

2 PETER 3:2, THE APOSTOLATE, AND A BI-COVENANTAL CANON

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Abstract: *While scholarship on the origins of the New Testament canon has typically focused on reception history, more attention is needed on “intrinsic” factors that may have determined the canon’s shape and scope. This article explores one of these factors, namely the curious, early and widespread juxtaposition of the terms “prophets” and “apostles” and the way that juxtaposition anticipates the bi-covenantal nature of the Christian canon as both Old and New Testament. The combination of these terms is traced through the New Testament sources themselves and into the second century up to Irenaeus.*

Key words: *New Testament canon, intrinsic factors, bi-covenantal canon, prophets and apostles, 2 Peter 3:2*

After nearly two thousand years, the bi-covenantal nature of the Christian canon—an OT delivered by the prophets and a NT about Jesus delivered by the apostles—seems rather unremarkable. Indeed, this structure is so ingrained in the Christian concept of canon that we rarely reflect upon its origins. It almost seems like it was inevitable.

However, when we do reflect upon this structure, we come to realize that its origins are not explained merely by appealing to the decisions of the later, post-apostolic church. Rather, I shall argue here that this bi-covenantal infrastructure—i.e., a two-part revelatory deposit from the prophets and apostles—was woven into the theological fabric of Christianity from the beginning. And therefore, the bi-covenantal canon that we have today is simply the “logical materialization”¹ of a deep theological paradigm embedded in the DNA of the earliest Christian movement. Put simply, this feature of canon is intrinsic rather than extrinsic.²

Needless to say, intrinsic features of canon have received comparably little attention among modern scholars.³ Indeed, for many scholars, canon (by definition) is only an extrinsic phenomenon. It is a creation of the later church, something

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¹ This phrase is from F. Bovon, “The Canonical Structure of Gospel and Apostle,” in *The Canon Debate* (ed. L. M. McDonald and J. A. Sanders; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 522. Bovon argues that the NT itself has a double structure—Gospel and Apostle—that itself was built into the theological heritage of early Christianity.

² For an exploration and comparison of the intrinsic and extrinsic models of canon, see Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013).

³ Kruger, *Question of Canon*, 47–78.

forced on a Christian movement that neither anticipated nor desired one.⁴ Brevard Childs describes this approach: “It is assumed by many that the formation of a canon is a late, ecclesiastical activity, external to the biblical literature itself, which was subsequently imposed on the writings.”⁵ Thus, for the extrinsic approach, canon is “simply a post-apostolic development.”⁶

Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that most studies of canon are focused almost exclusively on *reception history*. The standard avenues of research tend to dominate: rehearsing patristic testimony,⁷ exploring the development of manuscript collections,⁸ and even surveying the church’s earliest canonical lists.⁹ And such research is fundamental to account for the emergence of what we now call the NT.

But there is more to the story of the NT canon than these avenues of research, as important as they are. Beyond the question of the *when* and the *how*, is also the more fundamental question of *why*. Why do we have a NT canon at all? Or, more particularly, why do we have a NT canon that looks like the one we have? And to answer those questions, we must be willing to consider how the canon may have been shaped by “the internal dynamics of the Christian faith.”¹⁰ Or, as David Meade has argued, we must consider that the NT canon was formed not just by later ecclesiastical pressures but also by “elements inherent within [Christianity] itself.”¹¹ If so, then we might expect the “seeds” of the canon to be visible already in the earliest Christian sources, though it would be many years before they would grow and sprout.

A number of these intrinsic factors have been explored by others, but there is still more work to be done. The purpose of this chapter is to take a modest step

⁴ Christopher Evans, *Is “Holy Scripture” Christian?* (London: SCM, 1971); L. M. McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 426; Loren L. Johns, “Was ‘Canon’ Ever God’s Will?,” in *Jewish and Christian Scriptures: The Function of “Canonical” and “Non-Canonical” Religious Texts* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth and Lee McDonald; London: T&T Clark, 2010), 41–45.

⁵ B. S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (London: SCM, 1984), 21.

⁶ Childs, *New Testament as Canon*, 12.

⁷ Patristic testimony is the primary focus of the standard treatments of canon: B. M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987); Lee McDonald, *The Formation of the Biblical Canon*, vol 2: *The New Testament: Its Authority and Canonicity* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017); F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988); H. Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); and even T. Zahn, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons* (Erlangen: A. Deichert, 1888).

⁸ D. Trobisch, *The First Edition of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); L. W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); T. C. Skeat, “The Length of the Standard Papyrus Roll and the Cost Advantage of the Codex,” *ZPE* 45 (1982): 169–75; J. K. Elliott, “Manuscripts, the Codex, and the Canon,” *JSNT* 63 (1996): 105–22; and Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 233–59.

⁹ For the most up-to-date discussion of lists, see Edmon L. Gallagher and John D. Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹⁰ E. Ferguson, “Factors Leading to the Selection and Closure of the New Testament Canon,” in *The Canon Debate* (ed. L. M. McDonald and J. A. Sanders; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 295.

¹¹ D. Meade, “Ancient Near Eastern Apocalypticism and the Origins of the New Testament Canon of Scripture,” in *The Bible as a Human Witness: Hearing the Word of God Through Historically Dissimilar Traditions* (ed. Randall Heskett and Brian Irwin; LHOTS 469; London: T&T Clark, 2010), 304.

forward in the exploration of yet another one of these factors, namely the curious, early and widespread juxtaposition of the terms “prophets” and “apostles” and the way that juxtaposition anticipates the bi-covenantal nature of the Christian canon as both Old and New Testament.¹²

I. THE THEOLOGICAL STRUCTURE FOR A BI-COVENANTAL CANON

We will proceed first by exploring the place of this bi-covenantal infrastructure in our NT sources—beginning with 2 Pet 3:2 as an archetype. Then we will show how the same pattern continues into second-century patristic writings up to Irenaeus (though our sample must remain limited for space reasons).

Although the terms “prophets” and “apostles” form the pillars of this infrastructure, some writers also employ other terminology. The pattern can be laid out as follows:

First stage of revelation: OT *prophets*

Second stage of revelation: *apostles* who delivered the teachings of Jesus (or the “gospel”)

Thus, we will often find the term “prophets” on the one side, and an interplay of terms like “apostles,” “gospel” and “Jesus” on the other. The terminology of the second stage varies dependent on whether the author’s emphasis was on the *medium* of the message (“apostles”), the *content* of the message (“Jesus,” “gospel,” etc.), or even both (“apostles who delivered the gospel”).

1. 2 Peter 3:1–2. When it comes to its implications for canon, it is unfortunate that 2 Pet 3:1–2 has so often been overlooked. In a remarkable fashion, it juxtaposes “prophets” and “apostles” as the two divinely sanctioned sources of revelation for the early Christian movement, thereby providing a theological rationale for a bi-covenantal canon:

This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy *prophets* and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your *apostles*.¹³

Ταύτην ἤδη, ἀγαπητοί, δευτέραν ὑμῖν γράφω ἐπιστολὴν ἐν αἷς διεγείρω ὑμῶν ἐν ὑπομνήσει τὴν εἰλικρινῆ διάνοιαν μνησθῆναι τῶν προειρημένων ῥημάτων ὑπὸ

¹² This chapter is indebted to, and will be building on, D. Farkasfalvy, “Prophets and Apostles: The Conjunction of the Two Terms before Irenaeus,” in *Texts and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and the Early Church Fathers* (ed. W. E. March; San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1980), 109–34. For a helpful look at the implications of a bi-covenantal canon on the practice of biblical theology, see Christopher Seitz, *The Character of Christian Scripture: The Significance of a Two-Testament Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

¹³ NASB. All other citations are from the ESV unless otherwise noted. All instances of emphasis are my own unless otherwise noted.

