

BLENHEIM BIBLE STUDY, Supplemental Monograph #1

A DEFINING MOMENT



Codex Vaticanus, one of the oldest one-volume Bibles

When, Where, and Why the Christian Scriptures
Were Initially Published in a Single Volume—
A Critique of Prevailing Views

JOHN W. MILLER

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When, Where, and Why the Christian Scriptures Were Published in a Single Volume—A Critique of Prevailing Views

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PREFACE

Despite its unprecedented accessibility, the one-volume Christian Bible is still a mystery to many. It comes to us with no information about when, where, or by whom it was first published. It has no preface explaining what it is or how it should be interpreted. In prior studies I sought a deepened understanding of this sacred book by inquiring into its origins.¹ This monograph is a sequel and supplement to these prior studies. Its focus is the “defining moment” when the many scriptures of the Christian Bible were **initially** published in a one-volume book. The “prevailing views” on this matter are set forth in the following Prologue. I have raised questions about these views in prior writings. I do so again because the issues at stake are important ones for interpreting what the Bible is and means.

¹ *The Origins of the Bible: Rethinking Canon History* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1994); *How the Bible Came to Be: Exploring the Narrative and Message* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2004).

IN GRATEFUL MEMORY OF
LAWRENCE E. BOADT, CSP,
SCHOLAR, EDITOR, FRIEND

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PROLOGUE: A QUESTION SELDOM PONDERED

The initial publication of large one-volume Bibles must have been a defining moment in the life of the church. Where—when—why was such a momentous task undertaken? Strangely, this question is seldom pondered by readers of the Bible. Why?

At the beginning of the Christian movement its scriptures were on scores of separate scrolls or in booklets. At some point the contents of these scrolls and booklets were copied onto the pages of large one-volume Bibles. Three ancient manuscripts of this kind have survived the

ravages of time. They are named: Codex Vaticanus, Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus

("codex" being the earliest name of a



A facsimile of Codex Vaticanus, one of the oldest copies of the whole Bible.

"book"). Scholars believe Codex Vaticanus and Sinaiticus were created in the fourth century, Codex Alexandrinus in the fifth century. In appearance and contents these ancient one-volume Bibles are remarkably like Bibles today (see p. 12 for list of books in each of the three codices).

The initial creation of large one-volume Bibles of this kind must have been a defining moment in the life of the Christian churches. Where—when—why was such a momentous task undertaken? If we knew

the answer, it might shed light on who created the first Bibles and what their intentions were, and that in turn might help us better understand the Bible. Strangely, this question is seldom pondered by readers of the Bible. Scholars and teachers of the Bible likewise pay little attention to it. Why is this?

I have come to think it is due to prevailing scholarly views about when and why large one-volume Bibles were **initially** created. Because the **oldest** extant one-volume Bibles (Codex Vaticanus and Sinaiticus) are thought to be from the fourth century, many think the **fourth century** is when Bibles of this kind were first created. Prior to this, they believe, the scriptures of the church were written on scores of smaller scrolls or booklets. How the dispersed churches of the time kept track of these many smaller booklets, much less came to agreement about them—which to keep and which to reject—is not readily apparent. Also not apparent is why a decision was made in the fourth century to copy these many smaller booklets and scrolls onto the pages of large one-volume codices, when nothing like this had been done before. In other words, the view that these fourth or fifth century codices are the first Bibles of this kind ever produced is not a compelling one. It leaves important questions unanswered.

These oldest extant one-volume Bibles might be copies of still older Bibles. Their **first** editions might have been published for urgent reasons in the third, or even the second centuries. To my knowledge, those holding prevailing views in this regard have not

seriously considered this option. Their belief that one-volume Bibles were first published in the fourth century (and not earlier) is a taken-for-granted assumption on their part, based on scattered beliefs and observations—four in particular:²

1. The **script** used in these massive manuscripts dates them to the fourth or fifth centuries, and **not before**.
2. Large codices of this kind, **older** than the fourth century, have never been found—and older codices that **have** been found are far smaller.
3. Prior to the fourth century, Christians **were mainly intent on forming a collection of “New Testament” scriptures**, rather than complete Bibles (with older Jewish scriptures and “New Testament” writings in one volume).

² As nearly as I can tell, these four “beliefs and observations” are those of the following leading scholars (among many others): Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007); David L. Dungan, *Constantine’s Bible: Politics and the Making of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); D. C. Parker, *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

4. Prior to the fourth century, the **technical skills** seem to have been lacking for manufacturing complete one-volume Bibles as large as Codex Vaticanus.

In the chapters that follow I will cite evidence that casts doubt on each one of these assumed “beliefs and observations” and points to an alternative story of where, when and why one-volume Bibles were **initially** published.

1 ARE THE OLDEST EXTANT ONE-VOLUME BIBLES THE FIRST EVER PUBLISHED?

The oldest extant one-volume Bibles, Codex Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, are dated to the fourth century. Many think this is when one-volume Bibles of this kind were first created. A closer look at these ancient Bibles raises doubts about this assumption.

As just noted, the “prevailing view” among scholars is that one-volume Bibles were first created in the fourth and fifth centuries, because that is when the three oldest extant Bibles of this kind were published. Even a cursory look at the **contents** of these ancient Bibles raises doubts about this view, as do certain **editorial features** of two of them (Sinaiticus and Vaticanus).

A quick overview of contents

To facilitate an overview of the contents of these three codices I have listed their books in parallel columns (see chart on the next page). Even a glance at the books in each codex is startling—startling, because of how **many** books there are; startling, for the **similarities** of their arrangement. There are minor differences to be sure. These codices were obviously not created at the **same** time and place, or by the same persons. But just as obviously, those producing them had a similar plan in mind of what kind of codex they wanted to publish.

These ancient codices have the following features in common:

First, all three codices include a large collection of Jewish scriptures with a substantial collection of Christian books added. **Second**, the collection of Jewish scriptures in each codex includes every single one of the books Jews regarded as sacred scripture, plus several other Jewish writings.³ **Third**, the collection of added Christian scriptures is not only large but its many books are arranged in a strikingly similar way. Only Codex Sinaiticus is

THE LIST OF BOOKS IN THE OLDEST EXTANT CODICES

Codex Sinaiticus	Codex Vaticanus	Codex Alexandrinus
Genesis	Genesis	Genesis
(Incomplete)	(1:1-46:29 missing)	Exodus
Numbers	Exodus	Leviticus
	Leviticus	Numbers
	Numbers	Deuteronomy
	Deuteronomy	Joshua
1-2 Chronicles	Joshua	Judges
1-2 Esdras	Judges	Ruth
Esther	Ruth	1-4 Kings
Tobit	1-4 Kings	1-2 Chronicles
Judith	1-2 Chronicles	Twelve
1-2 Maccabees	1-2 Esdra	Isaiah
Isaiah	Psalms	Jeremiah
Jeremiah	Proverbs	Baruch
Lamentations	Ecclesiastes	Lamentations
Twelve	Song of Solomon	Epistle of Jeremiah
(Incomplete)	Job	Ezekiel
	Wisdom	Daniel
	Sirach	Esther
	Esther	Tobit
	Judith	Judith
Psalms	Tobit	1-2 Esdras
Proverbs	Twelve	1-4 Maccabees
Ecclesiastes	Isaiah	Psalms
Song of Solomon	Jeremiah	Job
Wisdom	Baruch	Proverbs
Sirach	Lamentations	Ecclesiastes
Job	Epistle of Jeremiah	Song of Solomon
	Ezekiel	Wisdom
	Daniel	Sirach
		Psalms of Solomon
Matthew	Matthew	Mt (25:6-28:20 only)
Mark	Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke	Luke
John	John	John (6:50-8:52 missing)
Romans	Acts	Acts
1 Corinthians	James	James
2 Corinthians	1 Peter	1 Peter
Galatians	2 Peter	2 Peter
Ephesians	1 John	1 John
Philippians	2 John	2 John
Colossians	3 John	3 John
1 Thessalonians	Jude	Jude
2 Thessalonians	Romans	Romans
Hebrews	1 Corinthians	1 Corinthians
1 Timothy	2 Corinthians	2 Corinthians
2 Timothy	Galatians	Galatians
Titus	Ephesians	Ephesians
Philemon	Philippians	Philippians
Acts	Colossians	Colossians
James	1 Thessalonians	1 Thessalonians
1 Peter	2 Thessalonians	2 Thessalonians
2 Peter	Heb (1:1-9:14)	Hebrews
1 John	(Ending lost, including pastorals)	1 Timothy
2 John		2 Timothy
3 John		Titus
Jude		Philemon
Revelation		Revelation
Barnabas		Clement (2-12:5)
Shepherd of Hermas		

³ For a more detailed analysis of the scriptures of Judaism in these ancient codices, see Ch. 5.

different in this regard. It alone has Acts and seven letters (James, 1& 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John, and Jude) **after** the letters of Paul, rather than before them. This unique arrangement is found in no other ancient manuscript.⁴ But even so, all three codices contain identical **sets** of Christian books—and the books **in each set** are arranged in the same order: four Gospels, in the same order; Acts followed by seven letters, in the same order; the letters of Paul, in the same order; plus Revelation.⁵

What can explain the striking similarities in these three ancient Bibles (presumably created at different times and places)? I have already suggested that those who created them shared a common plan or design. Each of these groups was intent upon creating a one-volume Bible with the same sizeable number of Christian scriptures added to a full collection of Jewish scriptures. What motivated them? Where did their common plan or design come from? Was it devised in the fourth century, or was it born earlier? My impression is that the churches for which these one-volume codices were created were already familiar with Bibles of this kind—their prototypes were created much earlier.

⁴ See fn. 14 for the possible origins of this codex and the unique arrangement of its books.

⁵ On the purpose of this arrangement, see chapter 5. The books at the very end of these codices (after Revelation) are valued writings not generally read in public meetings; they were added to these codices when it was possible to do so without their becoming **too** large to carry (on the size of these codices, see chapter 2).

Before commenting further on this issue, there is another surprising similarity, shared by these three oldest codices, that merits being noted. This is the careful way the same Greek words are abbreviated in all three of them. These “sacred names” (*nomina sacra*), as they are called by those who study them, appear not only in these codices but in virtually **all** early Christian publications! They are thus a “trade-mark” (so to speak) of early Christian publishing—so much so that if only one fragment of an ancient manuscript contains a single contraction of this type, it can quickly be identified as a Christian writing.

What “contractions” are we referring to? They are listed and described as follows, by Harry Gamble in his study, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*:

- Fifteen terms [Gamble writes] were commonly subject to this practice in early Christian manuscripts, and these can be subdivided into three groups according to the frequency of their contraction: God, Jesus, Christ, Lord, Spirit, Man, Cross, Father, Son, Savior, Mother, Heaven, Israel, David, Jerusalem.
- The terms were contracted [Gamble continues] in various ways: by writing only the first and last letters, or the first two and the last, or the first and last syllables. A horizontal line was always drawn over these letters to indicate that a contraction had been made . . . [see chart on next page].

