

Apostolic Canonization Introduction

New Testament Canonization before AD 70

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INTRODUCTION

The title I have chosen for this paper is: *The NT Canon Formed by AD 70*. It summarizes the proposition pretty well: That all 27 books of our New Testament were *written, collected* and *certified* as authoritative before the apostles passed from the earthly scene just before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. This is not a new theory, but it is very conservative, and one which evangelicals have embraced.

The word *canon*, as this paper uses it, simply means the list of sacred writings which Christians consider inspired, inerrant, and absolutely authoritative for all matters of doctrine and practice.

The New Testament does not use the word *canon* or *canonical* in reference to its contents, nor even in reference to the Old Testament collection of books. But the concepts of *canonicity* and *canonization* (inspiration, authority, direct revelation, scripture) are found in the New Testament, and we will look at some NT contexts where the concepts are mentioned either implicitly or explicitly.

The Roman Church did not give us the canon of scripture. The Holy Spirit did. The claim of the Roman Church is based on the idea of *apostolic succession*. As we Protestants are quick to point out, the office of apostle required direct eyewitness experience of the resurrected Christ, full inspiration and empowerment by the Paraclete, and direct revelation and commission from Christ. No one after the passing of the first century apostles had those qualifications. The idea of apostolic succession would require the gift of inspiration to be passed down perpetually, thus keeping the canon open forever. The Mormons would love that idea. If the Roman Church has apostolic succession, then they have the gift of inspiration, and the canon is still open.

But this idea of a closed canon by the time of the passing of the apostles is a sword that cuts both ways. Not only does it rule out the Roman Church claims of having the right to decide what our canon is, it also rules out the claims of everyone else after the time of the apostles.

What we are affirming here is that the apostles were the only ones who had the inspiration and authority to not only write inspired scripture, but also to infallibly decide which books were authoritative. Later churchmen are not inspired or inerrant, nor were they eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ, nor directly commissioned by Him. This means that the only Christians who were ever qualified to set the boundaries of the NT canon were those very apostles who wrote the inspired books in the first place. We call this *Apostolic Canonization*.

The challenge to both Protestants and Catholics is now clear. Does the NT contain historical evidence which shows that the apostles not only *wrote* those inspired books, but also made a *collection* of them, and *certified* them as authoritative? That is the burden of this paper, and to support it we have to go back before the Athanasian canon of the fourth century, before the Muratorian Fragment (late second century, c. 170 AD), and even before the NT books were written, to look at the OT basis for the development of a NT canon.

There is a chain of authority that begins with Moses and ends with "the prophet like unto Moses."

[Deut. 18:15-19, NAS95 – Moses speaking...] "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. This is according to all that you asked of the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.' The LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well. I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put **My words** in his mouth, and he shall speak to them **ALL** that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to **My words** which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him.

[Acts 3:22-23, NAS95 --Peter speaking...] "Moses said, 'THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to **everything** He says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not **heed that prophet** shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'

[Matt. 17:5, NAS95 --Transfiguration] While he [Peter] was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; **listen to Him!**" (cf. Lk. 9:35)

[John 5:46, NAS95 – Jesus speaking...] "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for **he wrote about Me.**"

Jesus was that prophet like Moses who was to come. Moses was the archetype, both in the spoken word and the written word. All other writings to come later would have to follow the pattern of Moses and be in harmony with its system of faith. Moses spoke the word first, then later wrote it down. Christ (the prophet like unto Moses) certainly spoke the word, but did not write it down. Neither did He baptize anyone, but his disciples did (John 4:2). And we can see clearly in the pages of the NT that Jesus was making preparations through the Paraclete for His Word to be written down by His apostles. Interesting in this regard is His statement about the value of a scribe who became a disciple of the kingdom:

[Matt. 13:52, NAS] And Jesus said to them, "Therefore every **scribe** who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who **brings out of his treasure things new and old.**"

The scribe who became a disciple of Jesus would use his talents to produce treasures both **new** and old (note the word "new" here).