τῶν ἁγίων προφητῶν καὶ τῆς τῶν ἀποστόλων ὑμῶν ἐντολῆς τοῦ κυρίου καὶ σωτήρος.

Several observations about this passage are in order:

a. *Two-part revelation.* Fundamental to this passage is that authoritative Christian revelation is found in a two-part source. There is little doubt that the “words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets” (τῶν προειρημένων ῥημάτων ὑπὸ τῶν ἁγίων προφητῶν) refers to OT writings either in part or in whole.¹⁴ Then our author mentions a second, parallel source of revelation, namely the “commandment of the Lord” (ἐντολῆς τοῦ κυρίου) spoken by “your apostles” (τῶν ἀποστόλων ὑμῶν). It is noteworthy that this two-part authority includes an obvious older half—“words spoken beforehand”—as well as an obvious newer half—the apostolically-mediated words of (about) Jesus. One might be forgiven if they see a precursor here to a future “old” and “new” Testament.

Of course, it should be observed that this Petrine juxtaposition of prophet and apostle as a two-part revelatory source is not first encountered in 3:2. The reader would have already witnessed this same phenomenon two chapters earlier as the προφητικὸν λόγον (1:19–21) was viewed as parallel to (and supportive of) the apostolic testimony (1:16–18).¹⁵ And, as we shall observe momentarily, the author does this yet again in 2 Pet 3:15–16.

b. *Authority of the apostles.* This passage presents the apostles as the designated medium by which one accesses the teachings of (and about) Jesus. Thus, the authority of Christ and the authority of the apostles are tightly connected. This connection is reinforced by the curious “double possessive genitive”¹⁶ in the second clause of verse 2. The commandment (τῆς ... ἐντολῆς) mentioned here is both the commandment “of the apostles” (τῶν ἀποστόλων) and also the commandment “of the Lord” (τοῦ κυρίου) at the same time.¹⁷ Bigg even suggested that the author meant the final phrase as an afterthought, “the commandment of your apostles, or rather, I should say, of the Lord.”¹⁸ Similarly, Kelly argued that it should be rendered, “the commandment of your apostles, viz. that of the Lord.”¹⁹ Thus, we have no reason to think the singular “commandment” refers to a particular saying of

¹⁴ R. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (WBC 50; Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 287; P. H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 260. Whether the author has in mind a portion of the OT (parts that perhaps deal with eschatological judgment—e.g. Isa 5:18–20; Jer 5:12–24; Ezek 12:22; Amos 9:10) as opposed to the OT in its entirety is not relevant for our argument here.

¹⁵ Davids, *2 Peter and Jude*, 260.

¹⁶ Michael Green, *The Second Epistle of Peter and the Epistle of Jude* (INTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 124.

¹⁷ The overlap between the words of Christ and the words of the apostle is made even more vivid by a later textual variant switching the ὑμῶν to ἡμῶν (ψ, 614, 623, 630, 1505, 1852, 2298, 2464), thus allowing the KJV to translate the clause as, “the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior.”

¹⁸ Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1978), 290.

¹⁹ J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (HNTC; New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 354.

Jesus, but is more likely “the substance of the Christian faith proclaimed by the apostles.”²⁰

The fact that apostolic teaching bore the authority of Jesus himself can be confirmed by a number of other NT passages.²¹ But it is most aptly demonstrated in a statement elsewhere by Paul where he declares, “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord (κυρίου ἐντολή)” (1 Cor 14:37).²² Here is yet another instance, along with 2 Pet 3:2, where the words of an apostle (in this case, written words) are said to have the authority of a “command of the Lord.”²³ Remarkably, 1 Cor 14:37 even uses κυρίου ἐντολή, nearly the identical Greek construction as 2 Pet 3:2.

c. *Access to the apostles.* Another noteworthy feature of this passage is that the author presumes that his audience is familiar with a plurality of apostles (how many is unclear), and, even more, that they have had (and maybe still have) access to the teaching of these apostles. Indeed, one cannot “remember” (μνησθῆναι) teaching they have not received.²⁴ Of course, this raises difficult questions about the precise medium (oral or written) by which the audience received this apostolic teaching. It is worth observing, however, that our author, just a few verses later, expressly states the medium by which the audience received at least one apostle’s teaching. We are told that the audience knew the teachings of “our beloved brother Paul” (3:15) and that they knew it in *written* form: “Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him as he does in all his letters” (v.16).

²⁰ D. J. Harrington, *Jude and 2 Peter* (SP 15; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 281–82; cf. Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 312–13; Davids, *2 Peter and Jude*, 261. The singular “commandment” appears also in 2 Pet 2:21 and Bauckham argues that it refers to the larger “body of [Christian] ethical teaching” (*Jude, 2 Peter*, 278). One should also note curious parallels in 1 Cor 14:37, 1 Tim 6:14, and Polycarp, *Phil.* 6.3, where “commandment” (or a variant thereof) refers to the collective apostolic teaching about Jesus.

²¹ Matt 10:14, 20; Mark 3:14–15; John 20:21; Acts 10:41–42; Gal 1:1–12. For more on the apostles in early Christianity, see E. Ferguson, “The Appeal to Apostolic Authority in the Early Centuries,” *ResQ* 50 (2008): 49–62; John Howard Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007); Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 12–54; and Andrew C. Clark, “Apostleship: Evidence from the New Testament and Early Christian Literature,” *VE* 19 (1989): 49–82.

²² Christian Stettler, “The ‘Command of the Lord’ in 1 Cor 14:37: A Saying of Jesus?,” *Bib* 87 (2006): 42–51, argues that the “command of the Lord” here is a reference to an actual saying of Jesus. However, there is no command of Jesus in the immediate context to which Paul could be referring. Moreover, elsewhere in 1 Corinthians Paul is clear when he refers to a saying of Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor 11:23–25).

²³ Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), speaking of this passage, observe that “[Paul] is conscious that what he says does not come from himself; he is the mouthpiece of Christ” (327).

²⁴ The term “remember” need not imply oral sources because the term is also applied to the OT prophets. For more on memory in early Christianity, see D. C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010); and W. Kelber and S. Byrskog, eds., *Jesus in Memory: Traditions in Oral and Scribal Perspectives* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009).

Indeed, in a stunning turn, the author even proceeds to place Paul's letters alongside the "other Scriptures" (v. 16), a term normally reserved for OT books.²⁵ Once again, we see that our author recognizes a two-fold source of revelation: apostolic writings (in this case, Paul's) and the "other Scriptures" (a clear reference to the OT). Both sources are Scripture, but they are divided into two distinct halves.