- No early Christian writer alludes to this transcriptional practice, and we can only conjecture its origin and purpose. It is found in the majority

Abbreviation	Stands for	Meaning
ἄνθρωπος	ανθρωπος	human being
δαβ	δαβ(ε)δ	David
θε	θεος	God
ισρα	ισραηλ	Israel
ιερημ	ιεροσολημ	Jerusalem
ιη	ιησους	.jesus
κς	κυριος	[the] Lord
μηρ	μητηρ	mother
ουανος	ουρανος	heaven(s)
παρ	πατηρ	father
πνε	πνευμα	spirit
στας	σταυρος	cross
σωρ	σωτηρ	savior
υς	υιος	son
χς	χριστος	Christ

of manuscripts and appears fully developed in the earliest manuscripts available.⁶

As Gamble’s comments imply, scholars are mystified about how this editorial practice got started, and even more—about why this practice was so pervasive right from the start of early Christian publishing. “No theory of the origins of the system of nomina sacra has yet commanded general assent,” he writes. This is one of the editorial traits of these manuscripts that compelled David Trobisch (in a landmark book on this subject) to conclude that these contractions “seem to reflect a conscious editorial

⁶ Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 75. I have slightly adapted the format of Gamble’s descriptions to enhance their clarity.

decision made by a specific publisher.”⁷ After a detailed comparison of Codex Vaticanus, Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus, he noted that they are so similar not only in this respect, but in the names and arrangement of their “New Testament” books that we “can safely assume an **older** common archetype.”⁸ As further evidence of this, he points to the fact that smaller “collection units” of books in almost all ancient manuscripts display the same features.⁹ “With the exception of five documents,” he writes, “all of the evaluated manuscripts of the first seven centuries may be interpreted as copies of the same edition.”¹⁰ Codex Vaticanus, Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus are not therefore—according to David Trobisch—the first Christian Bibles of this type. They are copies of an archetypal “first edition” of codices like these that was first published much earlier (in the second century, he believes). Before I knew of Trobisch’s research I reached similar conclusions, based on evidence to be looked at in the following chapters.

The dating of Codex Sinaiticus and Vaticanus

Before turning to a discussion of that evidence, I want to call attention to another feature of these oldest large

⁷ David Trobisch, *The First Edition of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford, 2000), 19.

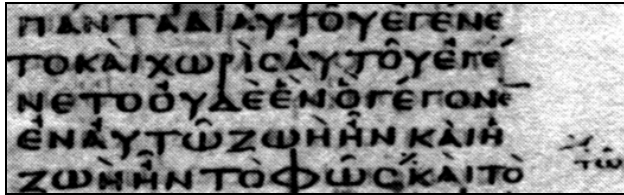
⁸ Trobisch, *First Edition*, 24.

⁹ Trobisch, *First Edition*, 26.

¹⁰ Trobisch, *First Edition*, 34.

codices that seems to call into question fixed assumptions about dating them to the fourth century—they might themselves be older than this. Assigning dates to these codices is usually done through an analysis of their script. All three extant codices (Codex Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexadrinus)

are written in block letters called uncials. A respected



The “uncial” letters of Codex Vaticanus (John 1:3)

authority on these manuscripts, Bruce M. Metzger, writes as follows regarding the script of Codex Vaticanus: “The writing is in small and delicate uncials, perfectly simple and unadorned . . . The complete absence of ornamentation from Vaticanus has generally been taken as an indication that it is slightly older than codex Sinaiticus.”¹¹ If Codex Vaticanus is “slightly older” than Sinaiticus, how old is Codex **Sinaiticus**—and how **much** older is Vaticanus?

As most scholars do, Metzger believes Sinaiticus is a fourth century manuscript. Therefore, since Codex Vaticanus is only “slightly older,” Vaticanus (in his opinion) is a fourth century manuscript as well. However, in correspondence with David Trobisch

¹¹ Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, Third, Enlarged Edition (New York: Oxford, 1992), 47.

(whose landmark book was just referred to), I learned of a more precise way of dating these manuscripts. “What dates Sinaiticus,” he wrote (in an e-mail communication), “is that it displays the Eusebian Canones added by the first scribes, which places it after Eusebius squarely in the 4th century as the earliest possible date” The “Eusebius” referred to in Trobisch’s note lived about 260-339. He was (as will be noted in Chapter 2) the foremost Christian scholar of his generation. The “Eusebian Canones” referred to in Trobisch’s note is a system Eusebius devised for finding parallel passages in the Gospels—one that entails numbering each section of each Gospel and placing numbers in the margins.¹² These “Eusebian numbers,” Trobisch informs me, appear on every page of the Synoptic Gospels in Codex Sinaiticus—and virtually all subsequent manuscripts—but are mysteriously missing in Codex Vaticanus. That they are missing in Codex Vaticanus reinforces Metzger’s opinion that Vaticanus is still older than Sinaiticus.¹³ That the Eusebian numbers **are** in Sinaiticus, means Codex Sinaiticus was produced sometime **after**

¹² For a description of “Eusebian canons,” see Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, 24-5.

¹³ In *Text of the New Testament*, Metzger writes as follows about another feature of Vaticanus that marks it as “more ancient” than “other early” manuscripts: “In common with other manuscripts of the New Testament, the Scripture text of Vaticanus is divided into what may be called chapters. The system of division, however, appears to be more ancient than that current in other early parchment copies”

Eusebius (as Trobisch thinks), or during his **own** lifetime—**Eusebius himself** might have produced this codex.¹⁴

Eusebius was about forty years old when the fourth century began. By that time in his life he had already become a renowned Christian scholar and publisher. **If Codex Sinaiticus was produced by Eusebius himself, he might have produced it in the third century. If Codex Vaticanus is still older than Sinaiticus, then it too might have been published in the third century, or even earlier.** This of course is only a possibility, but these observations put in question fixed assumptions that large one-volume Bibles like this were first created and published in the fourth century, and not earlier.

A remarkable eye-witness account of a Christian book-burning operation by the Roman government at the very start of the fourth century, reinforces the possibility of a third century date for large one-volume Bibles like this. During the Diocletian persecutions, which began in 303, edicts were issued ordering that Christian books be confiscated and burned. Several documents of this period portray the efforts of the state to enforce this edict in various localities.¹⁵ In one

¹⁴ If this were so (that Eusebius himself produced Codex Sinaiticus), the novel arrangement of its New Testament books (the letters of Paul after the Gospels and before Acts and the General Letters) might have been due to a scribal mistake, with the result that it was kept in the archives and never actually used in the churches (see Ch. 2 for an account of its discovery in a monastery library).

¹⁵ Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 145.

of these documents (*Gesta apud Zenophilum*) there is a firsthand report of a book-burning operation of this kind at the place of meeting of Christians in the town of Cirta, Capital of Numidia in North Africa. This report states that the sub-deacons of this church, when ordered to hand over the books, “produced one very large volume [*codicem unum permimum majorem.*]” When asked, “Why have you given one volume [*codicem*] only,” they replied, “We have no more, because we are subdeacons; the readers have the books [*codices*]. The homes of seven “readers” were forthwith searched and a detailed account given of what books were found in each home—a total of thirty-six in all: thirty-two codices (*codices*), and four fascicules (*quiniones*)!¹⁶

This unusual glimpse of the books of a typical church at the dawn of the fourth century, supports the thesis I will be developing in the following chapters—namely: that already in the third century a typical church had one “very large volume” of the complete Bible at their place of meeting, but smaller sections of this volume were also made available to liturgical “readers” for reading and study at their homes.

¹⁶ For a complete text of this document, see Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 145-150. The “readers” mentioned are those responsible for the liturgical reading of “scripture” in early Christian assemblies; see *Books and Readers*, 211-231, for a detailed study of this important role in early Christianity.

2 WHY DID CONSTANTINE REQUEST SO MANY ONE-VOLUME BIBLES?

Constantine's letter in 332 CE requesting "fifty volumes . . . of the Divine Scriptures" for the new churches of Constantinople is evidence of a taken-for-granted tradition of having Bibles like this in every church.

For investigating the origins of an earlier edition of the oldest extant one-volume codices, few texts are more important than a letter that the Roman Emperor Constantine wrote in 332 to the just mentioned Eusebius. In that letter Constantine requests of Eusebius that he prepare as quickly as possible "fifty volumes of the Divine Scriptures" for each of the fifty churches he soon hopes to build in Constantinople, his new capital city. At first glance this letter with this request appears to be compelling evidence of the thesis stated at the end of the previous chapter—that by this point in history (the first half of the fourth century), there was already a long established tradition among Christians of having one "very large" volume of their "Divine Scriptures" in **every** church.

However, we must proceed cautiously at this point. Scholars come to this letter with differing assumptions. Those who assume that large one-volume Bibles had **not** been produced before this time (the fourth century), read Constantine's letter in the light of this assumption. Those who think (as I do) that large one-volume Bibles were produced earlier, read this letter in **this** light. In the face of these differing assumptions

we will proceed in the following manner: a few background facts will be mentioned first; then the letter itself will be examined; then the differing interpretations will be presented, including my own. I will conclude this chapter with a brief report about a few things I have learned about the manufacturing of large codices like this in this ancient time.

A few background facts

We know of Constantine's letter to Eusebius (who lived from about 260 to 339) because Eusebius himself included it in a book he wrote about the life of Constantine (who lived from about 270 to 337). Constantine was the first Christian to be a Roman Emperor. During his reign (324-337) a sea-change took place in the Roman Empire so far as the status of Christians was concerned. Instead of being marginalized and occasionally persecuted, they were favored in many ways. Eusebius was the foremost Christian scholar during this watershed period. He lived in the Palestinian coastal city of Caesarea and was in charge of a library that his mentor, Pamphilus, had founded.

Pamphilus was a wealthy presbyter who died a martyr's death by decapitation February 16, 310, during the Diocletian persecutions—just fourteen years before Constantine took control of the Empire. The library he founded had a large number of books as well as a scriptorium where books were published,

especially Christian scriptures.¹⁷ Pamphilus himself was a renowned scriptural scholar. Eusebius wrote an account of his life, from which the following informative excerpt has survived.

Pamphilus was friend to all who studied. If he saw that some lacked the basic necessities of life, he generously gave as much as he could. He also eagerly distributed copies of the sacred scriptures, not only to be read, but also to be kept, and not only to men, but also to those women who had shown him that they were devoted to reading. Accordingly, he prepared many codices, so that he could give them out to those who wanted them whenever the need arose . . .¹⁸

Eusebius was an apt student and disciple of Pamphilus. Prior to Constantine's ascendancy he had written (among other things) a history of the Christian church and a massive study comparing the history of the world as recounted in Christian scriptures with that recorded elsewhere in world literature. In 314 he was appointed Bishop of Caesarea. He now had the means to intensify his scholarly activities. By 320 or so, historians tell us, "Eusebius's workplace must have become a substantial research institution, at once an

¹⁷ For a detailed study of the activities of this library, see Anthony Grafton and Megan Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book: Origen, Eusebius, and the Library of Caesarea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

¹⁸ This excerpt is quoted by Jerome in his polemical work against Rufinus (*Contra Rufinum* 1.9); translation by Grafton and Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book*, 181.

archive, a library, and a scriptorium. Staffed by specialist scribes and notaries who worked with their bishop on a wide range of projects, it seems to have offered a wealth of holdings organized by author and perhaps by other categories.”¹⁹ Is it any wonder that Constantine turned to Eusebius for the task of producing copies of the “Divine Scriptures”?