Jesus mentions several times to the apostles the coming work of the Holy Spirit ("...do not worry about how or what you are to say, for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say, for it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you." Matt. 10:19-20). Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to them, Who would "teach them **ALL** things," "bring to their remembrance **ALL** that Jesus said to them," "guide them into **ALL** the truth," and "disclose to them what was to come." (John 14:26; 16:13) Notice the use of the word "ALL" in three of these phrases about the work of the Paraclete. It does not sound like the canon would be left open after the Paraclete finished giving them **ALL** things, **ALL** truth, and brought to their remembrance **ALL** that Jesus wanted them to teach. Nothing would be left out. The Holy Spirit would make sure **the whole** Word of Christ was completely revealed, taught, and written down. Then the canon would be closed.

Just before His ascension, Christ claimed that He had **ALL** [canonical] authority in heaven and on earth, and therefore commissioned the twelve (and Paul later, see Rom. 1:5 and Gal. 1:1-16) to make disciples of **ALL** the nations and teach them to observe **ALL** that He had commanded them, and that He would be with them **ALL** the days until the End of the Age. (Matt. 28:18-20).

[Matt. 28:18-20, NAS95] And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “**All authority** has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of **all the nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you [**all the days**], even to the **end of the age**.”

Christ sent the Paraclete to be with the apostles “all the days” (of their lifetime) to enable them to complete the great commission before the End of the Age arrived. The Paraclete’s presence with them, and His work in them and through them, would continue to the End of the Age. If the End of the Age is still future, then the Roman Catholic idea of apostolic succession is automatically validated. However, it seems clear from Jesus’ use of this same phrase (End of the Age) in Matthew 24:3 that it refers to the End of the Old Testament Jewish Age in AD 70 when the temple was destroyed and the sacrificial system ceased. This means that the disciples would have completed the proclamation of the gospel to all the nations before they died and before the End of the Age arrived in AD 70. Are there any Biblical or historical statements which confirm that the Paraclete did enable the apostles to finish their great commission work “*to all the nations*” and to produce an inspired collection of writings before they passed on, and before the End of that Old Testament Age at AD 70? Yes there are:

[Rom. 16:25-27, NAS95] Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, **has been made known to all the nations**, leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen. (cf. Rom. 10:18; 15:19)

[Col. 1:5-6, NAS95] because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, just as **in all the world** also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as *it has been doing* in you also since the day you heard *of it* and understood the grace of God in truth;

[Col. 1:23, NAS95] if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was **proclaimed in all creation under heaven**, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

[Eusebius, Eccl. Hist. 3.8.11] But Vespasian did not rule the whole world, but only that part of it which was subject to the Romans. With better right could it be applied to Christ; to whom it was said by the Father, “Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the ends of the earth for thy possession.” At that very time, indeed, the voice of his holy apostles “**went throughout all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.**”

Jesus was going to be there with them through the Paraclete until His Word was preached to every nation, and then written down for all future generations afterwards.

The exclusive authority to DELIVER Christ's one true distinctive gospel was given ONLY to the first century apostles and prophets. The Holy Spirit (the Paraclete Helper) inspired them and enabled them to accomplish that work. Jude 3 shows that they DELIVERED that message faithfully in both spoken and written form:

[Jude 3, NAS95] Beloved, while I was making every effort to **write you** about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to **write to you** appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was **once for all handed down to the saints**.

No later generation after the apostles has been given that inspiration, nor the Paraclete's direct empowerment, nor the direct commission of Christ to produce the canon.

The three steps of the process (*write, collect, certify*) are inseparably linked. If we allow later generations the right to collect and certify the canon, we have not only stripped the inspired apostles of their Christ-commissioned work, but put it into the hands of uninspired churchmen who are unable and unauthorized to do it. The inspired and empowered apostles were the only ones authorized and enabled to do it. This is why the Catholic church got off track so far and so fast. They failed to realize that the apostolic authority was not successively passed down to each new head bishop of the Roman church, but instead ceased to be given to any later generations after the apostles, because it had only been given to the apostles for that first generation of the church. And their authority was equally vested in both their spoken and written words.

