

Chapter Six

(From *The Holy Bible In Its Original Order*
A New English Translation
A Faithful Version with Commentary)

Who Wrote the New Testament?

Is the New Testament merely a collection of religious myths—or was it really written by the original disciples of Christ as eyewitness accounts of His ministry? This question is central to the authenticity of the New Testament as the inspired Word of God.

The Miracle of the New Testament

It is an often unappreciated fact that the writers of the New Testament faced a considerably more difficult task in writing and canonizing the New Testament than did their Old Testament counterparts. From harsh slavery, God drew His chosen people, Israel, out of Egypt with powerful signs and wonders—the Passover itself, the crossing of the Red Sea, God thundering His Law from Mount Sinai, etc. Moses’ authority and credibility was virtually unquestioned; even Korah’s rebellion only served to reinforce the reality that God was working only through Moses and the established Aaronic priesthood. The Old Testament was written primarily in a *closed* environment to a *captive* audience—Israel. There was no real outside opposition when it came to God’s Word. Idolatry and false teachings were decisively forbidden (Deut. 13). The greatest challenge was faced by the prophets, who were often martyred for their corrective messages.

In contrast, the difficulties faced by the New Testament apostles and writers was vastly different and much more complex. For starters, the apostles’ message was not limited to the Jews or to Israel, but was for the whole world. And to say the least, it was an unpopular Gospel—one that challenged preexisting Messianic ideas and provoked outrage among the Jewish leadership. Instead of a “captive audience,” they faced a highly skeptical antagonistic audience—one thoroughly indoctrinated with a plethora of false religious teachings, both Jewish and pagan. Their credibility was questioned from the very beginning, and their authority rested with a man named Jesus, Who was condemned as a common criminal. Already labeled as rebels, the situation was made worse by their teaching that the Levitical/Temple system was obsolete—to be superseded by the spiritual realities of the New Covenant.

Indeed, the religious landscape of first-century Judea and the surrounding area was an often hostile maze of confusion—dotted by false prophets, false apostles and counterfeit religions. Several false messianic figures added to the mix. The apostles found themselves under constant attack from Jews as well as pagans. Opposition ranged from the direct—imprisonment or martyrdom—to challenges from false teachers such as Simon Magus. And being dubbed a “Jewish” sect meant certain persecution from the Roman authorities. Add to all of this the fact that the apostles had to deal with corruption and apostasy within the ranks of the Church itself.

It was under such hostile, adverse conditions—*literally against all odds*—that the New Testament was miraculously written and finally canonized. Can there really be any doubt about God’s direct inspiration, guidance and intervention in the writing and canonization of the New Testament?

Part One: The Writing of the Gospels and the Book of Acts

Popular “scholarly” theories hold that the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were written by third- or fourth-generation storytellers and are pure folklore and myth. For example, one such self-proclaimed “expert” writes: “In the absence of hard information, scholars theorize that the New Testament gospels were composed during the last quarter of the first century by third-generation authors on the basis of folk memories preserved in stories that had

circulated by word of mouth for decades. The oral stories the four evangelists recorded had been shaped, reshaped, augmented, and edited by numerous storytellers for a half century or more before achieving their final written forms” (Robert W. Funk and the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus*, p. 2).

Contrary to such theories and opinions, compilation of the Gospels actually began quite early—within one year after Jesus’ death and resurrection—not decades later.

Isaiah Prophesied That Jesus’ Disciples Would Write the New Testament

The prophet Isaiah actually foretold that the disciples of Jesus Christ would write what would become the New Testament: “**Bind up the testimony, seal the law among My disciples**” (Isa. 8:16). This prophecy clearly indicates that God did not leave the writing of the most important book in the world to those who were not disciples of Jesus Christ or eyewitnesses of His ministry.

Dr. Ernest L. Martin, a noted biblical scholar, commented on the meaning of the prophecy of Isaiah 8:16: “Christ did not mean that He would personally add to the Law and the Prophets by composing books of His own. A reading of the Old Testament revealed to the apostles that it was *they* who were to be responsible for writing and selecting the documents which would comprise the New Testament” (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, p. 297).

Martin comments on two key words from Isaiah’s passage: “What do the words ‘bind’ and ‘seal’ signify? The Hebrew for the word ‘bind’ means ‘to close.’ The word ‘seal’ means practically the same—‘to cap off, to enclose.’ This is exactly what the apostles did with the message which the ‘Stone’ and ‘Rock’ gave them. They were to complete it. Bind it up. Close it shut.... [Jesus’] disciples were commissioned ‘to add to’ and ‘to complete’ the Bible. In a word, the apostles felt that they had authority, even from the Old Testament, to bind, seal, authorize and canonize the Law and Testimony of Christ. This meant to put the teachings of Christ in a book, just like the Old Testament was given to the early Jews” (Ibid., pp. 298-299).

Isaiah concludes his prophecy by showing that Jesus and His disciples would form the New Testament Church: “Behold, I [Jesus Christ] and the children [the disciples and apostles] whom the LORD has given Me *are* for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, Who dwells in Mount Zion” (Isa. 8:18). Indeed, the apostles and disciples of Christ—who were eyewitnesses of His life and ministry—were the ones who wrote the New Testament. They were to “bind up the testimony” and “seal the law”—to complete the Testimony and teach the true spiritual meaning of the law. This task would never have been left to others, living decades later, who never knew Jesus nor were taught by Him personally.