Constantine’s letter

What does Constantine actually say in his letter to Eusebius? What do scholars think he says? As noted, the letter is found in a book Eusebius wrote on Constantine’s life late in his own life. The letter itself is in Book IV, Chapter 36—but in Chapter 34 Eusebius introduces it as a letter Constantine wrote to him “personally” on the subject of “copying of divinely inspired Scriptures.” The letter itself (in chapter 36) reads as follows:²⁰

36 (1) Victor Constantinus Maximaus Augusta to Eusebius:

[134] (1) In the City which bears our name by the sustaining providence of the Savior God a great mass of people has attached itself to the most holy Church,

¹⁹ Grafton and Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book*, 215.

²⁰ Cited from, Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, *Eusebius, Life of Constantine, Introduction, translation, and commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 166-67.

so that with everything there enjoying great growth it is particularly fitting that more churches should be established. (2) Be ready therefore to act urgently on the decision which we have reached. It appeared proper to indicate to your Intelligence that you should order fifty volumes [*somatia*]²¹ with ornamental leather bindings, easily legible and convenient for portable use, to be copied by skilled calligraphists well trained in the art, copies that is of the Divine Scriptures, the provision and use of which you well know to be necessary for reading in church. (3) Written instructions have been sent by our Clemency to the man who is in charge of the diocese that he see to the supply of all the materials needed to produce them. The preparation of the written volumes with utmost speed shall be the task of your Diligence. You are entitled by the authority of this our letter to the use of two public vehicles for transportation. The fine copies may thus most readily be transported to us for inspection; one of the deacons of your own congregation will presumably carry out this task, and when he reaches us he will experience our generosity. God preserve you, dear brother.

Immediately after this letter Eusebius included the following note:

²¹ The Greek word *somatia* (translated “volumes”) is “the nearest approach” in Greek for the Latin word *codex*, according to Colin H. Roberts and T.C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (London: Oxford University Press, 1983), 54, fn. 1.

37 These then were the Emperor's instructions. Immediate action followed upon his word, as we sent him threes and fours in richly wrought bindings (. . .)

This terse follow-up note raises a key question left by the letter itself: what exactly **were** the volumes Constantine was asking Eusebius to prepare as quickly as possible? Eusebius's terse follow-up note describes their pages as "**threes** and **fours** in richly wrought bindings." Codex Vaticanus has three columns per page—Codex Sinaiticus four. Was it large codices like these that the Roman Emperor was requesting? Or were they smaller volumes containing only part of the "Divine Scriptures"? If large complete Bibles, were they the **first** large volumes of this kind ever produced?

Differing answers

Harry Y. Gamble has been a respected voice in discussions of these issues. In his already cited book, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts*, he expresses the prevailing view that complete one-volume Bibles like Codex Vaticanus were **initially** produced in the fourth century—however, he doubts these were the kind of volumes Constantine was requesting in his letter to Eusebius. His comments in this regard are as follows:

Constantine wanted the books to be produced quickly and to be easily portable, but neither could be expected if the books in question were whole Bibles It is far more probable that the codices produced in the Caesarean scriptorium contained only the four Gospels rather than the whole New Testament or the entire Christian Bible. Nevertheless [Gamble continues], in the quality of their construction and inscription, if not in their scope, the codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus at least suggest the kinds of books that Christianity began to produce and use in the fourth century: large codices inscribed on high-grade parchment in careful literary hands by accomplished scribes, laid out in three (Vaticanus) or four (Sinaiticus) narrow columns to the page, reminiscent of the manner in which literary rolls had been written. Never before had Christian books been so fine. A barrier was broken²²

Others who share Gamble's belief that the fourth century was the first time one-volume Bibles of this "scope" were ever published, speculate that Constantine himself had more to do with this innovative development than most realize—and cite Constantine's letter as evidence of this.²³ In his provocatively entitled study of this issue, *Constantine's*

²² Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 80.

²³ This is the view of Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 318-320.

Bible,²⁴ David Dungan pictures Constantine himself as taking the initiative in creating Bibles of this type for the first time. He imagines him being informed by his advisors of Eusebius's research into what the scriptures of the church actually are and are not. As "part of his campaign to properly equip his new church buildings in Constantinople," Dungan writes, "Constantine sent an order to Eusebius, as the leading scholar of his day, for fifty Bibles."²⁵ He describes the ensuing results as follows:

The effect of this order—and of the resulting imperially authorized copies of the Bible—was significant. I think M. Odahl states the effect precisely: 'By patronizing the production of Bibles for his capital, the emperor hastened the closing of the Christian canon of scriptures and helped preserve a New Testament of twenty-seven books.' After Constantine's Bible had been produced, and in the tense atmosphere that followed the Council of Nicaea, what bishop would dare use a Bible in his cathedral that differed in content from one used by the bishops in Constantinople? He would likely be informed upon and investigated. He could lose his office or worse!"²⁶

²⁴ David L. Dungan, *Constantine's Bible: Politics and the Making of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

²⁵ Dungan, *Constantine's Bible*, 121.

²⁶ Dungan, *Constantine's Bible*, 122.

An alternative view

In my opinion, Constantine's letter gives no hint that the volumes he was ordering are new or different or a radical departure from those that already existed. Just the opposite! The letter itself is short and business-like. It states that Eusebius knows what kind of codices he has in mind. They are "volumes" which "you [Eusebius] well know to be necessary for reading in church." That Constantine wants "fifty" of these codices—one for each of the soon-to-be-built fifty churches in Constantinople—only reinforces this point. His request for this many Bibles implies a taken-for-granted tradition of having one copy of this kind of Bible in every church. Elsewhere in his *Life of Constantine*, Eusebius describes Constantine himself as having a Bible of this type, one that he took "into his hands" and read (4.17). The only new thing emphasized in his letter is that the requested "copies" should be of a high quality. They are "to be copied by skilled calligraphists well trained in the art," and bound in "ornamental leather," yet small enough to be "convenient" for "portable use." The word "copy" itself implies older manuscripts of this type existed from which copies could be made.

While there is no hint of the requested "copies" being novelties, there are indications of the difficulties posed by this request. Constantine writes that he is simultaneously writing to the administrator of the diocese where Eusebius is bishop that "he see to the

supply of all the materials needed to produce” these fifty volumes. He also points out that the task of Eusebius himself is “the preparation of the written volumes with utmost speed.” Why “with utmost speed”? Was Constantine afraid that the fifty churches he is planning to build will be completed without these volumes being there on time for the “great mass” of people (mentioned at the beginning of his letter) waiting to come to these churches? If so, his fear would be added testimony to how important these “volumes” of “Divine Scriptures” had become for the Christian church—it was a source of anxiety to envision a church-assembly without them.

Finally, to expedite this request, Constantine’s letter states, “two public vehicles” will be made available to Eusebius, for transporting the “fifty volumes” (when finished) to Constantine himself, who will personally receive and inspect them. Why “two public vehicles”?—obviously, because Constantine believes the ordered “volumes” will be too bulky for a single vehicle. This in itself implies the requisitioned codices were quite large. How large? Scholars estimate Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus had at least 1600 and 1460 pages respectively.²⁷ I have myself had access to a facsimile copy of the “Old Testament” portion of Codex Sinaiticus and ported it to many of my classes. It **was** indeed large. I can readily imagine why

²⁷ These are the estimates of Colin and Skeat, *Birth of the Codex*, 48.

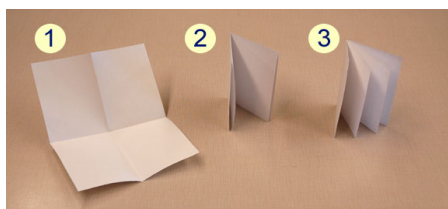
Constantine felt it necessary to send two “public vehicles” instead of one.

Codex-manufacturing in second to fourth centuries

I want to share at this point a few observations about the prevailing assumptions among scholars about codex-manufacturing in this period (on this subject, see also chapter 4). I have searched in vain for evidence in support of the widely shared presumption that technical know-how was lacking **prior to** the fourth century for manufacturing large one-volume Bibles like Codex Vaticanus. What technical know-how was lacking in earlier centuries? Why would it be impossible, even in the fourth century, to produce large Bibles of this type fairly quickly, as Gamble speculates (see above)? These are the kinds of questions I have been asking—and continue to ask.

The following is what I have learned so far about book-manufacturing in the second to fourth centuries. An ancient codex is essentially papyrus or parchment sheets folded together to form a group of pages. There are two ways of making a codex—through **single-quire** construction or through binding together **multiple quires**. A single-quire codex is made by simply taking a stack of papyrus sheets and folding them in half all together. This method produces a codex in which the first leaf is joined to the last, with the remaining leaves between. This method has obvious limitations in size. The largest surviving

single-quire Christian codex is the Chester Beatty Biblical papyrus. It contains ten letters of Paul on 208 pages. Larger codices were formed from “multiple quires” (groupings of 4, 8, or 16 leaves) bound together side-by-side (for making a “four-leaf quire,” see



University of Michigan Library

The above picture shows how a four-leaf quire is made from a sheet by folding and then cutting the sheet.

picture). In his assessment of codex-size among early Christians, Gamble cites the example of a third century papyrus codex (P45) containing the four Gospels and Acts. The usual practice among early Christians, he writes, was to produce single-quire booklets. But in this instance, he writes, we have a multiple-quire codex of about 440 pages.”²⁸ Why then does he suggest earlier that, “the early technology of book manufacture placed limits on size”?²⁹ Is the technology for producing large multiple-quire codices of 1600 pages any more difficult than that required for producing smaller multiple-quire codices of 440 pages, when it is only a matter of adding more (or larger) quires?

The only difference I can see between the multiple-quire codices of Codex Vaticanus or Sinaiticus and smaller codices of this type is page-size and the number of multiple quires bound together in one

²⁸ Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 67.

²⁹ Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 55.

volume. Of course, multiple-quire codices could not be so large that it would be difficult to carry them. This is an issue identified by Constantine himself in his letter to Eusebius—the “volumes” he is requesting, he writes, must be “convenient for portable use.” That he even mentions this implies that Bibles of this type were sometimes **too** big and bulky! My guess is that this was not a problem Eusebius worried about, nor was he worried about how he would manufacture these requisitioned Bibles. His **biggest** worry might have been how to transcribe all fifty volumes quickly enough to meet Constantine’s deadline. As noted, this is a worry Constantine also had—hence, his advice to proceed quickly upon receipt of his letter, as well as his assurance that the wherewithal would be provided to hire “skilled calligraphists well trained in the art” of copying manuscripts of this kind.