Evangelical Christians affirm that the first century apostles and prophets were inspired and their writings were canonical. But for some reason we do not all take the next logical step to conclude that ONLY those who had inspiration are also the ONLY ones who can infallibly decide which books are canonical. We have gullibly fallen for the Romanist idea that uninspired churchmen of later centuries are somehow able and authorized to make those decisions. We fall for this idea also because we do not realize that the apostles accomplished the collection and certification of the canon before they left the earthly scene. The possibility never seems to occur to us that later uninspired men cannot give us the canon. Only those inspired men who had the authority to write the books in the first place would have the authority and Paraclete's help to collect them and put their stamp of authenticity and authority on them.

Let's take a look at each of the three steps involved in the production of a NT canon (*writing, collection, and certification*). The burden of the *Apostolic Canonization* theory is to show that all three steps occurred during the lifetime of the apostles before they passed from the earthly scene.

FIRST STEP: ALL BOOKS WRITTEN BEFORE AD 70?

The idea that all 27 books of the NT canon were written during the lifetime of the apostles is affirmed by most conservative evangelical scholars, but there is a problem with that. Since John supposedly lived into the 90's, his longevity would leave the door open for a post-AD 70 date for at least the Johannine writings, after apostles Peter and Paul had already died. This paper terminates the writing of the NT books at AD 70 by showing that Apostle John did not live beyond AD 70.

In Matthew 20:20-23 (and its parallel in Mark 10:35-40) the mother of the two sons of Zebedee (James and John) asked Jesus to place her two sons on his right and left when He came into His Kingdom. Jesus then asked both sons if they were able to drink the cup (of martyrdom) that He was about to drink, and they both said to Him that they were able. Then Jesus then said to both of them (James and John) that they both would indeed drink His same cup (of martyrdom), implying that they would not live out their full lives, but instead would be cut short by martyrdom. James was indeed killed by Herod Agrippa I in about AD 44 (Acts 12:1-2). But when did John drink the cup of martyrdom?

Josephus (*Antiq.* 20.9.1) mentions that "James (the Lord's brother) and *some of his companions*" were arrested by Annas II during the three months between the end of Festus' and the beginning of Albinus' procuratorships in AD 62. Josephus says that James was killed by Annas II, but he does not say what happened to the others who were arrested. It is possible that John was one of those companions, but since John was a friend of the Annas family (as he himself tells us in John 18:15-16), he may have been exiled to Patmos rather than being killed. I believe this to be the case.

Since Luke's gospel and the book of Acts were written in Rome before Paul's trial

began in late 62 or early 63, they do not reflect any awareness of the unique material in John's gospel, which John wrote in Jerusalem (cir. late 60 to April 62) after Paul and Luke had left for Rome and before John was arrested and exiled in April of 62. Since the book of Acts does not mention the exile of John to Patmos, it seems probable that the gospel of John was written after Luke and Paul had gone to Rome (late 60), and that the book of Revelation (written while John was in exile on Patmos) was written right after Acts had been finished (late 62). The dates for Luke and Acts (AD 61-62) then become the pegs on which we hang the dates for several of the NT books. Acts was written right after Luke's gospel, both of which appear to have been written right after Paul and Luke reached Rome, and before Paul's case went to trial in late 62 or early 63.

Luke claims that he was aware of at least two other gospel accounts before he wrote his gospel, and since some of the unique material in Matthew and in Mark is found in Luke, those two gospels must have preceded Luke. That would mean that all four gospels were finished before the outbreak of the Neronian persecution in AD 64.

The book of Revelation would have been written after John was arrested and exiled in April of 62. That would place its writing just before the last flurry of prison and pastoral epistles by Paul, and the general epistles of Jude and Peter. Since the book of Revelation clearly warns its readers to "not add to...nor take away from this book of prophecy" (Rev. 22:18-19), tradition has taken this as implying that the book of Revelation was the last book of the NT to have been written. But that is not a necessary implication, especially when both Paul's and Peter's writings reflect awareness of the book of Revelation. The Apocalypse (on internal grounds) shows only that it was one of the last few books to have been written. The gospel of John, as well as his three shorter epistles, appear to have been written before he was exiled (i.e., before April 62). If John was still being held under Roman guard on Patmos at the time the Neronian persecution broke out two years later (summer or fall of AD 64), he probably would have been killed by the Romans about the same time Paul and Peter were - AD 64. This would have been the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction of John's drinking the same cup of martyrdom that his brother James had already drunk twenty years earlier.

