an equal basis with the OT Scriptures (Martin, pp. 288–289).

Next look at 2 Peter 3:1–2. “This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, *and* of the commandment of us the apostles of the Master and Savior” (emphasis added). For the Believers to be reminded of all the teachings of the apostles, Yeshua would require them to have some kind of written documents of an official nature which could be consulted whenever one needed to study the essential truths of Messiah. Furthermore, these records—“the commandments of the apostles”—would be on a par with the prophetic writings of the OT (Martin, pp. 288–289). 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 Elohim to leave Believers with the canon of the NT (and that a collection of Paul’s letters were to be a part of it) (Martin, pp. 292–293). In 2 Peter 3:16, Peter references Paul when he mentions “all of his [Paul’s] letters” and then compares them to “the other scriptures,” which places Paul’s letters on the level of “Holy Writ” or the OT. Paul confirms this when he claims that his writings would be canonized, for at the end of the Books of Romans, Paul makes a statement that seems to suggest that he believed that his writings concerning the Gospel of the Messiah would be acknowledged as prophetic Scripture (Martin, p. 305). Romans 16:25–26 states,

25 Now to him that is of power to establish you according to my Gospel, and the preaching of Yeshua the Messiah, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, 26 but now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets [or, prophetic writings (see the NIV, Bullinger’s *Companion Bible* and *The Interlinear Bible* by Jay P. Green)], according to the commandment of the everlasting Elohim, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.

The actual Greek leads us to believe that Paul is referring to his own writings and those of the other apostolic writers who are bringing forth the inspired prophetic utterances pertaining to the mysteries of Yeshua the Messiah. Elsewhere Paul speaks in terms of his divine mission to help fulfill (as Yeshua predicted using the same word in Matt. 5:17) or fill to the top “the Word of Elohim” (Col. 1:25–26; Eph. 3:3–5; 1 Cor. 1:12–13; 14:37; 1 Thess. 2:13).

The Cloak (?), The Scrolls and The Parchment

While in Rome, Paul asked Timothy and John Mark to bring three important items of his with them to Rome. “When you come, bring the cloak [Greek: *phelonen*] I left with Carpus, and the scrolls, especially the parchments” (2 Tim. 4:13). *Phelonen* has another meaning, as well. Vincent, in his *Word Studies in the New Testament*, says that *phelonen* originally meant a box for transporting or preserving parchments (vol. 3, p. 326). The Syriac (Aramaic) version of the NT, which some claim to have derived from the first century, uses the words *book carrier* or *book container* instead of *cloak* (see *The Holy Bible from the Ancient Eastern Text* trans. by George Lamsa; *The Hebrew Roots Version Scriptures*, trans. by James Trimm). It is interesting to note that Chrysostom, in the fourth century, commented on this very reference of Paul’s and stated that some thought Paul meant a “book case”—a receptacle for books (*Hom. in loc.*, vol. II, p. 780, ed. Gaume). Even Jerome mentioned this point (*Epist.* 36, ad Damasum) (Martin, p. 386).

Whatever these books were they were of the utmost importance to Paul, for he specifies “*the books*” (papyrus scrolls) and “*the parchments*” (animal skins or vellum volumes). “Since Paul gave no further description about them, it appears that Timothy and John Mark knew exactly the specific things Paul meant, and they realized it was important that they be brought immediately to Rome. This must be the reason why Paul requested John Mark to accompany Timothy” (Martin, p. 388). Mark was indispensable to the work of Paul, for we read in 2 Timothy 4:11, “Take Mark, and bring him with you, because he is a very useful helper in my work” (CJB). John Mark was Peter’s scribal assistant or secretary (or amanuensis) and right-hand man (Eusebius’ *Eccl. Hist.* 2.15; 1 Pet. 5:13 where “Babylon” is a code name for “Rome”). Similarly, Luke was Paul’s amanuensis. So Paul and Peter were both in Rome around A.D. 66 to 67 along with their literary scribes. What were they doing with the scrolls and parchments just before the apostles’ deaths? (Martin, pp. 388–390) Paul died in Rome around A.D. 65 to 68, the same time Peter died, according to the witnesses of several early church fathers. (*Recognitions of Clement*, 3.63; Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 2.17; Schaff, vol. 1, p. 251 where he lists no less than a dozen church fathers who attest to Peter preaching the Gospel in Rome when Paul was there, and where he subsequently was martyred.) So Peter and Paul were in Rome at the same time, very probably to begin the canonization of the NT.

John and the Canonization of the NT

James, the brother of John had been martyred in Jerusalem in the early sixties A.D., Peter in Rome in the mid to late sixties, and now it was left up to John, the remaining apostle, to finalize the NT canon. John did not create the NT on his own. He had helpers. If one will read the writings of John carefully, these assistants can be recognized, and they played a very important part in the overall canonization. References to them are found from time to time cropping up within the contexts of John's compositions. The elders who helped John were very important. Many of them were eyewitnesses to the teachings of Yeshua in Judea and they also saw him alive after his resurrection from the dead. They were a part of those 500 people still alive in A.D. 55 whom Paul said were witnesses to Messiah's resurrected body (1 Cor. 15:6) (Martin, p. 398).

As proof of this, we find numerous "we" passages in John's writings (John 1:14, 21:24, 1 John 1:1-4; 4:11; 3 John 12). It is clear that a body of men, other than John himself, was telling the readers of his First and Third Epistles that they too were witnesses to the truth that John was stating. These assistants (or editors) of John must have been well known to John's readers. All they say is "you know that the witness *we give* is true." Certainly, these men could reasonably be considered a group of John's right-hand men and known by all (Martin, p. 399). Furthermore, there is a historical record of these "elders" outside of Scripture. Early church father, Papias, who lived from about A.D. 70 to 155 mentions "the elders" several times in the short fragment of his work that remains (written about A.D. 110, see *Papias*, chapters 1 and 4). Clement of Alexandria also mentions these "Elders" of John (early 3rd century A.D) when he discussed the method that John used in writing his Gospel. He said:

But last of all, John, perceiving that the observable facts had been made plain in the Gospel [those formerly written], being urged on by friends, and inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel. (As quoted by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* VI.14.7) (Martin, p. 407).

Another piece of evidence points to John and his editorial staff completing the canonization process, as well. We see this in the editorial remarks in the writings of John. The KJV often offsets them parenthetically. We can see from the context that they were added later—after the fact. They are found in:

- John 3:13, even the Son of man which is in heaven
- John 4:23, and now is
- John 5:25, and now is
- John 13:3, and went to Elohim
- John 17:3, and Yeshua the Messiah whom you have sent
- John 19:35, and his record is true and he knows that he says true, that you might believe

Conclusion

In this brief work we have attempted to provide evidence to demonstrate the following:

- The 27 books of the NT would not have been acknowledged as being "Canon" if they had not first been recognized by the apostles of Yeshua and the Body of Believers in the first and second centuries A.D. as having the same authority as the earlier OT, and the latter Christian church would not have accepted these books as canon, and subsequently affirmed their canonicity if they had not felt that these books carried the weight of apostolic authority. This is perhaps the most important point we have made in this work. Historical records from the first and early second-centuries show us that the early Believers had faith in the same NT that we have today, so why shouldn't we?
- The earliest church fathers' writing in second century A.D. recognized the NT canon as Scripture on a par with the OT.
- There is substantial evidence within the NT themselves to show that some body of individuals under the auspices of the apostles themselves edited, then published, in effect, canonizing the NT by the end of the first century.

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