But, could even fifty or more “skilled calligraphists” produce fifty copies of large one-volume Bibles in the time implied by Constantine’s request? Are scholars who regard this request as improbable, if complete one-volume Bibles were meant, justified in thinking that way? How much time **would** it take for a large team of “skilled calligraphists” to produce fifty copies of one-volume Bibles like Codex Vaticanus or Sinaiticus? The best answer I have found to **this** question is a fascinating story Bruce Metzger relates about Tischendorf, the young German scholar who discovered Codex Sinaiticus at St. Catharine monastery at the base of Mount Sinai. It was not until

his third visit to this monastery in 1859, that the monastery's steward produced the codex he had been searching for, for so many years. "Concealing his feelings," Metzger writes,

Tischendorf casually asked permission to look at it further that evening. Permission was granted, and upon retiring to his room Tischendorf stayed up all night in the joy of studying the manuscript . . . He soon found that the document contained much more than he had even hoped; for not only was most of the Old Testament there, but also the New Testament was intact and in excellent condition, with the addition of two early Christian works of the second century, the Epistle of Barnabas (previously known only through a very poor Latin translation) and a large portion of the Shepherd of Hermas, hitherto known only by title.

The next morning Tischendorf tried to buy the manuscript, but without success. Then he asked to be allowed to take it to Cairo to study; but the monk in charge of the altar plate objected, and so he had to leave without it.

Later, while in Cairo, where the monks of Sinai have also a small monastery, Tischendorf importuned the abbot of the monastery of St. Catharine, who happened to be in Cairo at the time, to send for the document. Thereupon swift Bedouin messengers were sent to fetch the manuscript to Cairo, and it was agreed that Tischendorf would be allowed to have it quire by quire (i.e. eight leaves at a time) to copy it. Two Germans who happened to be in Cairo and who knew some Greek, an apothecary and a bookseller,

helped him transcribe the manuscript, and Tischendorf revised carefully what they copied. In two months they transcribed 110,000 lines of text.³⁰

After reading this account I thought, if Tischendorf with the help of two untrained men could transcribe a copy of Codex Sinaiticus in two months, surely “trained calligraphists” could do as well, or better. Perhaps Constantine’s request of Eusebius was not as impossible as it might seem. I looked again at the terse note Eusebius added after recording Constantine’s letter of request, in chapter 37 of his *Life of Constantine*. His note struck me now as business-like and factual—expressive of the satisfaction one feels about a job well done and on time. It reads:

37 These then were the Emperor’s instructions. Immediate action followed upon his word, as we sent him threes and fours in richly wrought bindings (. . .)

³⁰ Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, 43-44.

3 WHERE AND WHEN WERE ONE-VOLUME BIBLES INITIALLY PUBLISHED?

One-volume Bibles of this size and complexity do not get created, accepted and used without someone, somewhere taking the initiative. Ancient texts point to a conclave in Rome in the middle of the second century as the context in which this occurred.

The publication of Bibles like Codex Vaticanus must have been a transformative event in the life of the Christian churches. Where and when might this “transformative event” have happened? Historians agree that extraordinary changes occurred in the **second** half of the second century in how Christians regarded their scriptures. In the **first** half of that century they were often uncertain or confused about what their scriptures were, and the scriptures they did have, were often not available. By the end of the second century all this had changed. They knew what their scriptures were—and they had them and were reading them with new-found confidence. What brought about this remarkable transformation? In what follows in this chapter I will be examining these extraordinary changes—and then look at two ancient texts that point to a conclave in Rome where a determination was made which “books” to accept for reading in the churches, and which to reject. It was in the aftermath of this conclave, I will seek to show, that the first one-volume Bibles were published, and it was this that brought about the referred to changes.

“Extraordinary changes”

In order to understand the transformative changes that occurred in the second half of the second century in how Christians regarded their scriptures, we need to understand what was occurring **before** that time. The following is how a leading historian of this issue, Harry Gamble, describes scriptural practices among Christians during this **earlier** period:

During the late first and early second centuries the books that were read in Christian assemblies were principally the scriptures of Judaism . . . It is not likely that in this early period all churches would have possessed full collections of Jewish scripture. The scriptures of Judaism comprised not a single book but a collection of scrolls, five of the Torah and more of the prophetic books. These books were relatively costly, and their availability even to all synagogues cannot be taken for granted. Even if the books were available outside the synagogue and could be afforded, small Christian congregations probably had only a select group of Jewish texts . . . During the same period Christian writings were still making their way into circulation and had not gained the status of scripture. Nevertheless, their instructional value for Christian congregations was surely recognized and a given church would have used whatever Christian books had come to hand and proved to be helpful. In

this way Christian writings began to be read in the same setting as the Jewish scriptures.³¹

This was the “scriptural” situation among Christians that existed **during the first half of the second century**. What was the “extraordinary change” that occurred **after** this? Gamble describes it as follows: “It was common practice,” he writes, “at least by the middle of the second century to read Christian as well as Jewish texts in Christian services.” However, it is “unclear,” he adds, whether the Christian texts were regarded on a par with the Jewish scriptures. But soon thereafter, he continues,

Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian all speak of the Gospels, the Pauline letters, and some other early Christian texts as scripture and accord them fully as much authority as Jewish scripture. Thus Tertullian describing Christian worship at the end of the second century (*Apol.* 39.3) can speak of the reading of ‘the books of God’ without differentiating between Jewish and Christian writings, and he certainly intended both.

Gamble then makes this significant comment: “If in the first and early second century Christians made liturgical use primarily of Jewish scripture and whatever Christian texts they might have, by the late second century the situation had changed, for a great many Christian texts had been widely disseminated

³¹ Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 214.

and were generally available.”³² In other words, in the second half of the second century the “extraordinary changes” that occurred so far as Christian scriptures were concerned, were two-fold:

1. Many newer Christian writings came to be regarded as “scripture” **on a par** with Jewish “scripture.”
2. These scriptures (both Jewish and Christian) were now **widely circulated and available** for “liturgical use” (reading in church assemblies). **In less than fifty years a bi-partite Bible (Old and New Testament) was born!**

I know of no historian who disagrees with this assessment. Hans von Campenhausen, for example—in an earlier exhaustive investigation of these same “changes”—writes that, despite the earlier scriptural uncertainties and controversies, “From the beginning of the third century onward no one anywhere knew of a different arrangement: the sacred Scripture of the orthodox Church consisted of an Old and New Testament.” He then presents a detailed account of how from this point onward this “sacred Scripture” was being read and interpreted everywhere in the churches. “It is virtually impossible,” he writes, “to make a detailed assessment of the significance of the

³² Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 214.

bipartite Canon for the age that now dawned. It touched the whole of theological endeavor, and its effect was constant and universal.”³³

The formation of the first one-volume Bibles

What led to this amazing consensus? How was it arrived at so quickly? Not only that—how were the agreed-upon “scriptures” (Old and New Testament) acquired by these churches? At this point historians of the Bible offer a variety of answers, or no answers at all. Gamble, for example, writes of a “complex interplay” of a “wide range” of “largely fortuitous historical factors” that were the “crucible for the long process of canon formation.”³⁴ But the “process” was not “long” (no more than fifty years). Moreover, could scores of scattered churches **ever** forge a lasting consensus about such a large number of “scriptures” through “a complex interplay” of “largely fortuitous factors”? Campenhausen believes it was the “Spirit of truth” in “the usage and judgment of the one true Church” that enabled this to happen³⁵—but by whom exactly, or by what means this remarkable consensus was achieved, he does not say.

³³ Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 269.

³⁴ Harry Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 83.

³⁵ Campenhausen, *Formation of the Christian Bible*, 261.

With these questions and comments we touch on a reality generally overlooked by historians of these issues: the daunting dimensions of the challenge mid-second century churches were facing in coming to consensus regarding their scriptures. The sheer complexity of that challenge is alluded to in comments Campenhausen himself makes about the still fragmented “format” of these scriptures at that time. From “the technical angle of book production,” he writes,

there was no such thing [at mid-second century] as an Old Testament or a New Testament as a single physical entity. To the eye the whole Canon was still fragmented into a series of separate rolls or volumes. It is true [Campenhausen adds] that expert opinion today considers that the Church of the second century was already using the ‘Codex’ But even such a codex certainly did not as yet comprise the whole ‘New Testament’, but at most separate groups of writings, such as ‘the Gospel’ or the Pauline Epistles, and these then all counted as the ‘scriptures’ or the ‘scripture’ in the wider sense.³⁶

If that was the case—that **at mid-second century** the church’s scriptures were “still fragmented into a series of [scores of] separate rolls or volumes”—then, how was it possible for the churches of the world to reach a lasting agreement about which to keep or which to

³⁶ Campenhausen, *Formation of the Christian Bible*, 262.

reject, much less acquire them? The numbers of agreed-upon scriptures of **third**-century Christians are of such a size and complexity that it is virtually impossible to imagine how this happened without someone, somewhere, in some church taking the initiative in this endeavor. **A conclave of church leaders first had to meet and reach consensus on these difficult issues—and that in fact is what did happen!** Furthermore, there is evidence that this meeting occurred in Rome in the second-half of the second century—and the consensus reached was communicated to the churches of the world, not by argument or by fiat, but by initiating the publication of the agreed-upon scriptures in large one-volume codices.

What is the evidence of this watershed development? There are two ancient texts that point to **where** and **when** this conclave met. They also intimate **why** it met—but that will be the focus of the chapters to follow. In the remainder of **this** chapter the two texts that point to **where** and **when** this happened will be examined. Both are well known and datable to the **second half** of the second century—the one to its beginning, the other to its end.

The Muratorian Fragment (about 160 CE)

The first of these ancient texts, *The Muratorian Fragment*, is datable to the **beginning** of the second half of the second century. It was found by Lodovico

Antonia Muratori (in 1738-40) in a seventh or eighth-century codex in the Ambrosian Library of Milan. Its opening and closing lines are missing. The surviving fragment is a Latin translation of a document originally written in Greek.³⁷ The text reflects a time of intense controversy when important doctrinal and scriptural disputes were being settled. Marcion's name appears twice: first, in connection with two epistles (to the Laodiceans and Alexandrians), which it says, were "forged in Paul's name to [further] the heresy of Marcion"; secondly, in connection with "a new book of psalms for Marcion," which it says Miltiades composed. The names of other teachers and their writings are listed (among them Valentinus). Their books, the *Fragment* states, cannot be "accepted."

The **person** who wrote this document was engaged with others in a serious, difficult undertaking on behalf of the "Church catholic" (lines 62-3).³⁸ He and

³⁷ For a defense of the *Fragment's* authenticity, and an English translation, see Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 191-201, 305-307. The following quotes are from Metzger's translation.