It should also be observed that just one verse earlier, our author also referred to another written apostolic text, namely his previous letter: "This is now ... the second letter I am writing to you" (3:1).²⁶ The fact that written apostolic records are mentioned in both 3:1 and 3:15, "shows that both groups (not only the prophets) ... were remembered through written records."²⁷ But even if one insists that 2 Pet 3:2 only has the oral proclamation of the apostles in view, this passage is still a remarkable anticipation of the *future* bi-covenantal structure of the Christian canon. Indeed, Farkasfalvy argued that 2 Pet 3:2 "appears to sketch a theology of Canon, or, as I prefer to call it, a theology of the 'pre-Canon' or 'proto-Canon.'"²⁸

2. *Other NT writings.* There is little doubt that the canonical implications of 2 Pet 3:2 have been largely overlooked due to the widespread conviction it is a second-century text.²⁹ But even if that were the case, most date a pseudonymous 2 Peter to the first quarter of the second century (c. 100–125), making this passage still a very early data point for the emergence of the NT canon.³⁰ Moreover, there are other NT texts that offer a similar peek at a bi-covenantal canonical structure. Even if the precise terms "prophet" and "apostle" are not used, these passages still reflect the same two-fold source for Christian revelation.³¹

a. *Heb 1:1–2; 2:3.* The opening verses of the book of Hebrews are definitively focused on the subject of word-revelation—"God spoke" (v. 1).³² And when the author reflects upon how God has spoken, he sets forth (once again) a twofold structure involving an older stage and a newer stage: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb 1:1–2a). The first and older stage of revelation is identified explicitly with the "prophets" (προφήταις) who spoke "long ago" (πάλαι).

²⁵ Meade refers to this as "a significant milestone in Christian thought" ("Ancient Near Eastern Apocalypticism," 318).

²⁶ Kelly argues that 3:1 itself is "evidence of the emergence of a NT canon" (*Epistles of Peter and Jude*, 354).

²⁷ Farkasfalvy, "Prophets and Apostles," 120.

²⁸ Farkasfalvy, "Prophets and Apostles," 120.

²⁹ For an overview of 2 Peter's authorship, see M. J. Kruger, "The Authenticity of 2 Peter," *JETS* 42 (1999): 645–71.

³⁰ See C. E. B. Cranfield, *I & II Peter and Jude: Introduction and Commentary* (Torch Bible Commentaries; London: SCM, 1960), 149; J. B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. Jude and the Second Epistle of St. Peter* (London: Macmillan, 1907), cxxvii; Kelly, *Epistles of Peter and Jude*, 237; Harrington, *Jude and 2 Peter*, 237.

³¹ A number of passages juxtapose apostles and NT prophets, but we will not be examining those here (e.g. Eph 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28). It is worth noting, however, that patristic sources often interpreted these passages as referring to OT prophets (e.g. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 4.21; Tertullian, *Mar.* 5.17). In the Reformation era, so did J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 243.

³² P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 35–37; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 45–46.

Undoubtedly, the readers are familiar with these prophets through the writings of the OT Scriptures.³³ Then, the text offers a second, newer source of revelation, “in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son.” There are two channels of revelation because there are two eschatological epochs—the former times on the one hand, and the fullness of time on the other.³⁴ As for the message of salvation which the Son has spoken, the author informs us a few verses later that “it was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God bore witness by signs and wonders” (Heb 2:3–4a). There is little doubt that “those who heard” refers to the apostles (cf. Luke 1:2), those with the standing to “attest” (ἐβεβαιώθη) to God’s truth, divinely confirmed by “signs and wonders,” agents whose task was to deliver the salvific message of Jesus.³⁵

Thus, we see a remarkable similarity here with 2 Pet 3:2. Both passages indicate (a) there is a prior revelation through OT prophets; (b) there is a new revelatory message from the “Lord;” and (c) that this message from the Lord is mediated to later generations by his appointed apostolic witnesses.

b. *Rom 1:1*. In the opening verses of Romans, Paul focuses on the great message of redemption—the “gospel of God” (εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ)—and the two stages in which that message has been delivered. First, it was “promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures” (v. 2). Like 2 Pet 3:2, Paul directly equates the word “prophets” (προφητῶν) with the OT Scripture, something he also does elsewhere in the letter (Rom 15:4; 16:26).³⁶ Moreover, the “promised beforehand” here is quite similar to the “spoken beforehand” of 2 Pet 3:2. Then, second, this redemptive message has a newer stage of proclamation through Paul himself as “an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God” (v. 1). Being “set apart” (ἀφωρισμένος) gives Paul the distinct and authoritative office to deliver not his own message but the message “concerning his [God’s] Son” (v. 3).³⁷ Again, there is a remarkable parallel here to 2 Pet 3:2 where the apostolic office was simply the means by which one received the teachings of/about Jesus (or “gospel”).

In sum, God’s plan of salvation is revealed in two parts or stages, through the OT prophets in the prior age and through apostles in the current age.

c. *1 Pet 1:10–12*. In the first letter attributed to Peter, this prophet-apostle pattern is visible, albeit more subtly. The gospel was first announced in the OT prophets: “Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully” (1 Pet 1:10).³⁸ Then the apostles

³³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (BTCP; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2015), 53.

³⁴ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 37.

³⁵ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 79; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 47.

³⁶ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 55–56; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 44.

³⁷ Cranfield, *Romans*, 53: “The apostle’s function is indeed to serve the gospel by an authoritative and normative proclamation of it.”

³⁸ While some have argued NT prophets are in view, the consensus appears to be that OT prophets are intended; see discussion in Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 99–101; Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 60–61.

are the ones who have announced this same message of salvation, “It was revealed to them [the prophets] that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news (τῶν εὐαγγελισσαμένων) to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (1 Pet 1:12). Though the term “apostles” does not appear, the verb εὐαγγελίζεσθαι is repeatedly used throughout our earliest Christian writings to describe apostolic activity in particular.³⁹ As Schütz observes, “Nothing comes closer to suggesting the central, missionary nature of apostolic activity than the verb εὐαγγελίζεσθαι.”⁴⁰ Indeed, Polycarp seems to allude to 1 Pet 1:12 and makes the identity of the apostles explicit:⁴¹

1 Pet 1:12: “those who preached the good news (τῶν εὐαγγελισσαμένων) to you”

Polycarp, *Phil.* 6.3: “apostles (ἀπόστολοι) who proclaimed the gospel (εὐαγγελισσαμένοι) to us”⁴²

We might also observe that the ones who received “the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (1 Pet 1:12) were the apostles at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4).⁴³

If so, then we have here another instance where salvation is announced in two stages: it was revealed originally through the prophets but announced fully by the apostles.

d. *Luke 11:49*. The terms “prophet” and “apostle” also appear in Luke 11:49 as the designated agents by which God speaks truth over against false teachers: “Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute’” (11:49). Whether Luke’s appeal to the “Wisdom of God” is an allusion to a specific OT passage is difficult to discern,⁴⁴ but he does appear to view these offices as a two-fold unit. In prior times, it was the voice of the prophets that corrected false doctrine—prophets that spanned “from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah” (11:51), a possible reference to the totality of the OT canon.⁴⁵ And in the present time, it is the voice of the “apostles” that continues this pattern of correcting false teaching.⁴⁶ These two voices are

³⁹ E.g. Rom 10:15 (cf. Is 52:7); 1 Cor 11:7; 15:1; 2 Cor 10:16; Gal 1:8; 1:11; 4:13.

⁴⁰ Schütz, *Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*, 36.

⁴¹ J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (WBC 49; Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 47.