The Importance of Faithful Eyewitnesses

Because human testimony is sometimes fallible, God commanded that disputes and critical issues be settled on the word of two or three witnesses (see Deut. 17:6-7 and 19:15 for the principle). Most assuredly, *truth* itself is established only by faithful witnesses—for “**a faithful witness will not lie**” (Prov. 14:5). Jesus Christ specifically chose those who would bear true witness of His teachings and ministry. Therefore, we can have full confidence and assurance that those who wrote the New Testament wrote the truth and nothing less.

The whole purpose of Christ’s life and ministry was to testify of the truth of God the Father and bring the way of salvation to mankind. Since Jesus is “**the way, the truth and the life**,” He was and is a true Witness of God. The Greek word for a witness is *marturos*, which “signifies one that gives testimony to the truth at the expense of his life” (*Cruden’s Complete Concordance*, 1986, p. 754). Jesus was the ultimate Witness, giving His life for the truth of God.

Christ—“the faithful Witness” (Rev. 1:5)—commanded His disciples to preach the Gospel to all nations as His *witnesses*. “And in His name, repentance and remission of sins should be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. **For you are witnesses of these things**” (Luke 24:47-48).

The Gospels: Eyewitness Testimonies

The process of writing the Gospels was much different from the writing of the Epistles of the apostles James, Peter, John, Jude and Paul. The Epistles are not detailed histories of events

covering many years—as are the Gospels and the book of Acts—and were generally composed by one person over a short period of time. The Gospels and Acts, however, contain material from numerous sources collected over a number of years before being put into final form by Jesus’ chosen apostles.

It is important to understand that the Gospel accounts of the life of Christ were written by *direct* eyewitnesses of Jesus’ ministry—with the exception of Luke, who used the eyewitness accounts of many disciples. The twelve disciples who were ordained by Jesus as apostles were the primary eyewitnesses, and we can accept their writings and testimonies as the truth. There were scores of additional eyewitnesses who authenticated the disciples’ testimony. Scriptural evidence confirms that the accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry were written long before the eyewitness writers died—with some portions being written as early as 26 AD, at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry.

The Twelve Apostles: The word *apostle* means “one sent bearing authority.” The apostles were personally commissioned by Jesus Christ to bear His authority and were sent in His name to preach the Gospel in all the world. When the time came for Jesus to appoint and ordain the twelve as apostles, He prayed to God the Father all night and then selected them from among the disciples who followed Him. Those He named and ordained were Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot (Luke 6:12-16; Mark 3:13-19).

The Gospel of Matthew: We know from the Gospel accounts that Matthew was with Jesus Christ during His entire ministry. As a Levite, Matthew would have had knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. When we examine the Gospel of Matthew, it becomes evident that he used his knowledge of the Scriptures to show how prophecies were fulfilled in the life of Jesus and by the events of His ministry. As a tax collector, Matthew must have been well educated and skilled in record keeping. In order to keep tax records for Herod Antipas, he would have had an excellent command of Greek. There is little doubt that Matthew used his varied talents to record the teachings and activities of Jesus from the beginning of His ministry in 26 AD. This is especially evident when we closely examine the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5-7. When compared to the account in Luke 6, Matthew’s account is a detailed, almost word-for-word rendition of what Jesus taught His disciples. Therefore, there is no doubt that Matthew wrote the Gospel that bears his name.

The Gospel of John: The historical acceptance of the apostle John as author of the Gospel of John is based on an ancient source. Edmond Hiebert, Th.D., writes: “In A.D. 324 or 325, Eusebius in his noted *Ecclesiastical History* recorded the results of his investigations concerning the four [G]ospels. He wrote about the apostle John, ‘His Gospel, which is known to all the churches under heaven, must be acknowledged as genuine.’ In the same chapter [Eusebius] asserts, ‘But of the writings of John, not only his Gospel, but also the former of his [E]pistles, have been accepted without dispute both now and in ancient times” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1, pp. 192-193).

From the Gospels, we know that the apostle John was with Jesus throughout His ministry. Moreover, Jesus had a close relationship with John, whom He greatly loved (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). While He was dying on the cross, Jesus entrusted John with the care of His mother Mary (John 19:26-27). Furthermore, John had a special vantage point in that he—with his brother James and the apostle Peter—witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus.

The Gospel of John is entirely different from the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) in that it contains deeper spiritual teachings than the other Gospels. When we examine the writings of the apostle John, it is evident that he was moved to write more about the love of God than were any of the other apostles. Moreover, because the chronology of the Gospel of John follows the progression of the annual holy days, it gives us an accurate, year-by-year time frame for Jesus’ ministry. There is little question that the apostle John wrote the Gospel that bears his name—in which he states that the express purpose of the book is that we might “**believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God**; and that believing, [we might] have life through His name” (John 20:30-31).

The Gospel of Mark: This Gospel is unique in that its writer, Mark, was probably a teenager during Jesus’ ministry. Mark identifies himself as the one who fled naked when Jesus was arrested on the night before His crucifixion (Mark 14:51-52). From this account we know that Mark was indeed an eyewitness to Jesus’ ministry, although he was not chosen to be an

apostle. Mark lived in Jerusalem with his mother, Mary, who was also a disciple of Jesus (Acts 12:12). Beginning in 44 AD, Mark worked with Paul and Barnabas before returning to Jerusalem. Later, after 60 AD, Mark was with Peter in Babylon (1 Pet. 5:13).

Hiebert writes: "Certain features are consistent with [the Gospel's] traditional association with Peter.... [Such a] connection naturally accounts for the 'eyewitness vividness' of many of Mark's episodes.... The inclusion of Aramaic expressions attributed to Jesus (5:41; 7:11, 34; 14:36), not found in the other gospels, may well be due to the fact that Mark recalled 'vividly the tone of the Apostle in relating the Master's solemn words.'... Peter's traditional connection with the [G]ospel is supported by the fact that it conforms to the outline of the story as given by Peter in Acts 10:34-43.