We know James (the Lord's brother) wrote his epistle before he was martyred in April of 62. Peter died in the Neronian persecution (AD 64), so his two epistles were written before he was martyred. That leaves only Jude. Since Jude is very similar to the second chapter of 2 Peter, it seems probable that they were written about the same time before Peter's martyrdom in AD 64. So here is how we would sequence and date the 27 New Testament books. For a detailed explanation my reasoning for this, get my book entitled, *First Century Events in Chronological Order* (it is available for order from the IPA website: <http://preterist.org>)

Matthew (before AD 49)	Revelation (AD 62-63)
Galatians (AD 51-52)	Ephesians (AD 62-63)
1 Thessalonians (AD 51-52)	Colossians (AD 62-63)
2 Thessalonians (AD 51-52)	Philemon (AD 62-63)
Mark (cir. AD 55)	Philippians (AD 62-63)
1 Corinthians (AD 57)	Hebrews (AD 62-63)
2 Corinthians (AD 57)	Titus (AD 63)
Romans (AD 58)	1 Timothy (AD 63)
Luke (AD 61)	1 Peter (AD 63)
Acts (AD 61-62)	2 Timothy (AD 63)
John (AD 60-62)	Jude (AD 64)
James (AD 61-62)	2 Peter (AD 64)
1, 2, 3 John (AD 61-62)	

Norman Geisler in his article, "The Dating of the New Testament" (posted on the website: www.bethinking.org), argues for a pre-62 AD date for Luke-Acts, and cites both

William F. Albright and John A. T. Robinson as examples of even liberal scholars who have suggested pre-70 dates for most (if not all) of the NT documents. Robinson especially, in his 1976 book, *Redating the New Testament*, defended the idea that every NT book must have been written before AD 70 since the destruction of Jerusalem "is never once mentioned as a past fact" in any of the NT documents (p. 13). Several evangelical scholars have also advocated a pre-70 date for all NT books (e.g., Arthur Ogden, Milton Terry, David Chilton, J. Stuart Russell, and Cornelius Vanderwaal).

So one of the three requirements for Apostolic Canonization (writing before AD 70) seems viable. And this first part of the process must be viable, or the other two (collecting the books and certifying their canonical authority before AD 70) are automatically invalidated.

Ernest L. Martin (*Restoring the Original Bible*) has argued for Apostolic Canonization on the basis of Apostle John living beyond AD 70, so that by the death of Apostle John the canonization process was complete. But this paper advocates that only Peter held the keys to the Kingdom, and that all the canonical books must have been written by their respective authors, then collected, and certified by Peter before his death (AD 64). Because of Peter's key role in the canonical process, and because he died before AD 70, my particular theory of Apostolic Canonization *before AD 70* becomes critically dependent on a pre-70 date for all the NT books, including the Johannine corpus. Ernest Martin's theory of John providing the final work on the canon fails to satisfactorily explain how Peter's authority to certify the canon could have passed successively to John without compromising with the Catholics on the apostolic succession issue.

SECOND STEP: COLLECTION OF ALL BOOKS BEFORE AD 70?

Were the NT books widely circulated and collected before AD 70? The book of Acts and especially Paul's epistles tell us most of the story. Not only did churches share copies of their collected writings, but the apostles themselves carried copies of those apostolic books with them wherever they went. And the scribes of those churches copied those manuscripts while the apostle was with them, so that after he had gone to other places they would have those books to refer to for guidance.

Lee Woodard, in his work on Codex W (a manuscript containing the four gospels) has suggested that the *Washington Codex* is a good example of what a First Century collection of canonical gospels might have looked like. The codex has a pile of parchment sheets bound together like a book between two wooden covers. We know from classical Greek and Latin studies that codex collections like this were appearing on the first century literary scene no later than the mid-80's.