⁴² All English translations of the Apostolic Fathers, unless otherwise noted, are taken from B. D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2 vols. (I.L.C.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁴³ W. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 77.

⁴⁴ See discussion in I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 502–3; G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); 325. One possibility is Jer 7:25: “I have persistently sent (ἐξαπέστειλα) all my servants the prophets (προφήτας) to them, day after day.”

⁴⁵ For more on this disputed passage, see Edmon L. Gallagher, “The Blood from Abel to Zechariah in the History of Interpretation,” *NTS* 60 (2014): 121–38; and H. G. L. Peels, “The Blood ‘from Abel to Zechariah’ (Matthew 23,35; Luke 11,50f.) and the Canon of the Old Testament,” *ZAW* 113 (2001): 583–601.

⁴⁶ Luke’s use of “apostles” here on the lips of Jesus has led some scholars to suggest that he has merely redacted/updated the Matthean version which mentions “prophets and wise men and scribes” (Matt 23:36). See discussion in D. L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1121.

unified in such a way that they inevitably share the same fate: just as the OT prophets were persecuted for speaking the truth, so the apostles will be persecuted for speaking the same truth.⁴⁷ As Farkasfalvy observes, “Behind the historical continuity of persecution we detect the historical continuity of revelation: God sends messengers in succession but they all receive the same ill treatment.”⁴⁸

e. *1 Tim 5:18 (1 Cor 9:9, 14)*. Although the terms “prophet” and “apostle” are absent, we do find another juxtaposition of old and new sources of revelation in *1 Tim 5:18*, another oft-overlooked text: “For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’” In a rather stunning fashion, this passage cites an OT text (*Deut 25:4*) alongside what appears to be a Christian text, and refers to them both as “Scripture” (ἡ γραφή).⁴⁹ While some have suggested “Scripture” applies only to the first citation and not the second,⁵⁰ the textual evidence indicates that this is a standard double citation joined with the conjunction καί—a pattern we see in a number of other double-citation passages (*Matt 5:4*; *Mark 7:10*; *Acts 1:20*; *1 Pet 2:6–7*).⁵¹ Such considerations led Quinn and Wacker to conclude that the authors makes “no differentiation” between the two citations and thus the second one “is apparently to be read as *be-graphē*.”⁵² And if this second citation is regarded as “Scripture,” then it cannot be explained by an appeal to oral tradition; it must be a *written* text.⁵³

As for what written source could explain this mysterious second citation, the answer is not entirely clear. It could be a Q-like source⁵⁴ or even the Gospel of

⁴⁷ An even older instance of this same structure can be found in *1 Thess 2:13–16*. After commending the Thessalonians for accepting the apostolic teaching as the “word of God” (v. 13), Paul then acknowledges that such acceptance will lead to persecution—the same sort of persecution which “came from the Jews who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out.” In context, the “us” seems to be a clear reference to the apostles (see 2:6). So, just as *Luke 11:49* links the suffering of Jesus with the suffering of his messengers (prophets and apostles), Paul does the same in *1 Thessalonians*. For more, see Farkasfalvy, “Prophets and Apostles,” 110–11.

⁴⁸ Farkasfalvy, “Prophets and Apostles,” 110. Though this quote appears in Farkasfalvy’s discussion of *1 Thess 2:13–15*, it clearly applies also to *Luke 11:49*, which is discussed in the very next section.

⁴⁹ For a more extensive analysis of this text, see Michael J. Kruger, “First Timothy 5:18 and Early Canon Consciousness: Reconsidering a Problematic Text,” in *The Language and Literature of the New Testament: Essays in Honor of Stanley E. Porter’s 60th Birthday* (ed. Lois K. Fuller Dow, Craig A. Evans, and A. W. Pitts; BIS 150; Leiden: Brill, 2017), 680–700.

⁵⁰ E.g., J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (BNTC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1960), 126; M. Dibelius and H. Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles* (trans. P. Buttolph and A. Yarbro; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 79; and G. D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 134.

⁵¹ G. W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 234; E. Earle Ellis, *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1957), 49–51.

⁵² Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (ECC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 462.

⁵³ G. Schrenk, “γραφή,” *TDNT* 1:742–73.

⁵⁴ A. T. Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 102; J. S. MacArthur, “On the Significance of ἡ γραφή in *1 Timothy* v. 18,” *ExpT* 53 (1941): 37.

Luke itself.⁵⁵ Indeed, the words of Jesus in Luke 10:7 are the only known textual match for our citation.⁵⁶ Regardless of whether one prefers Luke or Q, what does seem to be clear is that this second citation is a command of Jesus. The parallel in 1 Cor 9:9–14 makes this clear. In this passage, Paul cites the exact same obscure Deut 25:4 text (1 Cor 9:9) and then places the teaching of Jesus alongside it: “In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel” (1 Cor 9:14). It is evident that 1 Tim 5:18 makes explicit what 1 Cor 9:14 kept implicit.⁵⁷

In both of these passages, then, we find the same twofold revelatory structure we have observed thus far, namely OT texts laid alongside the commands of Jesus (in the case of 1 Tim 5:18, even in written form). And if Luke’s Gospel is in view, then these commands of Jesus are mediated through an apostolic figure.⁵⁸ Of course, like 2 Peter, there are disputes over the date of the Pastorals. However, even for those who accept the pseudonymity of 1 Timothy,⁵⁹ the dates typically center on the early second century,⁶⁰ still making this another early data point in the emergence of the NT canon.

f. *2 Tim 4:13*. Tucked away at the end of 2 Timothy is another curious text that hints at a bi-covenantal canonical structure, even though the terms “prophets” and “apostles” do not appear. In the final greetings, a request is made to Timothy, “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments” (4:13). It is noteworthy that two different sets of writings are mentioned, “the books” (τὰ βιβλία) and “the parchments (τὰς μεμβράνας).⁶¹ There is little doubt that τὰ βιβλία is a reference to OT writings, probably in the form of scrolls.⁶² The term μεμβράνας—a transliteration from the Latin *membrana*—almost certainly refers to codices of some sort.⁶³ This same Latin

⁵⁵ E.g., J. P. Meier, “The Inspiration of Scripture: But What Counts as Scripture?,” *Mid-Stream* 38 (1999): 71–78; Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 234; C. Spicq, *Saint Paul: Les épîtres pastorales* (4th ed.; EBib 39; Paris: Gabalda, 1969), 543; B. S. Easton, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: SCM, 1947), 161; B. Paul Wolfe, “The Sagacious Use of Scripture,” in *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul’s Theology in the Pastoral Epistles* (ed. A. J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 199–218.

⁵⁶ Compare Luke 10:7 (ἄξιός γάρ ὁ ἐργάτης τοῦ μισθοῦ αὐτοῦ) with 1 Tim 5:18b (ἄξιός ὁ ἐργάτης τοῦ μισθοῦ αὐτοῦ).

⁵⁷ See fuller discussion in Kruger, “First Timothy 5:18,” 688.

⁵⁸ Tertullian refers to Luke and Mark as “apostolic men” (*Marc.* 4.2) even though they were not apostles.

⁵⁹ The classic work on the Pastorals is P. N. Harrison, *The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921). For a more up-to-date discussion, see Bart D. Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 192–222.

⁶⁰ W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), 387.