"We accept without hesitation the Marcan authorship of the second [G]ospel. This view does justice to the early and strong external evidence concerning its authorship and is consistent with the internal features of the [G]ospel" (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1, pp. 86-87). The Gospel of Mark was obviously written by Mark under Peter's supervision.

The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts: Concerning Luke's Gospel, Hiebert wrote: "Although the name of the author nowhere appears in it, the third [G]ospel does not present itself as an anonymous work.... [It] is certain that Theophilus, the original recipient of the [G]ospel, knew the writer's identity. In fact, it must have been common knowledge from the very beginning. Since the name of the author cannot with unquestioned certainty be deduced from the contents of his work, the uniform traditional ascription of it to Luke must represent information known from the first century" (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1, p. 114).

The Gospel of Luke differs from the other Gospels inasmuch as Luke was not an eyewitness of Christ's ministry as were Matthew, Mark and John. Rather, Luke used the accounts of numerous eyewitnesses to compile his Gospel. During the period recorded in Acts 13 to the end of the book, Luke was, however, an eyewitness to the apostle Paul's ministry. Luke was a Greek physician who apparently had been converted in Antioch, which was the location of the apostle Paul's home Church, or headquarters. From Paul's Epistles and the book of Acts, it is evident that Luke accompanied Paul during much of his ministry, serving as Paul's scribe, record-keeper and physician. Thus, we can conclude that Luke wrote his account under Paul's supervision.

Luke himself offers important information about the writing of his Gospel. He begins his account: "Since many have taken in hand to compile a *written* narration of the matters which have been fully believed among us, as they delivered *them* to us, **those who from the beginning had been eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word**, it seemed good to me also, having accurately understood everything from the very first, to write *these things* in an orderly sequence to you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you might know the *absolute* certainty of *the* things in which you have been instructed" (Luke 1:1-4). Luke begins the book of Acts in much the same way, writing of the "things that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which He was taken up..." (Acts 1:1-2).

From the introductions to the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, it is apparent that Luke primarily used the written records of the apostles and the original disciples to write his Gospel and the first twelve chapters of Acts. The rest of the book of Acts is Luke's eyewitness account of the apostle Paul's ministry.

Eyewitnesses and Ministers of the Word

Luke writes of disciples who, from the beginning, had been "eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word." Who are these "eyewitnesses"? By examining Luke's writings closely, we can discover the identity of many of these witnesses.

Soon after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples in Jerusalem where He "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'According as it is written, it was necessary for the Christ to suffer, and to rise from *the* dead the third day. And in His name, repentance and remission of sins should be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. **For you are witnesses of these things**'" (Luke 24:45-48).

Prior to ascending to heaven, Jesus promised the disciples that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit, stating, "[You] shall be **My witnesses**, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto *the* ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

In the book of Acts, we find that whenever the apostles proclaimed Jesus Christ and His resurrection, they emphatically declared that they were His witnesses. In his first message, Peter proclaimed: “This Jesus has God raised up, whereof **we all are witnesses**” (Acts 2:32). In the third chapter of Acts, Peter referred to Jesus as “the Author of life Whom God has raised from *the* dead, whereof **we are witnesses**” (Acts 3:15). Later, standing before the Sanhedrin, Peter said, “We are obligated to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus Whom you killed *by* hanging *Him* on a tree. Him has God exalted by His right hand *to be* a Prince and Savior, to give repentance and remission of sins to Israel. And **we are His witnesses of these things**, as *is* also the Holy Spirit, which God has given to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:29-32).

Years later—as God was opening up salvation to the Gentiles—Peter described Jesus’ ministry and works, saying, “**And we are witnesses of all *the* things that He did**, both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed Him by hanging *Him* on a tree. *But* God raised Him up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to **witnesses who had been chosen before by God**, to *those of* us who did eat and drink with Him after He had risen from *the* dead” (Acts 10:39-41). Again, Peter emphasizes that he and the other apostles were witnesses, *chosen* by God.

We can conclude that the apostles were the primary “**eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word**” that Luke wrote of in Luke 1:1-4, because they had been with Jesus from the beginning. They were chosen by God and commissioned by Jesus to preach and to write the Gospel by His authority. It was the apostles who wrote the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, directed by Jesus under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ did not leave the task of writing the most important book in the world to unknown storytellers living decades, or centuries after the apostles had died.

Other Key Eyewitnesses: Luke makes it clear that many of Christ’s disciples had taken it upon themselves to *write* accounts of what they had *heard* Jesus say and what they had *seen* Him do with their own eyes. Indeed, there were numerous eyewitnesses who contributed firsthand accounts in the compilation of the Gospels. Who were they? Luke’s account in the first chapter of Acts provides clues: “And after entering *Jerusalem*, they [the apostles and other disciples] went up into the upper chamber, where both **Peter and James were staying; and John and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James, the son of Alpheus, and Simon the Zealot; and Jude, the brother of James** [the eleven apostles]. All these were steadfastly continuing with one accord in prayer and supplications, *together* with *the* women, **including Mary**, the mother of Jesus, and **with His brothers**. And in those days, Peter stood up in *the* midst of the disciples (now *the* number of names together was **about a hundred and twenty**)” (Acts 1:9-15).