³⁸ Metzger's description of the *Fragment's* author as a "member of the Roman Church" who only "drew up . . . a synopsis of the writings" that were "recognized as belonging to the New Testament in his part of the Church" alone (*Canon of the New Testament*, 194) is puzzling, since the *Fragment* is so forthright about its author being part of a decision-making process on behalf of the "Church catholic." This failure to recognize the *Fragment* as a record of an ecumenical conclave may be the reason why Metzger also believes (as stated on page 1 of his book) that the process was "long and gradual" in which "writings, regarded as authoritative, were separated from a much larger body of early Christian literature," and that "history is virtually silent as to how . . . it was brought about" (*Canon of the New Testament*, 1).

his colleagues were sorting through scores of documents to determine which were worthy of being “read publicly to the people in church” (line 78), and which were not. Some of the expressions used for the decisions they made, are: “these are held sacred in the esteem of the Church catholic for the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline”; “[these] cannot be received into the catholic church”; “[these] are counted (or, used)”; “we receive only [these] . . .”; “some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church”; “it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among the prophets, whose number is complete, or among the apostles, for it is after [their] time”; “we accept nothing whatever of [these books] . . .” (lines 62-84).

The **date** of these deliberations is indicated in line 73, where reference is made to the *Shepherd* of Hermas, which (the text says) was “written very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the [Episcopal] chair of the church of the city of Rome.” The “bishop Pius” referred to lived about 100-145—thus, the reference to the *Shepherd* of Hermas being written during his bishopric “very recently in our times” implies a date for the writing of this text (and the meeting of this conclave) not much later than that. The name used for the “scriptures” that were deemed acceptable is “Prophets” and “Apostles” (lines 79-80)—the “Prophets” are the Jewish scriptures; the “Apostles,” are those that later would be called the “New

Testament” scriptures. Presumably, the only books in this latter category that can be “accepted” are those representing the views of “Apostles.” Which books are they?

The following is an overview of the complex things said about **this** category of books (“Apostles”):

- The *Fragment* begins with comments on Luke; it calls it “the third book of the Gospel” – the prior books in its missing part were likely Matthew and Mark.
- Next mentioned is “the fourth of the Gospels,” that of John, which it says was written by one of the “disciples,” the implication being he was not an apostle. It is stated, however, his work was approved by an apostle (namely, Andrew).
- Next mentioned is “the acts of all the apostles,” which it states were “written in one book” by Luke and finished prior to Peter’s martyrdom and “the departure of Paul from the city [of Rome], when he journeyed to Spain.”
- Paul’s letters are mentioned next—first, by way of introduction and then as a group of letters to seven churches. “As for the Epistles of Paul,” the text says by way of introduction, “they themselves make clear . . . which ones [they are], from what place, or what reason they were sent. First of all, to

the Corinthians, prohibiting their heretical schisms; next, to the Galatians, against circumcision; then to the Romans he wrote at length, explaining the order (or, plan) of the Scriptures, and also that Christ is their principal (or, main theme)."

- In the next section Paul's letters continue to be discussed. Following "the example of his predecessor John," it states, "the blessed apostle Paul himself . . . writes by name to only seven churches in the following sequence: to the Corinthians first, to the Ephesians second, to the Philippians third, to the Colossians fourth, to the Galatians fifth, to the Thessalonians sixth, to the Romans seventh. It is true," the text continues, "that he writes once more to the Corinthians and to the Thessalonians for the sake of admonition, yet it is clearly recognizable that there is one Church spread throughout the whole extent of the earth." And then this is said: "[Paul also wrote] out of affection and love to Philemon, one to Titus, and two to Timothy, and these are held sacred in the esteem of the Church catholic for the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline."
- Finally, reference is made to Jude, 1 and 2 John, which are "counted (or, used) in the catholic [church]; and the book of Wisdom, written by the friends of Solomon in his honor. We receive only the apocalypses of John and Peter, though some of

us are not willing that the latter be read in the church.”

It is difficult to avoid the impression that *The Muratorian Fragment* reflects what in fact did transpire in a second century conclave of church leaders.³⁹

Where did these deliberations take place? The only location named is “the church of the city of Rome” (lines 73, 77). Events and leaders unique to that church are mentioned. A letter written by Paul to the Romans is singled out as “explaining the order (or, plan) of the Scriptures, and also that Christ is their principle (or, main theme)” (lines 44-46). This indicates that the conclave was concerned not only about the “worth” of individual writings, but their “order (or, plan)” collectively.

In summary, what did the collection consist of at this point in time? The *Fragment’s* list of “accepted” scriptures is remarkably like that in the three ancient one-volume codices already looked at (see p. 12)—which is to say, like one-volume Bibles ever since. It assumes without discussion that the Scriptures of Judaism (referred to as “Prophets”) are an integral part of these scriptures (line 79). Four Gospels are also firmly in place. The “Acts of all the Apostles” is also included. Paul’s nine letters to seven churches are also

³⁹ For a recent defense of the second century date of this manuscript, see David R. Nienhuis, *Not by Paul Alone, The Formation of the Catholic Epistle Collection and the Christian Canon* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 46, 76-7.

accepted. Additional letters of Paul are also mentioned—to Philemon, to Titus, and two to Timothy. Several other writings are mentioned that are used in the “catholic” church—namely, the Epistle of Jude, two letters of John, plus the apocalypse of John. Notably missing at this point in this conclave’s deliberations is any reference to Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, and 3 John. However, there is no hint that this *Fragment* is a **final** report, or that the work of the conclave was over and done with. On the contrary, at the time this report was written conclave members were still debating the worth of the apocalypse of Peter (line 72). Moreover, manuscript evidence indicates that a decision was soon made to add James, 1 and 2 Peter and 3 John to the group of three “catholic” letters already assembled (Jude, 1 and 2 John) as a counterweight to Paul’s letters to seven churches⁴⁰—and that, at about the same time, Hebrews was added for possibly the same reason.⁴¹

⁴⁰ These seven “catholic” letters are in all the oldest (uncial) manuscripts and in all of them (except for Codex Sinaiticus; see fn. 14) they are located before the letters of Paul (for details, see William R. Farmer, *Jesus and the Gospel* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982], 274, fn. 145). For the importance of this location within the “design” of these first Bibles, see chapter 5.

⁴¹ On the “unsettled” placement of Hebrews in the oldest manuscripts—after Romans, after Galatians, before Ephesians, and (in Codex Vaticanus and Sinaiticus) after 2 Thessalonians and before 1 Timothy—see Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 298.

On Prescription Against Heretics, by Tertullian
(about 155-240)

The question remains, did this same conclave (as previously suggested), at some point in their deliberations, make arrangements for publishing their agreed-upon scriptures in a single codex? I first began thinking of this as a possibility over a decade ago when reading Tertullian's *On Prescription Against Heretics*—especially when reading chapter 36 of this treatise, where an event of precisely this kind is recounted that happened in Rome. Tertullian was born not far from Rome (in Carthage on the North African coast of the Mediterranean Sea) right about the time the conclave was beginning to meet. There was a large Christian community in Carthage and Tertullian joined it while still a young man. He trained to be a lawyer and quickly became the leading apologist for Christianity writing in Latin.

On Prescription Against Heretics was among his earliest published works (possibly written before 200). The word “prescription” in its title, a Tertullian scholar explains, is a Latin legal term referring to documents “which ruled a plaintiff’s case completely out of court.” In this treatise, he continues, Tertullian was seeking “an injunction to restrain any heretic from trespassing upon holy scripture, which is the sole property of Christians.”⁴² Not only in chapter 36 but

⁴² Timothy David Barnes *Tertullian, A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 64.

throughout his essay Tertullian refers to this “holy scripture” as a single artifact. His preferred word for naming it is *instrumentum*, another Latin legal term meaning, “a written contract or agreement (sometimes a public document).”⁴³ Tertullian writes that these singular artifacts are *instrumenta doctrinae* (“instruments of doctrine”) and criticizes the “heretics” against whom he is writing with “differently arranging” **their** “instruments” (ch. 38).⁴⁴

The “heretics” mentioned most often in *On Prescription Against Heretics* are Valentinus and Marcion. Valentinus is critiqued for misinterpreting scripture—Marcion for having a truncated version of it. “One man perverts the scripture with his hand, another . . . by his exposition,” Tertullian writes. “For although Valentinus seems to use the entire volume [*integro instrumento*], he has none the less laid violent hands on the truth only with a more cunning mind and skill than Marcion” (Ch. 38). The most telling point Tertullian makes against Marcion (in *On Prescription against Heretics*) is that as a newcomer to the Christian movement he had no right to separate the “New Testament” from the “Old Testament.” With the precision of a lawyer he states his case as follows: “For since Marcion separated the New Testament from the Old, he is (necessarily) subsequent

⁴³ Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 159.

⁴⁴ This, and the quotes that follow, are from *On Prescription Against Heretics* in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Latin Christianity: Its Founder Tertullian*, vol. 3, trans. Peter Holmes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).

to that which he separated, inasmuch as it was only in his power to separate what was (previously) united” (ch. 30). What Tertullian is referring to is Marcion’s creation of a single Bible-codex made up exclusively of newer Christian writings (Luke and ten letters of Paul) as a **replacement** for the scriptures of Judaism (further to this, see chapter 4). In Tertullian’s opinion Marcion had no right to do that (separate “the New Testament” from the “Old”).

Clearly, the *instrumentum* Tertullian is defending in *On Prescription Against Heretics* is a sizeable one—a bipartite collection of both “New Testament” writings “united” with “Old Testament” scriptures. Where did this large “instrument” come from? Who created it—and why is Tertullian defending it as though it were the sole “scripture” of true and faithful Christians? These are the questions addressed in the aforementioned chapter 36. In this chapter the “heretics” (about whom and to whom he is writing) are urged to consider the sizeable consortium of churches that **already have** the “writings” Tertullian is defending.

Come now, you [heretics, he writes in chapter 36] who would indulge a better curiosity, if you would apply it to the business of your salvation, run over the **apostolic churches**, in which the very thrones of the apostles are still pre-eminent in their place, in which their own **authentic writings** are read, uttering the voice and representing the face of each severally. Achaia is very near you, (in which) you find **Corinth**.

Since you are not far from Macedonia, you have **Philippi**; (and there too) you have the **Thessalonians**. Since you are able to cross to Asia, you get **Ephesus**. Since moreover [Tertullian continues] you are close upon Italy, you have **Rome** from which there comes **even into our own hands the very authority (of apostles themselves)**. How happy is its church on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood! Where Paul wins his crown in a death like John's! where the Apostle John was first plunged, unhurt, into boiling oil, and thence remitted to his island-exile! See what she has learned, what taught, what fellowship has had with **even (our) churches in Africa!** One Lord God does she acknowledge, the Creator of the universe, and Christ Jesus (born) of the Virgin Mary, the Son of God the Creator; and the Resurrection of the flesh; **the law and the prophets she unites** [*miscet*] **in one volume**⁴⁵ **with the writings of evangelists and apostles, from which she drinks in her faith.**

These words (some of which I highlighted) are Tertullian's succinct account of how "authentic writings" embodying "the very authority of the apostles themselves" were created and came "even into our own hands." Here we learn **who** created (and published) these writings, what they consist of and what they are meant to do. The church at Rome

⁴⁵ The Latin word *miscet* means "mix one thing with another" or "combine together" —hence (implicitly) "unites in one volume" (as Peter Holmes translates here).

created and published this collection. It consists of “the writings of evangelists and apostles” united with “the law and the prophets.” From this singular *instrumentum* (as Tertullian calls it elsewhere in this treatise) the Church at Rome “drinks in her faith.”⁴⁶

When did the Church at Rome do this? Tertullian does not say. In his mind, it may be happening right now. “She **unites**” these bipartite scriptures, he writes—this may be his way of referring to their ongoing publication. This *instrumentum* is right now being published and already being used by churches on three continents: in Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Rome and Carthage.