⁶¹ T. C. Skeat, “Especially the Parchments: A Note on 2 Timothy iv.13,” *JTS* 30 (1979): 173–77, makes the suggestion that “books” and “parchments” are one in the same, but his view has enjoyed limited support. For more discussion, see G. N. Stanton, “Why Were Early Christians Addicted to the Codex?,” in *Jesus and Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 165–91, esp. 177–78.

⁶² Luke 4:20; Gal 3:10; Heb 9:19; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.74; 2 *Clem.* 14.2.

⁶³ H. Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 50.

term is used by Quintilian⁶⁴ and Martial⁶⁵ to refer to parchment notebooks, that is codices.⁶⁶ Given the widespread and early Christian preference for the codex format,⁶⁷ and given that these writings are distinguished from the OT books, scholars have suggested that these *μεμβράνας* probably contained Christian writings of some sort, whether excerpts of Jesus's teachings,⁶⁸ Christian testimonia collections,⁶⁹ or (most plausibly) copies of Paul's own letters.⁷⁰

Regardless of the specifics, we have here in this passage another glimpse at a bi-covenantal structure for Christian revelation, consisting of OT texts laid directly alongside newer, Christian writings, possibly even Paul's own letters.

II. THE BI-COVENANTAL STRUCTURE IN EARLY PATRISTIC SOURCES

In the above discussion, we have argued that a two-part revelatory infrastructure—prophet and apostle—was woven into the theology of early Christianity from the very start. If so, we should not be surprised to find that this same theological structure continues into our earliest patristic sources. We shall examine some of the key examples here.

1. *1 Clement*. Writing at the end of the first century (c. 96), *1 Clement* affirms the unparalleled authority of the apostles, linking them (again) directly to Jesus and the deliverance of the “gospel.”⁷¹ He writes: “The apostles were given the gospel for us by the Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ was sent forth from God. Thus Christ came from God and the apostles from Christ.”⁷²

Like the other sources above, our author then juxtaposes the authority of the apostles with that of the prophets. For instance, immediately after explaining how the apostles delivered authoritative teachings about the governance of the church,⁷³ the author points out that the OT prophets did the same:

And why should it be so amazing if those who were in Christ and entrusted by God with such a work [i.e., the apostles] appointed the leaders mentioned earlier? For even the most fortunate Moses, a faithful servant in all the house, recorded in the sacred books (*ἱεραῖς βιβλοῖς*) all the directives that had been given him.

⁶⁴ *Inst. Or.* 10.3.31–32.

⁶⁵ *Epigr.* 1.2.

⁶⁶ C. H. Roberts and T. C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (London: Oxford University Press, 1987), 21–29.

⁶⁷ For an updated discussion of the Christian preference for the codex, see Hurtado, *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 43–93.

⁶⁸ Given the discussion above regarding 1 Tim 5:18, Luke's Gospel is a possibility.

⁶⁹ Martin C. Albl, *And Scripture Cannot Be Broken: The Form and Function of the Early Christian Testimonia Collections* (NovTSup 96; Leiden: Brill, 1999).

⁷⁰ E. R. Richards, “The Codex and the Early Collection of Paul's Letters,” *BBR* 8 (1998): 151–66.

⁷¹ A helpful introduction to 1 Clement can be found in Andrew F. Gregory, “1 Clement: An Introduction,” in *The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers* (ed. Paul Foster; T&T Clark Biblical Studies; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 21–31.

⁷² *1 Clem.* 42.1. cf. *1 Clem.* 5.2.

⁷³ *1 Clem.* 42.1–5.

And he was followed by all the other prophets (*προφήται*), who together testified to the law he laid down.⁷⁴

So, the church has two sources of authority regarding church governance. The newer pattern laid down by the apostles, and the older pattern laid down by the prophets (one of which is Moses), specifically in their “sacred books.” As to whether Clement received the apostolic half of the instruction from oral or written sources is not easy to ascertain. However, it should be observed that he did know some written apostolic books, including 1 Corinthians and Romans,⁷⁵ and possibly also Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Titus.⁷⁶

2. *Ignatius*. The seven letters that Ignatius wrote en route to his martyrdom (c. 110) provide additional insight to the bi-covenantal canonical structure around the turn of the century.⁷⁷ It has been well established that Ignatius held the apostles in high esteem, recognizing not only their divine authority as spokesmen for Christ, but as occupying a unique historical position that could not be replicated by later church leaders, including Ignatius himself.⁷⁸ Not only is Ignatius not an apostle—“I am not enjoining you as Peter and Paul did. They were apostles, I am condemned”⁷⁹—but he views the apostles as a separate, defined group plainly associated with God the Father and Jesus Christ.⁸⁰ Indeed, the relationship between the Father, Jesus, and the apostles is, for Ignatius, the heavenly pattern for the relationship between bishops, deacons, and presbyteries.⁸¹ Thus, like 2 Pet 3:2, the commands of Jesus and the apostles are closely linked, “Be eager therefore to stand securely in the decrees of the Lord and the apostles.”⁸²

Notable for our purposes here, Ignatius also places this apostolic source of revelation alongside the “prophets” of the OT. He declares, “I flee to the gospel as to the flesh of Jesus and to the apostles (*ἀποστόλοις*) as to the presbytery, and we should also love the prophets (*προφήτας*) because their proclamation anticipated the gospel and they hoped in him and awaited him.”⁸³ There is an uncanny parallel here with 2 Pet 3:2 as Ignatius not only mentions both categories of apostle and prophet, but also links the apostles to Jesus (and the gospel). For Ignatius, “both

⁷⁴ 1 Clem. 43.1–2. Bracketed statement is my own, indicating that the larger context (1 Clem. 42.1–5) is clearly about the apostles.

⁷⁵ Andrew F. Gregory, “1 Clement and the Writings That Later Formed the New Testament,” in *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* (ed. A. Gregory and C. M. Tuckett; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 129–57.

⁷⁶ Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 42.

⁷⁷ For a helpful overview of Ignatius and his writings, see Paul Foster, “The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch,” in *The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers*, 81–107.

⁷⁸ C. E. Hill, “Ignatius and the Apostolate,” in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 36 (ed. M. F. Wiles and E. J. Yarnold; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 226–48.

⁷⁹ Ign. Rom. 4.4; cf. Trall. 3.3.

⁸⁰ Hill, “Ignatius and the Apostolate,” 230. For example, Ignatius charges the church to encourage their bishop “for the honor of the Father and of Jesus Christ and of the apostles” (Ign. Trall. 12.2)

⁸¹ Ign. Magn. 6.1; 13.2; Smyrn. 8.1.

⁸² Ign. Magn. 13.1.

