

Bock & Wallace's "Dethroning Jesus"; Ryrie on How the New Testament Canon Was Discovered; Geisler & Nix: the Bible's Internal Evidence of Canonicity

Experts in textual criticism are able to easily identify a Gnostic manuscript. To give an example, here is a quote from the book I've recently recommended:

Bock, Darrell L. and Daniel B. Wallace. "Claim Two: Secret Gnostic Gospels, Such as Judas, Show the Existence of Early Alternative Christianities." Chap. 2 in *Dethroning Jesus: Exposing Popular Culture's Quest to Unseat the Biblical Christ*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 86-87:

Jesus ... moves to tell Judas alone some mysteries of the kingdom. One of the characteristics of Gnosticism is its emphasis on revelatory secrets given to some who follow Jesus but not others. So also in saying 13 of *Thomas*, Jesus tells the confessor-hero Thomas secrets about the kingdom that he will not share with the other disciples. (p. 86)

Gnosticism was an elitist faith. This fact is confirmed here where there are significant divisions within the group Jesus seemingly had called to carry out his mission. Gnosticism was an effort to combine Greek philosophical Neoplatonism—with its emphasis on the value of ideas and the devaluing of matter—with Christian symbolism. The hope, in part, was to create an expression of Christianity more in line with Greco-Roman thought and culture. The figure of Judas gets access to this inner knowledge while the rest of the Twelve are left out. (pp. 86-87)

There are numerous sources that acknowledge the canonicity of the New Testament's twenty-seven books. A summary of a few is provided by:

Ryrie, *Basic Theology*. 108-109:

Remember that the books were inspired when they were written and thus canonical. The church only attested to what was inherently true.

The witness of the apostolic period. The writers witnessed that their own writings were the Word of God.

Colossians 4:16 - After you have read [ἀναγινώσκω, *anaginōskō*: to come to perceive by reading aloud in public] this letter [Colossians], have it read [imperative of ποιέω, *poieō*] to the church of Laodicea. In turn, read the letter from Laodicea as well.

Note: The imperative of *poieō* means that Paul is using his apostolic authority to command the congregation at Colossae to study his Epistle of Colossians. He also orders them to get his letter that is presently at Laodicea. This is known to us as Ephesians which was an encyclical Epistle meant for all the churches in the Laodicean Valley. The impact of this Colossians verse is the principle that Paul's Epistles were meant for all the churches not just those churches to which they were addressed. This is in effect Paul's proclamation that Colossians and Ephesians were in the canon. The manner that these Epistles are to be studied is by exegesis: *anaginōskō*, the process of learning by means of public instruction. In addition to this, the passage is interpreted in the time in which it was written. From this system categorical doctrines are developed.

1 Thessalonians 4:15 - For we tell you this by the word of the Lord [the preposition ἐν, *en*, plus the locative of sphere of λόγος, *logos*, and the genitive of description of κύριος, *kurios*], that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not go ahead of those who have fallen asleep.

This NET Bible translation provides an instructive study note at footnote 9 in:

NET Bible. (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2001), 2214:

The word of the Lord is a technical expression in Old Testament literature, often referring to a divine prophetic utterance (e.g., Gen 15:1, Isa 1:10, Jonah 1:1). In the New Testament it occurs 15 times: 3 times as ῥῆμα τοῦ κυρίου, *rhēma tou kuriou*; Luke 22:61, Acts 11:16, 1 Pet 1:25) and 12 times as *logos tou kuriou*; here and in Acts 8:25; 13:44, 48, 49; 15:35, 36; 16:32; 19:10, 20; 1 Thes 1:8; 2 Thes 3:1).

As in the Old Testament, this phrase focuses on the prophetic nature and divine origin of what has been said.

Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 108-109:

They [the witnesses of the apostolic period] also acknowledged that the writings of other New Testament books were Scripture. Now “Scripture” was a designation in Judaism for canonical books, so when it is used in the New Testament of other New Testament writings, it designates those writings as canonical.