That Tertullian can describe its origins as succinctly as he does is testimony to its current status among the “heretics” of whom and against whom he is writing. They are already familiar with this volume—they already know what is in it and who created it. Being a public document virtually everyone knows this. The only thing **not** known at that time was **which** of the

⁴⁶ Origen (185-254), a younger contemporary of Tertullian, describes this volume similarly in his Commentary on John, Book V, Chapter 6, where he alludes to the “divine Scripture” as containing “statements about Christ . . . recorded in one book, if we understand books in the more common sense. For they have been recorded in the Pentateuch and he has also been mentioned in each of the prophets and in the Psalms, and in general ‘in all the Scriptures,’ as the Savior himself says when he sends us back to the Scriptures and says, ‘Search the Scriptures for you think you have eternal life in them. And it is they that testify of me.’” Quoted from, *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, Books 1-10, Ronald E. Heine, trans. (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989).

competing one-volume Bibles already in use in the churches will win out—the truncated volume Marcion had assembled and published, or the larger one-volume codex being published right now by the church at Rome.

4 WHY WAS IT SO URGENT FOR ALL THESE SCRIPTURES TO BE IN ONE VOLUME?

*Evidence indicates alarm at the growing acceptance of a small single-volume codex published as a **replacement** for the scriptures of Judaism was a major reason for publishing a much larger one-volume codex which **included** these scriptures*

Early book-publishing in general

Before saying more about **why** a second-century conclave at Rome did what it did with its many scriptures—publish them in one-volume codices—it is helpful, I have found, to know what book-publishing **in general** was like at the time, as well as what **Christian** publishing was like. In regard to book-publishing in general at that time, I have found the remarks of Edgar J. Goodspeed especially informative. In chapter 11 of his pioneering book on early Christian publishing,⁴⁷ he presents a detailed overview of the publishing world in which Christianity emerged. The following are a few excerpts from this chapter (some of which I highlighted).

Publication is not identical with printing [Goodspeed writes]; still less is it subsequent to it. The Greeks practiced publication at least as early as the fifth century before Christ. They seem to have invented it. Printing grew out of publication, not publication out

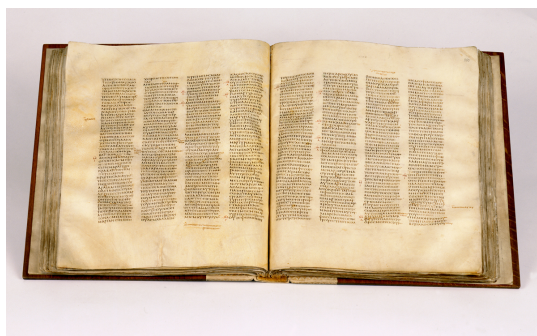
⁴⁷ Edgar J. Goodspeed, *Christianity Goes to Press* (New York: Macmillan, 1940).

of printing, and publication was practiced in Europe two thousand years before printing with movable types.

In the Middle Ages, it is true, such arts declined, but in that Graeco-Roman world which Christianity entered, publishing was at its height. It was a world of writers and of readers, of publishers, bookstores and libraries. **Never before or since, until modern times, have there been such libraries, or has the distribution of literary works been so widespread.**

In an obscure town of Roman Egypt modern excavation has discovered fragments of the works of more than thirty Greek authors—remains of the books the Greeks of that town owned and read. They had not laboriously copied out these books themselves; they were sale copies, which they had bought in bookstores . . .

And let no one suppose that these ancient books were crude and clumsy affairs. They were the work of skilled



One of the two bound volumes of Codex Sinaiticus at The British Library.

professional writers . . . There was as much difference between ordinary Greek writing, and book hands used in publication, as there is between the print in a book and your handwriting or mine, today.

Almost anyone could tell that your writing or mine is at least English, but with some Greek private hands of the first and second centuries, it takes a skilled paleographer to decide that they are Greek at all. The book writing, on the other hand, is regular, elegant, and clear as print. In fact the early printers took as their patterns the book hands of the classical manuscripts, and early printer's fonts owe most of their acknowledged distinction to that fact.

The modern printer's concern for the proportion of his column, margins, spacing of lines and all the rest is an inheritance from these ancient book designers, who were already practicing the art . . . with no little skill. Their script designs were quite as elegant as ours, and they achieved a far greater uniformity of effect by reason of the fact that they used no capitals, or rather used nothing but capitals, used no spaces between words, nor paragraphs as we understand the word, and usually no accents or breathings. Aesthetically considered these practices gave their columns a regularity and beauty ours cannot even aspire to.

Professor Hatch has argued, probably rightly, that the Romans, who did nothing by halves but everything by twelfths, dividing feet into twelve inches, and pounds into twelve ounces, also divided the line into twelve letters, and that is why the ancients called book hands "uncial" that is, with letters a twelfth of a line in width, or twelve letters to a line—which may serve to show how far the ancient publishers and their scribes carried their passion for regularity.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Goodspeed, *Christianity Goes to Press*, 26-29.

Early Christian book-publishing

Since Goodspeed wrote on this subject, scholars have continued to study this world of ancient publishing—with surprising results. One of the most surprising is their discovery that right from the start, when most writings in the culture at large were still being published on **scrolls** Christians chose to publish **their** most valued writings in “**codices**” (or “books”) instead. Ever since becoming aware of this fact scholars have wondered why.⁴⁹ In his study of this issue Harry Gamble has come up with a compelling answer. He cites evidence that Paul’s “nine letters to seven churches” were the earliest Christian scriptures to be published, and suggests the only way this could be done so that “both the number and the order of letters could be firmly established,” was to publish them **together** in a **single** scroll **or** in a **single** codex. The codex was chosen instead of the scroll, he conjectures, because of “what is commonly called ease of reference but might better be termed the capacity of the codex for *random access*, as distinct from *sequential access* offered by the roll.”

It is not easy to suppose [he continues] that a narrative like a Gospel should have first been published in a codex. A Gospel was brief enough to be easily

⁴⁹ For a review of the manuscript evidence for this innovative practice, and possible reasons, see Hurtado, *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 43-89.

contained in a roll of normal length, and as a narrative it was meant to be read from beginning to end. For this, the codex offered no advantage over the roll. It is unlikely, however, that a sequential reading was ever envisioned for the Pauline letters, save individually in their original settings. As a group they have no necessary sequence but could be and certainly were read and studied selectively. Their availability in a codex permitted easy access to any part of the collection.

The conclusion that Gamble draws from these observations is as follows: "On no other hypothesis would the unique features of the codex be so clearly an advantage as they are in the case of an edition of Paul's letters."⁵⁰ Their publication in a single codex marked a turning-point in Christian publishing. It demonstrated so successfully the usefulness of the codex for publishing Christian scriptures that it began a tradition. According to Gamble, Paul's letters were already published in this way (in a single codex) at the beginning of the second century "at the latest."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 63.

⁵¹ Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 61. D. C. Parker, *New Testament Manuscripts*, seems to agree with Gamble's "premise," as he calls it (19), and also with its importance. "This debate," he writes, "which might appear only technical, is of much wider significance because of the light it casts on a question which should be considered by every student of the New Testament: why did early Christians prefer the codex to the roll? This is a very important question, because implicit within the answer to it are observations about the role and status of the writings in the earliest Christian communities" (17).

Marcion's one-volume "Bible"

A well-known sequel to the publication of Paul's letters occurred a short time later, one that had a profound bearing on **why** a decision was made to publish not just letters of Paul in a single codex, but all of the church's scriptures. I refer to how an entrepreneurial Christian leader named Marcion **added** the Gospel of Luke, plus Paul's letter to Philemon, to the nine letters of Paul to "seven churches" in circulation at the time in a single codex, and challenged mid-second-century Christians to regard this enlarged collection of writings as **replacement scriptures** for their ancient Jewish scriptures. Did Marcion publish his proposed scriptures in a single codex as well? The huge impact his newly devised scriptures soon had is inexplicable apart from his having done so (see below). Only in this way could he have published these writings in the sequence in which **he** wanted them to be read—only in this way could he have published them with **the ease of access** that Christians had come to expect when reading Paul's letters.

Who was this man? Why did he do what he did—create and publish what many regard as the first Christian Bible? Since all copies of Marcion's Bible have been lost, we must piece together our picture of it and him from the writings of those who opposed him, such as the already mentioned writings of Tertullian. From these sources we learn that Marcion was born in

Asia Minor in the latter half of the first century.⁵² He grew up in a Christian family (some think, a Jewish-Christian family) and as an adult became a wealthy shipbuilder and theologian. He was captivated by the letters of Paul. He noted the contrast Paul drew between the grace of Christ and the Law of Moses in the scriptures of Judaism (with which he was also familiar). From his studies Marcion came to the radical conviction that there are **two Gods**—the law-obsessed God of Judaism who created this miserable world, and Jesus Christ, a God of grace who had come to rescue us **from** this world for a spirit-world in heaven.

Utterly convinced of his insights Marcion took the following decisive actions. First, he wrote a book called *Antitheses* (“Opposites”), in which he spelled out the radical differences between Jesus (the God of grace) and the God of Judaism (Creator of the world). Next, as a replacement for the scriptures of Judaism he created his Christian “Bible” consisting (as noted) of an edited version of Luke’s Gospel and ten letters of Paul (whom he regarded as the only true apostle of Jesus Christ). Then (in the 140’s) Marcion went to the Church at Rome, the leading church of the time, now that Jerusalem was destroyed. After giving its elders a large sum of money, he presented his ideas in a bid for

⁵² For a detailed reconstruction of Marcion’s life, we remain indebted to Adolf von Harnack’s research in his magnum opus, *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God* (Durham: Labyrinth Press, 1990 [original German edition, 1934]), 196-221.

their support. When his ideas were rejected and his money returned, he began disseminating his “Bible” and teachings on his own. There is substantial evidence that his efforts in this regard were amazingly successful. “Scholars conjecture,” states John Clabeaux, “that in numbers alone the Marcionites may have nearly surpassed non-Marcionites in the decades of the 160’ and 170s.”⁵³ Indications are, adds Stephen Wilson, that “during its heyday in the second century, the Marcionite church was one of the dominant forms of Christianity—and that beyond the second century its influence continued to be felt.”⁵⁴

The first large one-volume Bibles

Thus, in the second half of the second century the Christian churches of the world were theologically fractured and in crisis. Growing numbers of them rejected the scriptures of Judaism and believed as Marcion did, that a heretofore unknown God of love (in the person of Jesus Christ) had come to save them **from** the world and the law-obsessed God who created it for a spiritual home in heaven. This was the setting in which the previously discussed conclave in Rome met in mid-second century (see chapter 3). The churches opposed to Marcion were faced thereby with

⁵³ John J. Clabeaux, “Marcion,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), vol. 4, 515.