Here, Luke specifies that Mary, the mother of Jesus, and His four brothers (Mark 6:3) were included in that number. Also, counted among them were Joseph and Matthias, one of whom was to replace Judas Iscariot. Undoubtedly among the 120 were the 70 disciples that Jesus sent to preach the Gospel in various villages and cities to prepare His way (Luke 10:1-20). There is no question that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome were also included in the 120 (Mark 15:40-41). Based on these passages, we can thus identify most of the 120 eyewitnesses described as early disciples of Jesus.

Others, perhaps, might include the two disciples with whom Jesus walked to the village of Emmaus; Mark, who wrote the Gospel of Mark, and his mother Mary; Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary; Nathanael, an early disciple of Jesus (John 1:46-52); Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (John 19:38-39); and Jesus’ sisters (Mark 6:3).

Because of the magnitude of the life and ministry of Christ—God manifested in the flesh—Jesus did not simply select two or three witnesses as required under Old Testament law. Rather, it is apparent that—in order to ensure the veracity of the Gospels—Jesus chose 40 x 3, or about 120 witnesses.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene: After the twelve apostles, perhaps the most important eyewitness was Mary, the mother of Jesus—contributing the account of her visit with Elizabeth; Elizabeth’s salutation to Mary; Mary’s hymn to God; the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem; the shepherds’ visit as Jesus lay in the manger; and the words of Simeon and Anna when Mary and Joseph presented Jesus at the Temple after Mary’s purification (Luke 1:39-2:35). Undoubtedly, she contributed to the accounts of Herod’s attempt to kill Jesus and of the escape of Joseph, Mary and Jesus by night to Egypt, as well as their return to Nazareth (Matt. 2:1-23). Only

Mary was an eyewitness to all of these events, having “stored up all these sayings” in her heart (Luke 2:19).

Mary Magdalene contributed as well to the compilation of the Gospels. Mary went to Jesus’ tomb early in the morning (John 20:1-18), where Jesus appeared to her first. The account of Jesus’ conversation with Mary Magdalene must have originated with her, because she and Jesus were the only ones privy to the exchange.

The Apostles Give Themselves to the Ministry of the Word

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to the apostles in order to open their minds to Old Testament prophecies concerning His ministry, death and resurrection (Luke 24:44-47). He charged them saying, “**For you are witnesses of these things**” (verse 48).

Without question, the apostles realized the magnitude of their work. Note Peter’s powerful answer, for example, in Acts 4:5-12 when he and John were brought before the Sanhedrin for healing a man. Later, in a similar situation, Peter concluded his response by saying, “**And we are His witnesses of these things**... (Acts 5:32).

Within a year after Christ’s crucifixion, the apostles had fully devoted themselves to the “**ministry of the Word**” (Acts 6:4). From the introduction to his Gospel, we can conclude that Luke meant that the apostles were compiling and *writing down* the teachings of Jesus, which later became the Gospels (Luke 1:1-2). Because of the increase in the number of disciples, the apostles no doubt realized the need for a written compilation of Christ’s teachings—a uniform standard from which to teach new disciples.

In giving themselves to the ministry of the Word, the apostles were writing their narratives. Other eyewitnesses probably assisted the apostles in verifying and compiling their writings, which later became the Gospels as we know them. Luke wrote that the apostles “delivered *them* [the written accounts] to us” (Luke 1:2). Thus, the teachings of Jesus were written down from the beginning. Matthew probably recorded many parts of what became his Gospel much earlier, near the beginning of Jesus’ ministry.

Three Special Eyewitnesses—Peter, James and John

Jesus selected Peter, James and John to witness a vision of Him as God in His glorified form on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-9). After Jesus’ resurrection, these three would become especially powerful witnesses, greater than the rest of the twelve apostles in preaching and performing miracles.

The only other man to have seen God in His glorified form was Moses. The LORD God, Who became Jesus Christ, showed His glory to Moses and talked with him face-to-face (Ex. 33:18-23, 34:1-9). When we understand the **status of Moses**, then we will understand why Jesus chose Peter, James and John to be special eyewitnesses of His glory, and what this choice meant in regard to writing and canonizing the New Testament.

Moses received the Law directly from God Himself—and wrote the book of the Law and the rest of the Law as contained in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, along with the book of Genesis. Then he officially finalized, or canonized, the books and gave them to the priests for safekeeping (Deut. 31:9).

Moses had God’s **stamp of authority**. No one in the history of Israel was greater. Moses was considered a prophet *par excellence* because 1) he spoke to God face-to-face, 2) wrote the Law, 3) canonized the first five books of the Bible and, 4) led the children of Israel to the Promised Land.

Jesus Christ gave this same **stamp of approval** to Peter, James and John—the only eyewitnesses to Jesus’ transfiguration. Just as Moses had led the children of Israel, these three apostles would lead in preaching the Gospel to all the world—not only by their spoken words, but also by their writings. Just as Moses wrote and canonized the first five books of the Old Testament, they would help write and then finalize the complete New Testament. The apostles were to “bind up the testimony and seal the law,” which meant they were to write the New Testament, showing that Christ’s teachings made the Law complete by revealing the spiritual meaning and intent of the laws and commandments of God. Truly, another of Isaiah’s prophecies has been fulfilled (Isa. 42:21).

The Disciples and Apostles Were to Do Greater Works Than Jesus

On the night of His last Passover, Jesus told His apostles: “Truly, truly I say to you, the one who believes in Me shall also do the works that I do; **and greater works than these shall he do** because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12). Thus, Jesus confirmed the authority He would give to Peter, James and John (as well as to the other apostles) which would later be manifested in powerful, unheard-of miracles—such as those recorded in Acts 3:1-11.