⁸³ Ign. Phil. 5.1–2; cf. Phil. 9.2.

the prophets and the apostles preached Christ, and as such both have the same authority.”⁸⁴

In a similar fashion, Ignatius also juxtaposes “prophets” and “gospel” as revelatory sources. Since the “gospel” is something closely connected to (and delivered by) the apostles,⁸⁵ then such passages constitute a parallel phenomenon to the prophet-apostle pairing observed above.⁸⁶ For instance, Ignatius encourages believers to “pay attention to the prophets (προφήταις), and especially to the gospel (εὐαγγελίῳ), in which the passion is clearly shown to us and the resurrection is perfected.”⁸⁷ Similarly, “For the beloved prophets (προφήται) made their proclamation looking ahead to him; but the gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) is the finished work that brings morality.”⁸⁸ At one point, Ignatius may even contrast old and new sets of writings, “For I heard some saying, ‘If I don’t find it in the ancient records (ἀρχαῖοις), then I don’t believe [it is] in the gospel (εὐαγγελίῳ).’”⁸⁹ If εὐαγγέλιῳ refers to a written Gospel here, then we have a clear two-part canon in view.⁹⁰ While the precise terminology varies, all these passages still reveal the same bi-covenantal structure to the unfolding of God’s revelation.⁹¹

Although it is not clear whether the apostolic teaching to which Ignatius had access is oral or written,⁹² the following observations can be made: (a) we know that apostolic writings were already in circulation by this time period; (b) Ignatius shows knowledge of some written apostolic texts, most notably some Pauline letters as well as Matthew and John;⁹³ and (c) Ignatius refers to the teachings of the

⁸⁴ John Behr, *Formation of Christian Theology*, vol. 1: *The Way to Nicaea* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 86.

⁸⁵ Ign. *Phil.* 5.1; *Magn.* 13.1; *Phil.* 9.2. See discussion in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, 2.2.260–61; and Schütz, *Anatomy of the Apostolic Authority*, 35–83.

⁸⁶ Bovon argues that the terms “gospel” and “apostle” refer to two halves of the NT canon (“The Canonical Structure of Gospel and Apostle,” 516–27). However, the evidence explored in this paper suggests that these two terms largely overlap—the gospel of Jesus is *delivered by* the apostles. The terms blend together. Indeed, the canonical Gospels themselves were viewed as “apostolic” writings, even those not written directly by apostles (Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 66.3; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.11.9; Tertullian, *Marc.* 4.2).

⁸⁷ Ign. *Smyrn.* 7.2.

⁸⁸ Ign. *Phil.* 9.2; cf. *Smyrn.* 5.1.

⁸⁹ Ign. *Phil.* 8.2. Bracketed words are my own. See further discussion in C. E. Hill, “Ignatius, ‘The Gospel,’ and the Gospels,” in *Trajectories Through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers* (ed. Andrew Gregory and Christopher Tuckett; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 267–85.

⁹⁰ For more on this passage, see M. D. Goulder, “Ignatius’ ‘Docetists,’” *VC* 53 (1999): 16–30.

⁹¹ Another example of this variation in canonical language can be found in the second-century *Epistle to Diognetus*: “Then the fear of the law is sung, the grace of the prophets is made known, the faith of the Gospels is established, the tradition of the apostles is guarded, and the grace of the church leaps for joy” (*Diogn.* 11.6).

⁹² For an argument that Ignatius’s “gospel” was written, see Goulder, “Ignatius’ ‘Docetists,’” 16–30.

⁹³ Discussion of Ignatius’s “canon” can be found in Paul Foster, “The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch and the Writings That Later Formed the New Testament,” in *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, 159–86; W. Inge, “Ignatius,” in *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* (ed. A. Committee of the Oxford Society of Historical Theology; Oxford: Clarendon, 1905), 61–83; and Robert M. Grant, “Scripture and Tradition in St. Ignatius of Antioch,” *CBQ* 25 (1963): 322–35. For a more negative appraisal of what books Ignatius knew, see Matthew W. Mitchell, “In the Footsteps of Paul: Scriptural and Apostolic Authority in Ignatius of Antioch,” *J ECS* 14 (2006): 27–45.

apostles with words typically reserved for written texts: “decrees” (δόγμασι) and “injunctions” (διαταγμάτων).⁹⁴ Such considerations led Lightfoot to argue that the term “apostles” in Ignatius refers to “some authoritative *writings* of the New Testament.”⁹⁵

3. *Polycarp*. As a disciple of the apostle John,⁹⁶ a friend of Papias,⁹⁷ and a mentor to Irenaeus,⁹⁸ Polycarp was well positioned to inform us about the state of the canon by the turn of the century.⁹⁹ Writing c. 110, he affirmed that the apostles have a distinct, separate authority—higher than even a bishop like himself: “For neither I nor anyone like me is able to replicate the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul.”¹⁰⁰ In addition, Polycarp knows of written apostolic texts, including a Pauline letter collection,¹⁰¹ 1 Peter and 1 John,¹⁰² and likely some of the Synoptic Gospels.¹⁰³

For Polycarp, this authoritative apostolic deposit does not stand alone, but alongside the “prophets”:

And so we should serve as his [Christ’s] slaves with reverential fear and all respect, just as he commanded, as did the apostles (ἀπόστολοι) who proclaimed the gospel to us and the prophets (προφήται) who preached, in advance, the coming of our Lord.¹⁰⁴

This remarkable passage shares several features in common with 2 Pet 3:2: (a) apostle and prophets are a two-fold source of revelation; (b) the prophets represent an older, prior stage of revelation (“preached in advance”); and (c) the apostles are linked to what Jesus “commanded” (and to the “gospel”).

4. *2 Clement*. The second epistle attributed to Clement is quite different than the first—possibly an early Christian homily and published around the middle of the second century—suggesting they do not share the same author.¹⁰⁵ Regardless, it does share the same bi-covenantal authority structure. When arguing that the

⁹⁴ E.g., Ign. *Magn.* 13:1; *Trall.* 7.1. Further discussion in Hill, “Ignatius and the Apostolate,” 234–40.

⁹⁵ J. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2 vols. (London: MacMillan, 1889), 2.2.260 (emphasis original).

⁹⁶ *Hist. eccl.* 5.20.4–7.

⁹⁷ *Hist. eccl.* 5.33.4.

⁹⁸ *Hist. eccl.* 5.33.4.

⁹⁹ For an introduction to Polycarp, see M. W. Holmes, “Polycarp of Smyrna, Epistle to the Philippians,” in *The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers*, 108–25.

¹⁰⁰ *Phil.* 3.2. Polycarp appears to know the teachings of several apostles beyond Paul (*Phil.* 6.3, 9.1).

¹⁰¹ Polycarp refers to plural “letters” of Paul (*Phil.* 3.2), quotes Ephesians as “Scripture” (*Phil.* 12.1), and shows knowledge of Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and 1 and 2 Timothy. For more, see Paul Hartog, *Polycarp and the New Testament: The Occasion, Rhetoric, Theme, and Unity of the Epistle to the Philippians and Its Allusions to New Testament Literature* (WUNT 2/134; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 2001), 195.

¹⁰² Hartog, *Polycarp*, 267.

¹⁰³ *Phil.* 2.3, 7.2. See discussion in P. V. M. Bénécke, “The Epistle of Polycarp,” in *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, 103. Of course, even if Polycarp did know the Synoptic Gospels, it is unclear whether he regarded them as apostolic writings.

¹⁰⁴ *Phil.* 6.3.