One is 1 Timothy 5:18 where a quotation from Deuteronomy 25:4 is linked with one from Luke 10:7, and both are called Scripture.

1 Timothy 5:18 - For the scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain” [**Deuteronomy 25:4**], and, “The worker deserves his pay” [**Luke 10:7**].

The other is 2 Peter 3:16 where Peter refers to the writings of Paul as Scripture.

2 Peter 3:15 - Regard the patience of our Lord as salvation [σωτηρία, *sōtēria*: **deliverance from the destruction of the universe, noted in vv. 10-13**], just as also our brother Paul wrote to you, according to the wisdom given to him,

v. 16 - speaking of these things in all his letters. Some things in these letters are hard to understand, things the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they also do to the rest of the scriptures.

This is a significant attestation because of the relatively short span of time that had elapsed between the time Paul wrote some of his letters and the time when Peter acknowledged them as Scripture. (p. 108)

The witness of the period A.D. 70-170. During this period all the New Testament books were cited in other writings of the period, and the church fathers recognized as canonical all twenty-seven books. However, each church father did not include all twenty-seven. (pp. 108-109)

The witness of the period A.D. 170-350. Three important pieces of evidence come from this period. First, the Muratorian canon (170) omitted Hebrews, James, and 1 and 2 Peter. However, there is a break in the manuscript so we cannot be certain that these books were not included.

NOTE: Muratorian Canon, a late 2nd-century-AD Latin list of New Testament writings regarded as canonical, named for its discoverer Lodovico Antonio Muratori \mü-rä-tō'-rē\, an Italian scholar who published the manuscript in 1740.

Second, The Old Syriac version (end of the second century) lacked 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. But no extra books were added to bring the total to twenty-seven.

Third, the Old Latin version (200) lacked 2 Peter, James and Hebrews, but added no extra books. So the unqualified candidates for books to be included in the canon were rejected during this period; most of the New Testament books were received; only a few were debated.

The Council of Carthage (397). It is generally agreed that this church council fixed the limits of the New Testament canon as including all twenty-seven books as we have them today.

Even though the canon was officially closed in 397 by the Council of Carthage it is important to emphasize that even as the canon was being developed, those who were the human authors of the books not only recognized their own writings as inspired but also those of others. A summary of the internal biblical evidence of the canon's formation in the first century is provided by:

Geisler, Norman L. and William E. Nix. *A General Introduction to the Bible. Revised and expanded.* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 283, 286-88:

Within the New Testament itself, there is evidence of the concept of a developing canon of inspired books. This may be observed in the principle and progress of canonization in the New Testament.

The principle of canonization. The determining factor in New Testament canonization was inspiration, and the primary test was apostolicity. If it could be determined that a book had apostolic authority, there would be no reason to question its authenticity or veracity. In New Testament terminology, the church was "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph.2:20) whom Christ had promised to guide unto "all the truth" (John 16:13) by the Holy Spirit. (p. 283)

Selecting procedure. John implies there was a selecting process going on among the apostles themselves, dealing with the problem of which particular truths should be preserved in written form. He writes that "Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed ... which are not written in this book" (John 20:30); and "if they were written in detail," he adds, "I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written (John 21:25). Luke speaks of other accounts of the life of Christ, from which he compiled "an accurate account" based on "eyewitnesses" in order that "the exact truth" might be known (Luke 1:1-4). This evidence seems to imply that there were other written records of Christ's life that were not entirely true.

There are several references to the authority of apostolic oral tradition or teaching:

1 Thessalonians 2:13 - We constantly thank God that when you received God's message that you heard from us [oral apostolic teachings], you accepted it not as a human message, but as it truly is, God's message, that is at work among you who believe.

1 Corinthians 11:2 - I praise you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I passed them on to you [Paul's verbal teachings].

These "traditions" meant that there was authoritative teaching by original eyewitnesses to Christ's life. (p. 286)