Christ had so established the power and authority of Peter and the other apostles that when Ananias and his wife Sapphira lied to Peter, they fell over dead (Acts 5:1-10). The Church was greatly affected by these events. “Then great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard these things. And many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles...” (verses 11-12). There was no question that God was working through Peter, John, and the rest of the apostles by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through preaching, miracles, and wonders, the authority of the apostles was fully established. Thus, the apostles fulfilled Jesus’ promise that they would do greater works than He had done.

The Apostle Peter—a Special Eyewitness

The vision of the transfiguration affected the apostle Peter and his ministry for the rest of his life. In his First Epistle, when Peter addressed the elders of the churches, he referred back to this vision of the glory of the transfigured Christ. He writes: “The elders who *are* among you I exhort, even as a fellow elder, and **an eyewitness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory that is about to be revealed**. Feed the flock of God *that is* among you” (I Pet. 5:1-2).

In his Second Epistle, Peter wrote that the New Testament writings of the apostles were not based on folklore or myth. “For we did not follow cleverly concocted myths *as our authority*, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but **we were eyewitnesses of His magnificent glory** [in the transfiguration]...” (II Pet. 1:16). It is most evident that the transfiguration was a defining experience for Peter, and dramatically impacted his entire ministry—including his writings.

Peter aptly described what the apostles wrote, compiled and canonized as “the confirmed prophetic Word.” Thus was Isaiah 8:16 fulfilled. This was not a foretelling of future events, but the *inspired* writings of the books of the New Testament. “**We also possess the confirmed prophetic Word** [the New Testament books that the apostles had] to which you do well to pay attention, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and *the* morning star arises in your hearts; **knowing this first, that no prophecy** [inspired writing] **of Scripture** [New Testament or Old Testament] **originated as anyone’s own private interpretation** [it did not evolve from religious myths]; **because prophecy was not brought at any time** [Old Testament or New Testament] **by human will, but the holy men of God spoke** [and wrote] **as they were moved by the Holy Spirit**” (II Pet. 1:19-21). There is no question that the New Testament is the “confirmed prophetic [inspired] Word,” and, as Paul wrote, the “prophetic [inspired] scriptures” (Rom. 16:26).

The Apostle John—a Special Eyewitness

Jesus Christ referred to John and his brother James as the “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). In many passages of the Bible the voice of God is likened to thunder. James and John were called the sons of thunder because they preached the Word of God with *great power*. James was beheaded by Herod in 44 AD (Acts 12:1-2). The Jews also wanted to kill Peter (verse 3-5), but God spared him, leaving John and Peter as the last remaining eyewitnesses of the transfiguration.

Seeing Jesus in His glorified form was an awesome spiritual experience for John, the disciple whom Jesus especially loved. Thus, he began his Gospel in a powerful, though simple, way that demonstrated the lasting impact of the transfiguration. “In *the* beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in *the* beginning with God...” (see John 1:1-4, 9, 14, 16). All of the apostles knew that the LORD God of the Old Testament had been manifested in the flesh—but none of the others expressed this profound truth as powerfully and effectively as John.

In his First Epistle, John wrote of what he and the other apostles had experienced

firsthand during Christ's ministry: **"That which was from *the* beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our own eyes, that which we observed for ourselves and our own hands handled, concerning the Word of life;** (And the life was manifested, and we have seen, and are bearing witness, and are reporting to you the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us;) **that which we have seen and have heard we are reporting to you** in order that you also may have fellowship with us; for the fellowship—indeed, our fellowship—*is* with the Father and with His own Son, Jesus Christ" (I John 1:1-3).

The Special Help of the Holy Spirit

After His last Passover with the apostles, Jesus explained that they would be aided by the power of the Holy Spirit to remember whatever was necessary for their ministry of the Gospel: "But *when* the Comforter *comes*, *even* the Holy Spirit, which the Father will send in My name, **that one shall teach you all things, and shall bring to your remembrance everything that I have told you**" (John 14:26). Jesus told the apostles that they would be His witnesses after the Comforter came to reside within them: "But when the Comforter has come, which I will send to you from the Father, *even* **the Spirit of the truth** ... that one shall bear witness of Me. **Then you also shall bear witness**, because you have been with Me from *the* beginning" (John 15:26-27).

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostles compiled and wrote the truth contained in the New Testament. As John was concluding his Gospel, he specifically stated that through belief in Christ and His words one could have eternal life: **"But these [miracles] have been written, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, you may have life through His name"** (John 20:31).

Part Two: The Uniqueness of Epistles and Revelation as Scripture

After the Gospels and Acts, most of the rest of the New Testament was inspired to be written in the unique form of *personal* letters, or *epistles*. Because believers have a personal, family relationship with the Father and Christ, God inspired that His love and instructions for them would be conveyed in the form of epistles written by the apostles. As Hiebert has pointed out: "The New Testament is striking in that practically one-third of its contents is letters.... **In this prominent use of the epistolary form the New Testament is distinct from all the other sacred writings of the world....**

"Under the legal dispensation the demands of God were set forth in legal documents, sealed with the direct authority of God; **in the age of grace God further makes known His will to His children through loving letters of instruction and exhortation.** With the inauguration of the age of grace, the apostles wrote *letters* to the *brethren* in a **spirit of loving intimacy....**" (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 13-14, bold emphasis added).

Under the New Covenant, believers become the children of God the Father through the begetting of the Holy Spirit. "You have received *the* Spirit of sonship, whereby we call out, 'Abba [Daddy], Father.' The Spirit itself bears witness conjointly with our own spirit, *testifying* that **we are *the* children of God**" (Rom. 8:15-16). Indeed, the New Testament is the only book in the world that intimately reveals God's love for His begotten children and Jesus Christ's love for His brethren.