¹⁰⁵ For an introduction, see Paul Parvis, “2 Clement and the Meaning of the Christian Homily,” in *The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers*, 32–41. Eusebius himself seems to doubt the authenticity of 2 Clement (*Hist. eccl.* 3.38.4).

church was not a new institution, the author appeals to two primary authorities: “And, as you know, the books (τὰ βιβλία) and the apostles (οἱ ἀπόστολοι) indicate that the church has not come into being just now, but has existed from the beginning.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, we see again that the new stage of revelation is designated as the “apostles” while the older stage, similar to 2 Tim 4:18, is called “the books,” an obvious reference to the OT writings. Of this passage, Lightfoot observes, “This is a rough synonym for the Old and New Testaments respectively.”¹⁰⁷

As to whether 2 *Clement* had access to this apostolic teaching through written sources, that is disputed.¹⁰⁸ However, there are a number of places where it seems likely that 2 *Clement* drew upon the Gospels of Matthew and Luke,¹⁰⁹ and possibly Ephesians and Hebrews,¹¹⁰ though we cannot know whether he regarded these writings as apostolic in nature.

5. *Justin Martyr*. Writing toward the middle of the second century (c. 150–60),¹¹¹ the philosopher-theologian Justin Martyr spoke plainly about the role and authority of the apostles.¹¹² The apostles were the original followers of Jesus,¹¹³ given the authority to proclaim God’s Word,¹¹⁴ functioned as the mouthpiece of Christ,¹¹⁵ and, most importantly, wrote authoritative books called “gospels,”¹¹⁶ also known as the “memoirs of the apostles.”¹¹⁷ Included in these memoirs were certainly the three Synoptics,¹¹⁸ and possibly John as well.¹¹⁹ In fact, Justin referred to the memoirs as “drawn up by His apostles and those who followed them”¹²⁰—language that might reasonably refer to the canonical four.¹²¹

What is most noteworthy here is that Justin affirms the authority of these memoirs alongside the OT prophets:

¹⁰⁶ 2 *Clem.* 14.2. Ehrman’s translation offers “the books” as an alternate translation.

¹⁰⁷ Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, 1.2.245.

¹⁰⁸ For further discussion, see Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher Tuckett, “2 *Clement* and the Writings That Later Formed the New Testament,” in *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, 251–92; and J. V. Bartlet, A. J. Carlyle, and P. V. M. Benecke, “II Clement,” in *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, 124–36.

¹⁰⁹ Most notable is 2 *Clem.* 2.4: “And also another Scripture says, ‘I did not come to call the upright, but sinners’” (cf. Matt 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32). Gregory and Tuckett comment, “Some dependence on Matthew (direct or indirect) seems to be the most likely explanation of the evidence here” (“2 *Clement*,” 255).

¹¹⁰ E.g., 2 *Clem.* 14.22 (Eph 1:22; 5:23); 2 *Clem.* 11.6 (Heb 10:23).

¹¹¹ A broad overview of Justin’s life, writings, and theology can be found in Sara Parvis and Paul Foster, eds., *Justin Martyr and His Worlds* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

¹¹² O. Skarsaune, “Justin and His Bible,” in *Justin Martyr and His Worlds*, 53–76, esp. 68–71.

¹¹³ 1 *Apol.* 50.12

¹¹⁴ 1 *Apol.* 39.3; 53.3.

¹¹⁵ 1 *Apol.* 42.4.

¹¹⁶ 1 *Apol.* 66.3.

¹¹⁷ 1 *Apol.* 67.3.

¹¹⁸ *Dial.* 100.1; 103.8; 106.3–4.

¹¹⁹ 1 *Apol.* 46.2; *Dial.* 88.7; *Dial.* 105.1; 1 *Apol.* 35.7. See fuller argument for John’s inclusion in C. E. Hill, “Was John’s Gospel among Justin’s Apostolic Memoirs?,” in *Justin Martyr and His Worlds*, 88–94.

¹²⁰ *Dial.* 103.

¹²¹ G. Stanton, “The Fourfold Gospel,” *NTS* 43 (1997): 317–46.

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the *apostles* or the writings of the *prophets* are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.¹²²

This fascinating glimpse at early Christian worship solidifies the pattern seen thus far: apostles and prophets stand side by side—a bi-covenantal revelation from God. And *both* forms of revelation are clearly in written form. Moreover, the apostolic writings have now taken such a precedent that the standard order is reversed; for Justin, the apostolic writings come even before the OT prophets.¹²³ In this way, Justin is able to affirm the primacy of the new covenant over and against Judaism, and, at the same time, affirm the abiding legitimacy of the OT over and against Marcionism.¹²⁴

This same pattern is exhibited elsewhere in Justin: “We, having believed God’s voice spoken by the *apostles* of Christ, and promulgated to us by the *prophets*, have renounced even to death all the things of the world.”¹²⁵ Here we see that both forms of revelation—apostles and prophets—plainly exhibit “God’s voice.” Similarly, Justin affirms that Christians will endure the last days by remembering what they learned from these same two sources of revelation: “Christians ... having learned the true worship of God from the *lam*, and the word which went forth from Jerusalem by means of the *apostles* of Jesus, have fled for safety to the God of Jacob.”¹²⁶

6. *The Muratorian Fragment*. Written c. 180, the Muratorian fragment constitutes our earliest canonical list.¹²⁷ Approximately twenty-two of our twenty-seven NT writings are affirmed: the four gospels, thirteen epistles of Paul, 1 and 2 John, Jude, and Revelation.¹²⁸ Toward the end of the list, the author rejects the canonicity of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, arguing it cannot be read publicly like Scripture: “It cannot be read publicly to the people in the church either among the *prophets*, whose number is complete or among the *apostles*, for it is after [their] time” (78–80).¹²⁹ The language here fits remarkably well with that of Justin observed above. According to

¹²² *1 Apol.* 67. English translations of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, unless otherwise noted, are taken from A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1885).

¹²³ Farkasfalvy, “Prophets and Apostles,” 123–124.

¹²⁴ Farkasfalvy, “Prophets and Apostles,” 124.

¹²⁵ *Dial.* 119.6. See also *1 Apol.* 49: “For the Jews having the *prophecies*, and being always in expectation of the Christ to come, did not recognize Him. ... But the Gentiles, who had never heard anything about Christ, until the *apostles* set out from Jerusalem and preached concerning Him, and gave them the prophecies, were filled with joy and faith” (cf. *1 Apol.* 53).

¹²⁶ *Dial.* 110. In this context, “law” appears to refer to the entirety of the OT witness.

¹²⁷ Though the date of the fragment has been disputed, the late second-century date has not been dislodged: J. Verheyden, “The Canon Muratori: A Matter of Dispute,” in *The Biblical Canons* (ed. J.-M. Auwers and H. J. de Jonge; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 487–556. For a defense of the later date, see G. M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

¹²⁸ There is some speculation that all three Johannine letters are implied in the list: P. Katz, “The Johannine Epistles in the Muratorian Canon,” *JTS* 8 (1957): 273–74.

¹²⁹ English translation from Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 307.

the Muratorian fragment, the public reading of Scripture was drawn from two (and only two) sources: the prophets and the apostles. Since the *Shepherd* is from neither source, it cannot be regarded as Scripture. Thus, the bi-covenantal structure of the canon was so well established by this point that it could even function as a method of exclusion.¹³⁰ Books that did not fit within the structure were rejected.

7. *Irenaeus*. Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons in the late second-century, was a towering figure in early Christianity.¹³¹ His NT canon was quite extensive, including the four Gospels, Acts, Paul's letters (except Philemon), Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 1–2 John, and Revelation.¹³² For Irenaeus, the apostles held a preeminent place; they were the source of the one true faith,¹³³ spoke by the power of the Holy Spirit,¹³⁴ delivered the message of Jesus,¹³⁵ and handed down that message in their own written Scriptures.¹³⁶

In addition, Irenaeus repeatedly places the authority of the apostles alongside the authority of the prophets, plainly affirming a bi-covenantal canonical structure. Indeed, so commonplace was this structure within Irenaeus's writings, that his testimony functions as a fitting capstone—even a crescendo of sorts—to the lengthy and well-documented prophet-apostle pattern we have traced all the way back to the NT writings themselves.