⁵⁴ Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70-170 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 208.

an unprecedented challenge—to decide what **their** scriptures were and should be.

In this light the urgency and complexity of the conclave's decisions as reported in *The Muratorian Fragment*, are a little more understandable. We begin now to understand what the *Fragment* meant by its reference to the "heresy of Marcion" (line 65)—not only were Marcion's teachings spreading like wild fire, but his Bible was as well. In that light the complexity of the conclave's deliberations take on a new specificity. We now know why this conclave devoted the careful attention it did to Paul's nine letters to seven churches. These nine letters, already circulating in most churches in a single codex, were now the centerpiece of Marcion's increasingly popular Bible. We now understand as well why certain letters of Paul on the conclave's list of accepted scriptures were **not** in Marcion's Bible. "Paul's" two letters to Timothy and one to Titus are said to be "held sacred in the esteem of the Church catholic for the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline" (lines 61-63). Reading them in the light of the phenomenal success of Marcion's movement reveals them to contain the most directly anti-Marcion teachings of the conclave's entire collection. Marcion taught there were two Gods (the Creator and Jesus)—these letters state unequivocally that "there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). Marcion taught that law is a curse—these letters state with equal finality that "the law is good, if one uses it legitimately" (1 Tim. 1:8f.).

Marcion taught that the world would be destroyed and only a few would be saved—these letters state: “we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people . . . (1 Tim. 4:10; Titus 2:11).

Marcion wanted Christians everywhere to get rid of their Jewish scriptures—these letters teach: “**All** [Jewish] scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness . . . (2 Tim. 3:16).⁵⁵

We can also understand better now why participants of this conclave were so sharply focused on Paul’s teaching about the “order (or plan) of the Scriptures [of Judaism], and . . . that Christ is their principle (or, main theme)” (lines 44-46). This above all was their fear—that Marcion’s nullification of their (Jewish) “Scriptures” would result not only in the loss of these scriptures but of the church’s most prized possession: Jesus Christ, the “principle (or, main theme)” of those “Scriptures.” Their burning conviction (contra Marcion) was that Jesus was the “**Creator’s Christ**” (as Tertullian repeatedly referred to him in his treatise *Against Marcion*)—and that in his first and second coming he (together with his followers) would transform the world in accordance

⁵⁵ 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus address the issues posed by Marcion so directly that some believe they were drafted for this purpose (see R. Joseph Hoffmann, *Marcion: On the Restitution of Christianity; An Essay on the Development of Radical Paulinist Theology in the Second Century*, ch. 9, “The Marcionite Error in the ‘Pastoral Epistles’” [Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1984], 181-305).

with scriptural prophecies. **In this context, the conclave's decision to publish their ancient (Jewish) and newer (Christian) "scriptures" in a single codex was imperative and virtually inevitable.** The precedent for doing so had been established fifty years earlier, with the publication of Paul's letters in a single codex. Now that Marcion had created his own one-volume Bible with these same letters as the centerpiece (as a replacement for the scriptures of Judaism)—the churches opposing Marcion had little or no option but to do the same. They too would have to publish **their** many scriptures in a one-volume Bible. Only in this way could they be read and studied in an arrangement in which **they** wanted them to be read and studied. Only in a single codex could "random access" be afforded to this entire collection. Only in a one-volume Bible could this large body of writings be rightly interpreted as pointing—**from start to finish**—to the advent of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of ancient hopes for the renovation of the **created** world (God's kingdom come **on earth** as in heaven).

5 WHAT WERE THE FIRST LARGE ONE-VOLUME BIBLES DESIGNED TO DO?

*A closer look at the design of this **large** codex reveals that it included **all** the writings in the **smaller** codex, but in a way that refuted and warned against the interpretation of the writings in the smaller codex that was being promulgated at that time.*

I want to take a closer look now at the **design** of these first large one-volume codices, for this in itself says much regarding what their purpose was.⁵⁶ To do this we need to recall what the contents of these first large Bibles were, as reflected in their oldest extant codices, Codex Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus (see chart on p. 12). As noted in chapter 1, the minor differences between these three ancient codices give the impression of their being published at different times and places, but of having a common tradition. In the preceding chapters we learned that this “common tradition” can be traced back to a mid-second century conclave in Rome. Through the centuries, large Bibles of this type have continued to be different in minor ways. Yet, as also noted, their oldest prototypes are remarkably alike, reflecting the mind-set and intentions of those who created them.

⁵⁶ For an expanded version of the following comments, see *How the Bible Came to Be*, ch. 7, “The Resultant Form and Focus of the Church’s Canon-codex,” 55-75.

The Jewish Scriptures of the first one-volume Bibles

Each of these large codices opens with a substantial collection of older Jewish scriptures. These opening books are referred to in the added “apostolic scriptures” in a manner customary among Jews: as “the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 5:17), or simply as “scriptures” or “holy scriptures” (2 Tim. 3:14f.). Roger Beckwith suggests that the minor differences in their list and arrangement in the three oldest codices reflect “the reading habits of the early church” at the time and place they were published.⁵⁷ The significance of these differences should not be exaggerated however. From Genesis through Kings, except for Ruth, there are only minor variations from the list in Jewish Bibles (ancient and today). It is chiefly after Kings that variations appear, and for obvious reasons. Before being transcribed in one-volume codices each of these scriptures was on a separate scroll. Transcribing them in a single codex required that decisions be made not only about what books to include but in what order. Unlike the scrolls of Genesis to Kings (which tell a continuous story), the scrolls **after** Kings, offer few (if any) clues to what their order or position in the collection is or should be, or if this matters. To know about this (or even **what** scrolls were included), Jewish

⁵⁷ Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church, and Its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 195.

communities were dependent on oral or written traditions, such as the rabbinic teaching cited in *Baba Bathra* 14b of

the Babylonian Talmud specifying what the **order** of the books is (see chart, first column). The **list** of scrolls was not in question, but it seems that uncertainty existed among the scattered Jewish communities about the **arrangement**. It is thus hardly surprising that precise

SCRIPTURES IN OLDEST CODICES COMPARED WITH JEWISH BIBLE

Jewish Scriptures*	Sinaiticus	Vaticanus	Alexandrinus
Genesis	Genesis (Incomplete)	Genesis (1:1-46:29 missing)	Genesis
Exodus		Exodus	Exodus
Leviticus		Leviticus	Leviticus
Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers
Deuteronomy		Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy
Joshua		Joshua	Joshua
Judges		Judges	Judges
Samuel		Ruth	Ruth
Kings		1-4 Kings	1-4 Kings
	1-2 Chronicles	1-2 Chronicles	1-2 Chronicles
	1-2 Esdras	1-2 Esdra	Twelve
	Esther	Psalms	Isaiah
Jeremiah	Tobit	Proverbs	Jeremiah
Ezekiel	Judith	Ecclesiastes	Baruch
Isaiah	1-2 Maccabees	Song of Solomon	Lamentations
The Twelve		Isaiah	Epistle of Jeremiah
Ruth	Isaiah	Job	Ezekiel
Psalms	Jeremiah	Wisdom	Daniel
Job	Lamentations	Sirach	Daniel
Proverbs	Twelve	Esther	Esther
Ecclesiastes		Judith	Tobit
Song of Songs	(Incomplete)	Tobit	Judith
Lamentations		Twelve	1-2 Esdras
Daniel	Psalms	Isaiah	1-4 Maccabees
Esther	Proverbs	Jeremiah	Psalms
Ezra-Nehemiah	Ecclesiastes	Baruch	Job
Chronicles	Song of Solomon	Lamentations	Proverbs
	Wisdom	Epistle of Jeremiah	Ecclesiastes
	Sirach	Ezekiel	Song of Solomon
	Job	Daniel	Wisdom
			Sirach
			Psalms of Solomon
			Solomon

* Order and list as specified in the Talmud (*Baba Bathra* 14b).

knowledge regarding **these** matters was also lacking among the Gentile churches of this period.

As a consequence when assembling and publishing these first Bibles, each community where this was done was more or less on its own and had to do what it thought, best. Even so, the influence of the older Jewish arrangement is still visible. Thus, in both Codex Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus three of the prophetic scrolls (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the Twelve [minor prophets]) are still located in the **middle** of the collection **prior to** the section called "Writings" in the Jewish scriptures (Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Job, etc.), rather than at the end as they are in Codex Vaticanus. Also in Codex Alexandrinus 1-2 Esdras (Ezra-Nehemiah) come **after** the prophetic scrolls (as is also the case in Jewish Scriptures), rather than after Kings and Chronicles, as is the case in Codex Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.

This lack of precise uniformity regarding list and arrangement of these Jewish Scriptures in the three oldest codices accords with what is known of the church's goals in transcribing them into single codices. This was not done with the idea of creating a perfect Bible with a fixed list and arrangement of its books. Rather what was intended was making whatever Jewish scrolls some of the churches had in hand and were using, as accessible as possible to as many churches as possible, as quickly as possible. **Since these older "scriptures" were the very ones that Marcion was challenging the churches to get rid of, publishing them quickly in this more accessible format was a forceful theological statement in its**

own right: these older scriptures, long read and used in the churches—no matter how uncertain the details of their list and arrangement—were, are, and henceforth shall be the scriptures of the church (contra Marcion)!

“Apostolic scriptures” of the first one-volume Bibles

A similar goal was at work in the formation of the collection of “apostolic scriptures” that were added to the Jewish scriptures in the first large Bibles. Marcion had assembled a much smaller collection of these same “apostolic scriptures” **by themselves**, independent of the Jewish scriptures (in fact, as a replacement for these older scriptures). It seems evident, therefore, that those who assembled a similar, but much larger collection of “apostolic scriptures” (then had it bound together in a single codex with their Jewish scriptures) were likewise registering a defiant “no” not alone to Marcion’s call for getting rid of the Jewish scriptures, but also to his newly formed collection of “apostolic scriptures,” as if to say: “Not that tiny Marcionite Bible, but **this** one, with all of these Jewish scriptures plus this enlarged collection of “apostolic scriptures” — **this** is our Bible.”

Thus, **both** actions (that of keeping their ancient Jewish scriptures, and that of adding a greatly enlarged body of apostolic writings) were facets of a single action. Both were done in conscious reaction to initiatives Marcion had taken. The **form** and **content**

of this now-expanded body of apostolic writings is thus (in my opinion) a thoughtful response to the Marcionite challenge.⁵⁸ With this in mind I want to take a closer look now at **Marcion's smaller Bible** and the reasoning behind it, and then see if (or how) the large Bible that was devised to combat it does in fact do that. The more precise list and arrangement of the writings in Marcion's Bible are evident from Tertullian's *Against Marcion*, Book 5, where they are discussed as he found them. As listed there, they are: Luke's Gospel, followed by Paul's letters to seven churches in the following arrangement: Galatians, 1-2 Corinthians, Romans, 1-2 Thessalonians, Laodiceans (Ephesians), Colossians, Philippians — plus Paul's letter to Philemon.