The General Epistles

The seven General Epistles were written by James, the brother of Jesus, Peter, John and Jude, another of Jesus' brothers, who apparently was ordained an apostle to succeed James after the latter was martyred in 62 AD. These four were sent by Jesus to witness to the children of Israel, as were all of the apostles except Paul and Barnabas.

In order to understand the General Epistles, especially the Epistle of James, one needs to understand that Christ's commission to preach the Gospel to those "of the circumcision" did not include *only* the Jews—which consisted of the tribe of Judah, part of the tribe of Levi and part of the tribe of Benjamin, known as the house of Judah—but also the so-called "lost" ten tribes of Israel, known also as the house of Israel. Jesus sent the twelve apostles, saying: "Do not go into *the* way of the Gentiles, and do not enter into a city of the Samaritans; but go

instead to **the lost sheep of the house of Israel** [not to the house of Judah only]. And *as you are going*, proclaim, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’ ” (Matt. 10:5-7).

When the twelve apostles went on this first mission, it is obvious that they did not leave the area of Galilee and Judea. However, from Jesus’ instructions, it is evident that He meant this commission to be carried out continuously in every generation until His return (Matt. 10:23). The ten northern tribes known as the house of Israel were never part of the Jewish nation, which was known as the house of Judah. To this day, the ten tribes of the house of Israel are not a part of the Jewish nation located in Palestine, called Israel. The Bible records that the ten tribes were taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 721-718 BC, who exiled them, into Assyria, Persia and Media (II Kings 17:21-24).

When Peter addressed the multitudes on Pentecost 30 AD, he demonstrated that he understood the difference between the Jews (the house of Judah) and the Israelites (the house of Israel) by specifically addressing both groups (Acts 2:14, 22). Peter concluded by calling on “all the house of Israel” to repent (verse 36). The phrase “all the house of Israel” means *all* twelve tribes—the ten northern tribes of the house of Israel as well as the Jews of the house of Judah. It is important to understand this vital biblical and historical distinction between the house of Judah and the house of Israel in order to know to whom the apostle James wrote his Epistle.

The Epistle of James: The New Testament gives some basic facts about James. Mark records that James was one of four half-brothers of Jesus Christ (Mark 6:3). This means that James and his three brothers, Joses, Judas (Jude) and Simon, grew up with Jesus. As brothers, they had a special relationship with Jesus. They were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life while He was growing up. They lived with Jesus, talked with Him, ate with Him and worked with Him on a daily basis.

Yet, in spite of this, when Jesus began His ministry, they did not become His disciples. It appears that before Jesus’ resurrection, they did not really believe He was the Messiah (John 7:1-6). After His resurrection, Jesus appeared personally to James (I Cor. 15:7). Afterwards, James believed, as did his other half-brothers, because all of Jesus’ brothers, along with His mother Mary, were in the assembly of the original 120 disciples mentioned in Acts 1:14. It is uncertain when James became an apostle, but in 36 AD the apostle Paul referred to him as such (Gal. 1:19).

When the apostle James wrote his Epistle to the twelve tribes of Israel, he knew exactly where they were located. He begins his epistle, “James, a servant of God and of *the* Lord Jesus Christ, **to the twelve tribes, which are in the dispersion:** Greetings!” (James 1:1.) Obviously, his Epistle was sent to *believers*—Jewish and Israelite—living in the various countries named in Acts 2:9-11.

First Peter: The apostle Peter wrote the First Epistle that bears his name. At the beginning of his Epistle, Peter clearly identifies himself: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 1:1). We find that Silvanus and Mark were with Peter in Babylon (I Pet. 5:12-13). Therefore, it is very probable that Peter used Mark or Silvanus as his scribe.

Hiebert relates, “The early Church had no doubts concerning the authenticity of I Peter. The evidence for the epistle is early and clear, and it is as strong as for any other book in the New Testament. It was universally received as an acknowledged part of the Christian Scriptures” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 105).

Peter and his brother Andrew were the first two disciples that Jesus called (John 1:39-44; Mark 1:16-18; Matt. 4:18-20; Luke 5:1-9). When Jesus selected the twelve apostles, Peter was named first (Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14). As we have seen, the apostle Peter was one of the special eyewitnesses, along with the apostle John and his brother James, who saw the glory of Jesus’ transfiguration on the holy mount (Matt. 17:1-9). These three were the initial leaders of the twelve apostles, although the book of Acts makes it clear that Peter and John fulfilled the primary leadership roles (Acts 2-5).

Some traditions make the claim that Peter was the first *pope*, and that he ministered in Rome for twenty-five years and was martyred there. However, most biblical scholars consider these traditions invalid because they have no factual basis in the New Testament. In fact, there is no place in the New Testament where Christ or the apostles authorized any man to assume the exalted office and title of pope, or “holy father.” Jesus commanded the apostles never to call any man “Rabbi” or “Father.” Such an exalted religious position is diametrically opposed to the teachings of Jesus Christ, Who set an example of love and service during His entire ministry (Matt. 20:25-28).

Second Peter: There is a notable difference in the style of writing and language of II Peter as compared to I Peter. Apparently the apostasy sweeping the churches of God was so vicious and insidious that Peter condemned such false teachings in the strongest language possible. Undoubtedly, this is why the style and language of Peter's Second Epistle is so different from that of his First Epistle. (Read II Peter 2 in its entirety to understand the full force of Peter's condemnation of false teachers.)