In a classic formulation, Irenaeus describes the authority of the apostles: “We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.”¹³⁷ Then he juxtaposes these apostles with the prophets: “These [apostles] have all declared to us that there is one God, Creator of heaven and earth, announced by the law and the prophets.”¹³⁸

In refutations of heretical groups, Irenaeus often appeals to these same two authorities: “This calumny, then, of these men, having been quashed, it is clearly proved that *neither the prophets nor the apostles* did ever name another God, or call [him] Lord, except the true and only God.”¹³⁹ For Irenaeus, heretical teachings are ruled out precisely because they do not appear in either of the recognized authorities. Elsewhere Irenaeus employs the same method: “And others again reject the coming of the Son of God and the dispensation of His incarnation, which the *apostles*

¹³⁰ Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1972), 254.

¹³¹ For an overview of Irenaeus, see Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London: Routledge, 1997); a detailed analysis of his thought can be found in Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹³² Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 154–55.

¹³³ *Haer.* 1.10.1. For more, see Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 17–48.

¹³⁴ *Haer.* 3.1.1; *Epid.* 41.

¹³⁵ *Haer.* 1.8.1; 1.27.2; 4.35.2.

¹³⁶ *Haer.* 3.1.1; 3.5.1; 3.11.9.

¹³⁷ *Haer.* 3.1.1.

¹³⁸ *Haer.* 3.1.2.

¹³⁹ *Haer.* 3.8.1.

delivered and the *prophets* declared beforehand.”¹⁴⁰ Again, heretical teaching is identified as that which does not square with the teaching delivered through the apostles and prophets.

And when Irenaeus positively presents the core teachings of the Christian faith, he appeals to the same bi-covenantal structure:

Read with earnest care that Gospel which has been conveyed to us by the *apostles*, and read with earnest care the *prophets*, and you will find that the whole conduct, and all the doctrine, and all the sufferings of our Lord, were predicted through them.¹⁴¹

But if, at His advent, He sent forth His own *apostles* in the spirit of truth, and not in that of error, He did the very same also in the case of the *prophets*.¹⁴²

The Lord, therefore, who has called us everywhere by the *apostles*, is He who called those of old by the *prophets*.¹⁴³

Then I have pointed out the truth, and shown the preaching of the Church, which the *prophets* proclaimed (as I have already demonstrated), but which Christ brought to perfection, and the *apostles* have handed down.¹⁴⁴

Irenaeus expands his terminology at various points, especially when dealing with false teachers, often adding “Lord” alongside the term “apostles”:

For what sort of conduct would it be, were we to forsake the utterances of the *prophets*, of the *Lord*, and of the *apostles*, that we might give heed to these persons, who speak not a word of sense?¹⁴⁵

Such, then, is their system, which neither the *prophets* announced, nor the *Lord* taught, nor the *apostles* delivered, but of which they boast that beyond all others they have a perfect knowledge. They gather their views from other sources than the Scriptures.¹⁴⁶

Neither the *prophets*, nor the *apostles*, nor the *Lord Christ* in His own person, did acknowledge any other Lord or God, but the God and Lord supreme.¹⁴⁷

Our Lord Jesus Christ being one and the same, as He Himself the *Lord* doth testify, as the *apostles* confess, and as the *prophets* announce.¹⁴⁸

Both the *Lord*, then, and the *apostles* announce as the one only God the Father, Him who gave the law, who sent the *prophets*, who made all things.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁰ *Epid.* 99.

¹⁴¹ *Haer.* 4.34.1.

¹⁴² *Haer.* 4.35.2.

¹⁴³ *Haer.* 4.36.5.

¹⁴⁴ *Haer.* 5 (preface).

¹⁴⁵ *Haer.* 2.2.5.

¹⁴⁶ *Haer.* 1.8.1.

¹⁴⁷ *Haer.* 3.9.1.

¹⁴⁸ *Haer.* 3.17.4.

¹⁴⁹ *Haer.* 4.36.6.

There are many more passages that could be considered, but these are sufficient to demonstrate a remarkable commitment by Irenaeus to this long-standing two-fold authority structure of prophet and apostle (and sometimes Lord).¹⁵⁰ And, like Justin Martyr, both sources of authority are clearly manifest in *written* texts.

III. IMPLICATIONS OF A BI-COVENANTAL STRUCTURE IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

The above survey of first and second-century sources has demonstrated that Christians, from the very earliest time, conceived of God's revelation to his people as having two distinct (but interrelated) phases: an older phase revealed by the "prophets" and a newer stage about Christ revealed by the "apostles." This theological structure appears to have been deeply embedded in the DNA of early Christianity and thus has a number of implications for how we understand the emergence of the NT canon.

First, this theological framework anticipates the overall *structure* of the biblical canon. Whatever new revelational deposit the apostles would deliver about Jesus, it could not be severed from the earlier deposit through the prophets. The two stages of revelation were bound inextricably together. Since the prophets "promised beforehand" (Rom 1:2) the coming of Jesus, the OT Scriptures were an essential part of the "good news" (Rom 1:1). Thus, Marcion's attempt to cut away the OT failed not only because the later church rejected it, but because the theological commitment to the prophets was already embedded in the gospel message from the start. The battle over the OT was decided as much by intrinsic factors as extrinsic ones.

Second, this theological framework goes a long way towards explaining why we have a NT canon at all. The earliest Christians, from the very start, were remarkably unified in viewing the apostles as having the highest of authority—indeed, the very authority of Christ himself. But it is not merely the existence of such authority that is noteworthy, but the manner in which that authority is consistently and repeatedly laid alongside existing scriptural writings of the prophets, forming a tight, bi-covenantal unit. It is this *combination* of prophets and apostles that is the definitive factor. Put differently, the earliest Christians recognized not only *that* the apostles had authority, but that they had the *kind* of authority that now stands alongside the OT. Thus, as soon as the apostles began to write books, it is not difficult to imagine a second/newer canon forming naturally alongside the first.

Third, this theological framework provides an explanation for why our NT collection, at least in broad terms, ended up with the books that it did. Of course, this is not to suggest that this early bi-covenantal infrastructure could have anticipated precisely the 27-book canon we now possess. However, there are good reasons to think it would have anticipated a NT that was composed of books that had a reasonable claim to be "apostolic." And that would have gone a long way towards explaining why we ended up with certain books and not others. Indeed, this is the very reason that the Muratorian fragment rejected the *Shepherd of Hermas*, because it

¹⁵⁰ Other examples include *Haer.* 1.3.6; 2.28.7; 2.30.9; 3.19.2.

did not appear “either among the *prophets* whose number is complete or among the *apostles* for it is after [their] time.”

In this way, then, the prophet-apostle infrastructure shows that the canon, in a sense, was “closed” from the very start. Certainly, the debates and discussions over certain books continued for centuries. However, from the beginning, the church was *already* committed to accepting books, and only those books, that were part of the “prophets” or the “apostles.”