Why had Marcion settled for such an extremely small set of scriptures? His thinking in **this** regard is reflected in the so-called "Marcionite Prologues" to Paul's letters, present in all branches of the Latin Vulgate and thought by some to be a surviving

⁵⁸ David Carr, in a review of this issue, in "Canonization in the Context of Community: An Outline of the Formation of the Tanak and the Christian Bible," in *A Gift of God in Due Season: Essays on Scripture and Community in Honor of James A. Sanders*, ed. Richard D. Weis and David M. Carr (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), has come to a similar conclusion. He writes that while many factors "contributed to the veneration of a class of Christian writings in the early church *as part of/alongside* its Jewish heritage, the decisive impetus for definition of a widespread, clearly defined two-Testament Christian canon seems to have been the struggle with heresy, particularly Marion's mid-second-century proposal to substitute a Christian Gospel and Apostle . . . for the Jewish Torah and Prophets" (60-1).

remnant from Marcion's Bible.⁵⁹ If so, they afford a rare glimpse into Marcion's thinking from sources emanating from Marcion himself (or those close to him). In these Prologues, Paul is portrayed as the one true Apostle who alone defended "true evangelical faith" against attack and corruption by "false Apostles" of "the sect of the Jewish Law." In the Marcionite Prologue to Romans, for example, we read: "These [Romans] were reached beforehand by false Apostles, and under the name of our Lord Jesus Christ had been brought in to the Law and the Prophets." The Prologue to Corinthians makes a similar point. The Corinthians were misled by "false Apostles . . . brought in by the sect of the Jewish Law," but it was the Apostle Paul who recalled them "to true Evangelical wisdom" The Prologue to Galatians characterizes Paul similarly as the Apostle who recalled the Galatians "to the faith of the truth" after they had been tempted "by false Apostles." In short, of all the Apostles, Marcion believed Paul alone was a truthful witness to what had been revealed through Jesus Christ. All others were "false apostles" because of their devotion to the Law and the Prophets. This was the core conviction underlying Marcion's Bible and the reason why it included only Luke's Gospel with Paul's letters attached, and nothing else.

⁵⁹ For text and translation of the "Marcionite Prologues," see John Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament: An Essay in the Early History of the Canon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 169-71. Knox believes they go back to the second century, if not to Marcion himself.

When, therefore, comparing Marcion's small set of writings with the much larger Bible created to oppose it (as its books appear in the oldest codices), what becomes evident right away is how similar the two "Bibles" are in certain respects. **Luke's Gospel and Paul's letters are found in both collections and in that order** (Luke first, Paul's letters second). **But of course, the larger Bible is larger by far.** Why is the larger Bible **so much larger**? In this larger Bible the Gospel of Luke (in Marcion's Bible) was **enclosed**

WRITINGS IN MARCION'S BIBLE	SCRIPTURES IN OLDEST CODICES
	All the Scriptures of Judaism
Gospel	Gospels Matthew Mark Luke John
Luke	Acts and Seven "Catholic Letters" Acts James 1-2 Peter 1,2,3 John Jude
Paul's Letters to "Seven Churches" Galatians 1-2 Corinthians Romans 1-2 Thessalonians Ephesians Colossians Philippians	Paul's Letters to "Seven Churches" Romans 1-2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1-2 Thessalonians
Additional Letter	Additional Letters
Philemon	Hebrews 1-2 Timothy Titus Philemon Revelation

within three additional Gospels (Matthew, Mark, **Luke**, John). Then, in the final letter-section of this larger Bible (in the oldest codices) Paul's nine letters to "seven churches" were grouped together (as they are

in Marcion's Bible), and two things done with them. First, they were rearranged as follows: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians,⁶⁰ and then these nine letters (plus Philemon) **were also enclosed** within a greatly enlarged body of letters and books (see chart on previous page). At the **forefront** of this now expanded letter-collection were added Acts, plus seven catholic letters (James; 1 & 2 Peter; 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude). Then, **after** Paul's nine letters to "seven churches" the book of Hebrews was added, plus three new letters of Paul not in Marcion's Bible: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus—and then Philemon and Revelation.⁶¹ Finally (in this larger Bible), this greatly enlarged end-section of Apostolic Scriptures was added to a full collection of Jewish Scriptures (then in use in the churches), **so now the books in Marcion's small Bible were part of an enormously enlarged scriptural corpus whose narrative extended all the way back to the world's origins, as recounted in Genesis.**

In summary, in this greatly enlarged Bible the books in Marcion's small Bible (Luke and ten letters of Paul), instead of being rejected, are taken up and re-

⁶⁰ From this rearrangement we get a sense of what motivated those who did this, and in what order **they** meant these letters to be read, so as not to misinterpret them.

⁶¹ For evidence that this is the arrangement in all but five of the extant manuscripts of the first seven centuries, see Trobisch, *First Edition*, 21-34.

contextualized. This suggests that it was in this way, primarily—**through re-contextualization**—that those who created this enlarged Bible sought to refute Marcion’s Bible and teaching wherever they had gained a foothold or were threatening to do so. This re-contextualization of Paul’s letters to “seven churches” may be diagrammed as follows:

<i>The Church’s Enlarged Canon-codex</i>				
The Scriptures of Judaism	The Gospels and Acts of all the Apostles	The General Epistles	Paul’s letters to “seven churches”	Additional letters, and Revelation

That this was in fact the intention of those created this enlarged Bible (i.e. that Paul’s letters would be re-contextualized and therefore less prone to being misunderstood as Marcion was interpreting them) is made known in a variety of ways, but most explicitly by means of a strategically placed warning to its readers at the end of 2 Peter. Here in the middle of seven “general letters” (that are located in all but one of the oldest codices **prior** to Paul’s letters) is a warning to be on guard against misinterpreting them in the “lawless” manner that was right then happening (2 Peter 3:17). When it is realized that Paul’s letters to seven churches were **already published** in Marcion’s Bible—and how they were being misinterpreted by him—the urgency of this warning becomes evident.

This warning is the only one of its kind in the entire Bible explicitly alerting its readers to the dangers of misinterpreting it. It points two ways: back to the preceding “scriptures” in the codex (“the rest of scriptures”) and forward to “all” Paul’s letters, which follow (2 Peter 3:15f.). This warning has important implications for how this entire body of scriptures is to be read.⁶² **To understand this large one-volume codex aright, this warning implies, attention must be paid to the collection as a whole and not just to individual books, and, more specifically, to the theological dangers involved in understanding Paul’s letters to seven churches along the lines advanced by Marcion.** Instead of “the rest of scriptures” being understood in the light of these letters, Paul’s letters to seven churches should be read in the light of the “rest of scriptures” — especially the scriptures immediately preceding and following them.⁶³

⁶² David R. Nienhuis, *Not By Paul Alone*, captures the uniqueness of this entire letter when he writes that, “2 Peter is not simply a pseudepigraph, but a *canonically motivated* pseudepigraph. It is a document that was created . . . to enable the process of canon formation according to the particular theological needs of his ecclesial readership” (18).

⁶³ For further thoughts in this regard, see *How the Bible Came to Be*, 62-75, 109-113.

EPILOGUE: READING THE ONE-VOLUME BIBLE IN THE LIGHT OF ITS ORIGINS

The Bible is a mystery to many. It was initially published without a preface explaining what it is or how to interpret it—but reading it in the light of its origins can help interpret it in line with the thoughts and intentions of those who created it.⁶⁴

Most readers of the Bible today are not aware that the warning in 2 Peter 3:14-18 even exists. Why? 2 Peter is no longer at the forefront of the letter-collection of many Bibles. Moreover, the warning is rather vague. It refers to Paul's letters but does not specify what they are or **how** they were being misinterpreted. Most readers assume it does not apply to them. Does it apply?

Let us recall some of the ways Paul's nine letters seven churches were being misinterpreted at the time the Bible was created.

- **Paul's sharp contrast between law and grace** was mistakenly taken to mean that the Jewish scriptures are of little or no value and its laws are of no relevance for our "salvation"—it is by grace alone we are saved. Does this apply?

⁶⁴ The following is a slightly modified excerpt from the Blenheim Bible Study, Course #5, *New Testament Letters and Revelation*, Session Six (New Dundee: Blenheim Bible, 2011).

- **Paul's sharp contrast between the love revealed in Christ and the judicial power of God revealed in the Scriptures of Judaism** was taken to mean that love and justice cannot coexist in the same God—it is non-judicial love alone that matters. Does this apply?
- **The sharp contrast Paul drew between his present life in Christ and his former life in Judaism** was mistakenly interpreted as meaning that Judaism and Christianity are different religions—Christians have (and should have) nothing to do with Judaism. Does this apply?
- **The stark contrast Paul drew between life on earth and life in "heaven" with Christ** was mistakenly taken to mean that Christian hope is solely about personal salvation in a spirit-world totally different from this one, not about God's kingdom coming on earth as in heaven? Does this apply?

Are we in danger of interpreting Paul's nine letters to seven churches (and hence the Bible as a whole) in a similarly distorted way? If so, what can be done about it? What is needed to heed the warning in 2 Peter 3:14-18 **today**?

The warning is directed to readers of "scriptures" who are in danger of losing hope for the world's

renovation and salvation because of distorted interpretations of Paul's letters.

- In order to heed this warning, readers of the Bible will need to know the warning exists and how important it was at the time it was issued (because of wrong teachings being propagated in Paul's name).
- They will need to learn about what those wrong teachings were and how the Bible was created to combat them—and in what manner it does in fact combat them.
- In other words, in order to heed this warning today readers of the Bible will have to do (in one way or another) what we have attempted to do in this booklet: learn about when and why one-volume Bibles were initially created.

The Bible is a mystery to many. There was originally no preface explaining what it is or how to interpret it—**but it does have this warning** which if taken seriously can help interpret the Bible in light of the thoughts and intentions of those who were inspired to create it.

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“The oldest large one-volume Bibles, Codex Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, are usually dated to the fourth century. Many think this is when one-volume Bibles of this kind were first published. A closer look at these Bibles raises doubts about this assumption.”

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“Constantine’s letter in 332 CE requesting ‘fifty volumes . . . of the Divine Scriptures’ for the new churches of Constantinople suggests a taken-for-granted tradition of having Bibles like this in every church.”

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“One-volume Bibles of this size and complexity do not get created, accepted and used without someone, somewhere taking the initiative. Ancient texts point to a conclave in Rome in the middle of the second century as the setting in which this occurred.”

Excerpts from *A Defining Moment: When, Where, and Why the Christian Scriptures Were Initially Published in a Single Volume—A Critique of Prevailing Views*.

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