When the internal evidence is examined, there is little doubt that Peter wrote this Epistle. He begins his Second Epistle as he began his first, by identifying himself: "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained *the* same precious faith as ours by *the* righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 1:1). Hiebert notes, "The claim to Petrine authorship is stronger in this epistle than in I Peter. The writer calls himself Simon Peter (1:1) and identifies himself as a witness of the transfiguration (1:16-18). He places himself on a level with the apostle Paul (3:15), identifies himself as the writer of a previous epistle (3:1), and recalls the Lord's prediction concerning his death (1:14)" (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 139).

While strongly condemning false teachers, Peter exhorts believers to be diligent and to develop godly Christian character through faith and the understanding that they are perfected through the love of God (1:5-11). Finally, he encourages the brethren not to give up hope because "the day of the Lord" and Christ's second coming did not appear to be imminent. He reminds them that in spite of scoffers, the promises of God were sure and "the day of the Lord" would occur at its set time in the future (3:1-14).

First John: This Epistle has an unusual beginning, in that it opens without an address or a declaration of the writer's name. Apparently, the writer was so well known and had such an intimate relationship with the intended recipients of his Epistle that he had no need to identify himself. It is clear that they knew who he was and recognized his apostolic authority. Thus, John opens his epistle with a special preamble showing that he was an intimate disciple of Jesus Christ who had been with Him from the beginning of His ministry (I John 1:1-4).

There appears no doubt whatsoever that the apostle John wrote the Epistle of I John: "In fact all Fathers, Greek and Latin, accept this epistle as being by John.... Thus the evidence shows that this epistle, undoubtedly one of the latest of the New Testament books to be written, took an immediate and permanent position as an authoritative writing of inspiration" (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 184).

When the style and language of John's First Epistle is compared with that of the Gospel of John, there can be no question that the apostle John wrote these books. In both, the language is simple and direct, revealing the spiritual love and power of God the Father and Jesus Christ. One of the most interesting features in all of John's writings is his use of *contrasting opposites* that show the difference between the way of God and the way of Satan and the world—the light of God vs. the darkness of the devil.

Second and Third John: The similarity in content, language and style of these two short Epistles clearly demonstrates that they were written by the apostle John. These Epistles further strengthen the teachings in his First Epistle and his Gospel. Hiebert writes: "The relationship of these letters to I John further makes it clear that all three must have come from the same hand. Second John bears the closest resemblance to the first. More than half of its contents are also contained in I John. Both of these epistles have many phrases which recall, or are identical with those of the first epistle" (Ibid., p. 218).

The Epistle of Jude: In the first verse of this short Epistle, the author identifies himself as the brother of James. The salutation here is very similar to that in the Epistle of the apostle James, which begins: "James, **a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.**" The opening of Jude's Epistle is nearly identical: "Jude, **a servant of Jesus Christ** and brother of James, to the called *saints*, sanctified by God *the* Father and kept in Jesus Christ."

Little is known about Jude. However, we know that Jude was the third of the four half brothers of Jesus, which means that he was probably much younger than James (Mark 6:3). Also, Luke noted that all of Jesus' half-brothers were counted among the original 120 disciples (Acts 1:14). Jude was a special eyewitness of Jesus' life—he lived with Jesus, talked with Him, ate with Him, and worked with Him on a daily basis.

There is no record, from history or Scripture, as to when Jude became a prominent leader in the Church. However, it is probable that he replaced James as the overseer of the Church in

Jerusalem after James was martyred in 62 AD. After James was killed, many of the Jewish believers began to leave Christianity and turn back to Judaism and to Jewish gnosticism. At this time, a “great apostasy” was sweeping the churches, as noted in the three Epistles of John, II Peter and many of the epistles of Paul (such as II Thessalonians). No doubt Jude witnessed these events firsthand. His Epistle shows that many believers were following ungodly men who had stealthily crept in and had established themselves in positions of authority—and were perverting the grace of God by granting license to sin. Apparently, the apostasy was so powerful and the situation was so desperate that Jude urged believers to earnestly *fight* for the original “faith once delivered” to the saints (Jude 3-4).

The Epistles of the Apostle Paul

The New Testament contains more information about Paul than any other apostle. He wrote of himself in many of his fourteen Epistles. In addition, the book of Acts contains firsthand, detailed accounts of Paul’s conversion, his ministry and his travels. The *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* contains this synopsis: “We are dependent on Acts alone for most of our knowledge of Paul’s career. That he was born in Tarsus, and was a citizen of Tarsus by birth; that he was named Saul; that he was educated in Jerusalem ‘at the feet of Gamaliel’ (Acts 22:3); that he was present at the stoning of Stephen and was a persecutor of the Jerusalem church; that he made a persecuting trip to Damascus and was converted as he approached this city; that he subsequently engaged in three distinct missionary journeys; that he was arrested in Jerusalem, appealed to Caesar as the right of a Roman citizen, and was sent to Rome for trial—all this we know only from Acts. Paul himself never mentions any one of these items” (vol. 3, pp. 683-684).

Saul was a Roman citizen by birth and was well educated. Growing up in Tarsus, he must have been educated in the Roman schools and by the local rabbis as well. He also must have been extremely gifted, because he was selected to go to Jerusalem for advanced studies in Judaism. Saul was taught there by Gamaliel, a Pharisee, the most renowned Jewish teacher of his day. There is no indication of Saul’s age when he went to Gamaliel’s school. Since Paul does not mention that he was in Jerusalem or Judea during Jesus Christ’s ministry, it can only be assumed that he returned to Tarsus before Jesus began preaching.