David Trobisch (*Paul's Letter Collection: Tracing the Origins*) has suggested that the NT documents were collected in three codices, one for the four gospels, one for Paul's fourteen epistles, and a third one for Acts, the general epistles, and the Apocalypse. As far back as we have codex collections, we find this very kind of arrangement. Furthermore, Trobisch notes that in all extant complete collections of Paul's writings in codex form, the book of Hebrews was always included. Trobisch has suggested that this triple codex arrangement of the NT books may have followed the pattern set by the original apostolic collections of Peter and Paul.

The codex (bound book) was much easier to handle on trips like the Apostle Paul had to take. Christians may not have been the first ones to use the codex, but they were certainly the most prolific users of that format. This makes Apostle Paul's casual reference to his collection of *books* and *parchments* (in **2 Tim. 4:13**) much more interesting.

[2 Tim. 4:13, NAS95] When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books [Gr. *biblia*, scrolls], especially the parchments [Gr. *membranas*].

Paul clearly had a collection of books (scrolls) and parchments (codices). Did he keep copies of his epistles with him so that when he traveled to some church that did not have copies, they could make copies from his originals?

Luke states at the beginning of his gospel that "many have undertaken to compile an account" (Lk. 1:1ff). He says he researched those other accounts "carefully" (Lk. 1:3) and wrote it down in consecutive order so that Theophilus could know the exact truth about all these things. So Luke was not only aware of those other accounts of the gospel, but had carefully researched them as he was writing his own account. So he had access to them for a significant period of time while he was writing his own gospel. Did either he or Paul have copies of those other gospels? Did he keep copies of his own gospel to use as a master for others to copy from? Were they a part of the collection of "books and parchments" that he and Paul traveled with? It is possible.

In **2 Pet. 3:15-16**, Peter shows that he is not only aware that Paul had written a number of epistles, but that he had evidently read them, and was here stating his approval of them.

[2 Pet. 3:15-16, NAS95] and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in **all his letters**, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also **the rest of the Scriptures**, to their own destruction.

Note also that Peter mentions Paul's letters as a group ("all his letters") as if he had access to a completed collection of them (which might imply that Paul had already been killed). The way Peter refers to Paul ("our beloved brother Paul") can certainly be understood as a post mortem eulogy.

The point we want to stress about these two texts (**2 Tim. 4:13; 2 Pet. 3:15-16**) is that both Paul and Peter seem to have access to a collection of NT documents. Tradition states that Peter had read Matthew's gospel and found it lacking some of the details that he remembered about Christ, so he commissioned Mark to write an account which included those details and perspectives of Peter. And John remembered some other details that the other three gospels did not include, and decided to write them down for the benefit of the church. Peter and John would have done their writing in Jerusalem, and the church there would have had a collection of all these writings for other Christians to copy from. Luke would have had access to the Jerusalem collection during the two years (AD 58-60) that Paul was imprisoned in nearby Caesarea, before Luke and Paul went to Rome. That would have been a perfect opportunity for Luke to do the research for his Gospel and Acts while he had access to the church in Jerusalem and their collection of writings. And it would have been the perfect time for the Jerusalem church to make copies of all of Paul's epistles as well. So those two years that Paul spent in Caesarea, waiting to be sent to Rome, may have been a very providential time for the writing and collection of all the NT books by the Jerusalem church under the leadership of Apostle Peter.

If Peter had copies of all 27 books, then we can be sure that the Jerusalem church was aware of them and had access to them as well. It is known that Paul and Luke visited Jerusalem several times during the time when these books were being written (mentioned in the book of Acts and Paul's epistles). Paul even states that he had his own collection of books and parchments. We do not know how extensive Paul's collection was, but we can assume that he knew of all the books that Peter had, and that he probably obtained copies of all of them as soon as he visited Jerusalem. When Luke wrote his gospel account, he

states that he had access to at least two other gospel accounts (probably Matthew and Mark, since Luke shows the most similarity to them, and shows no familiarity with John's gospel). Paul would have copies of all his epistles with him (possibly in codex form as 2 Tim. 4:13 would allow). He also had Luke's gospel and the other two (Matthew and Mark). So the only books Paul might not have had were the Johannine corpus and those last few catholic epistles that were written after Paul was arrested and sent to Rome the first time. Since Mark was the courier for Peter and traveled extensively throughout Syria, Turkey, Alexandria, Cyprus, Greece and Rome, it is possible that Mark may have brought copies of those catholic epistles with him to Rome. Between the travels of Paul and Mark and their other traveling companions, it would easily explain how copies of all the manuscripts could have been made at all the major churches (Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome).

THIRD STEP: ALL BOOKS CERTIFIED BEFORE AD 70?

It is worthy of note that Apostle Paul seems to place his gospel preaching of Jesus on the same level as "the scriptures of the prophets" as an authoritative source for the establishment of not only the Roman church, but for "all the nations."

[Rom. 16:25-27, NAS95] Now to Him who is able to **establish you according to my gospel** and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, **and by the Scriptures of the prophets**, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to **all the nations**, *leading* to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.

We should also mention what Paul says about the pillars of the Jerusalem church certifying his gospel as authoritative and commissioned by Christ (Gal. 2). Compare with the similar decisions that were made in Acts 15 and Acts 21.

We mentioned earlier that Peter had evidently read all of Paul's epistles, and approved of them (2 Pet. 3:15-16). But it was more than just approval. Peter places Paul's epistles on the same level with "*the rest of the scriptures*," implying that Paul's epistles were canonical. This is canonical certification language. When Paul's letters are put on the same level with "the rest of the scriptures" it is certifying those letters as canonical.

Did Apostle Peter have the authority to make canonical pronouncements like this? Of course he did! This was not the first time he had sent out a decree. In Acts 15 the apostles and elders at the Jerusalem council composed a document which contained decrees (Gr. *dogmata*, Acts 16:4) that were delivered to the Gentile churches in the Diaspora. This was an exercise of canonical authority, and it showed where that authority resided (in Jerusalem, not in Rome or Antioch).

But we need to go back into the gospel records to see what kind of authority Jesus actually gave to Apostle Peter. Peter appears to have been the key leader in the whole process of deciding which books would be considered on a level with "the rest of the scriptures." This seems consistent with what Jesus said to Peter in **Matt. 16:17-19**.

[Matt. 16:17-19, NAS95] And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. **I will give you the keys** of the kingdom of heaven; and **whatever you bind on earth** shall have been bound in heaven, and **whatever you loose** on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom, so that whatever he bound on earth would be bound in heaven as well. This sure sounds like canonical authority to me, and it was at least the right to decide which writings were to be considered canonical.

If we have reconstructed these events correctly, then we have shown that Apostolic Canonization of the NT documents before AD 70 is a valid possibility, and one which deprives the Romanists of their apostolic succession argument and places the authority back into the hands of the first century apostles, and Peter especially.

This means that the collection of writings that was approved by Peter and the apostles would have been the first (and only) authoritative canonical list, and would have had inspired men doing the writing, collection, and certification of that canon. That would be a canon that we could trust, which would render any determinations by uninspired churchmen later as being secondary and subordinate at best.

CONCLUSION:

What I AM, and AM NOT, saying: I am not saying that all the churches throughout the Roman empire had copies of all 27 NT books. Nor am I saying that there were very many churches which had copies of all 27 books (Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, and maybe a few others). That is not necessary to the thesis of Apostolic Canonization. All that is necessary to this theory is that Peter and the other apostles and the Jerusalem church had copies of all 27 books, and that Peter and the other apostles gave their approval of them before they had passed from the earthly scene by AD 70. That much seems to be indicated by the statements of Peter and Paul that we have looked at above.

This idea has been labeled *Apostolic Canonization* --a very conservative approach to the New Testament Canon, which needs and deserves broad consideration from the evangelical theological community.

Now it is your turn to offer your comments and questions.

Edward E. Stevens, President
International Preterist Association
122 Seaward Avenue
Bradford PA 16701-1515 USA
Website: <http://preterist.org>
Email: preterist1@preterist.org

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