Saul, the zealous persecutor who ravaged the Church, was the last person that anyone, other than God, would have called to be the apostle to the Gentiles. But after Saul’s dramatic conversion (Acts 9:1-18) Christ called him a “chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before *the* Gentiles, and kings, and *the* children of Israel” (verse 15). Interestingly, Jesus specifically chose Saul—a zealous Pharisee steeped in Judaism—to ensure that Judaism and its traditional works of law would never supplant the grace of God through faith in Christ. Indeed, “God works in mysterious ways.”

After being baptized by Ananias, Saul remained in Damascus for a short time, testifying that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 9:19-22). Later, he went into Arabia for three years, during which time Christ personally taught him in visions. Therefore, the Gospel that Paul preached did not come from any of the other apostles—it came directly from Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11-19).

Aside from the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Christ, the Lord’s call and conversion of Saul—who became Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles—is perhaps the greatest act of grace recounted in the New Testament. Because Paul had received this most profound grace, he fully understood the grace of God through Jesus. Therefore, in the same way that God used the apostle John to teach and write more on the love of God than any other apostle, He used the apostle Paul to teach and write more about the magnificent grace of God than any other apostle.

Paul’s Ministry and Apostleship: Luke adds more details about Paul’s visit to Jerusalem after he returned from Arabia in 36 AD: “And when Saul came to Jerusalem, he attempted to join himself to the disciples; but all were afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. Then Barnabas took him *and* brought *him* to the apostles [James and Peter], and [Paul] related to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. And he was with them, coming in and going out in Jerusalem, and speaking boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then he spoke and disputed with the [Greek-speaking Jews], but they attempted to kill him. And when the brethren learned of *it*, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus” (Acts 9:26-30).

Paul remained in Tarsus until 40 AD. By that time, through the preaching of the disciples,

God had raised up a great number of Gentile believers in Antioch, the first converts to be called “Christians.” The apostles sent Barnabas to minister to them, but there were so many disciples that Barnabas went to Tarsus and found Paul and brought him to Antioch to help him minister to them (Acts 11:20-26).

Four years later, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Barnabas and Paul were ordained as apostles—and soon afterwards were sent on their first evangelistic tour (Acts 13:1-4). During this first tour, Saul was renamed Paul (verse 9).

The Nature of Paul’s Epistles: During the next twenty years of the apostle Paul’s ministry, he and his helpers traveled extensively. God used him to raise up numerous churches throughout Asia Minor, Galatia, Greece, Rome, Italy, Spain and perhaps other countries not mentioned in the book of Acts. Paul wrote epistles to the churches to instruct them in the Gospel of Christ and to address questions pertaining to Christian living. Fourteen of the New Testament Epistles were written by Paul. Nine were written to seven specific churches: Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and I and II Thessalonians. Four are called “pastoral Epistles” because they were written to ministers who had worked with Paul: I and II Timothy, Titus and Philemon. The book of Hebrews can be categorized as a general Epistle because it was written to the Greek-speaking Church at large, rather than to a specific congregation or individual.

Apparently the only Epistle that Paul wrote with his own hand was that addressed to the Galatians (Gal. 6:11). He usually dictated his Epistles to a scribe. Paul used Luke quite extensively, along with Silas, Timothy, and perhaps Mark and others as scribes.

Hiebert writes that Paul’s Epistles are “not abstract doctrinal dissertations on some particular aspect of the Christian faith. They were written to meet specific needs and were adapted to the occasion. The epistolary method enabled Paul to stress the truths of Christianity again and again in different contexts and with different applications, all according to the needs of his readers.... [The] use of the epistolary form ... does not rob these writings of their authority as Scripture. Everywhere in the lofty, unwavering testimony of the writer there is that sense of authority which gives these writings their force and finality” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 14-16).

The Book of Revelation

The book of Revelation, also known as the *Apocalypse*, is the most intriguing, mysterious and enigmatic book in the Bible. It is fitting that it stands as the last book of the New Testament and of the entire Bible. What God began as recorded in the book of Genesis, He is going to finish as recorded in the book of Revelation. The first chapter of Revelation marks the beginning of the end—as Jesus said, “**I AM THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA, THE BEGINNING AND THE ENDING,**” says the Lord, ‘Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come—the Almighty’ ” (1:8). When all of the events described in Revelation have been fulfilled, Jesus proclaimed that His work will be done—the end will have arrived. What He started in the beginning, He will have finished: “And He said to me, ‘**It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.**’ To the one who thirsts, I will give freely of the fountain of the water of life’ ” (21:6). Genesis and Revelation, encompassing all of Scripture, reveal the plan of God in microcosm. It is fitting that what Genesis began, Revelation finishes.

Hiebert writes, “The book of Revelation is the true capstone of the Bible. It is the only distinctively prophetic book of the New Testament. Other New Testament books contain various prophetic portions, but none of them provides such a sustained prophetic picture of the future as is given in this concluding book of [the] biblical canon. Without it our Bible would be quite incomplete—like a stirring story without an ending or a drama without its climax. It brings the eschatological expectations of the Church to their fitting conclusion [with the return of Jesus Christ to earth and the establishment of the kingdom of God]” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 231).

The Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation: The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation complement one another. Daniel tells half of the story and Revelation tells the rest. When Daniel desired to understand the prophecies that God had given to him, an angel of God told him that it was not for him to know their meaning. Rather, the prophecies he wrote would not be understood in his day, but only at the “time of the end”—and only by the “wise” (Dan. 12:4, 8-

10).

But who are the wise? How is it that they will understand and the wicked will not? The wise are those who love God, fear Him and keep His commandments—and because they do, they will understand (Psa. 111:10). They are the ones who “keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” and again, they are those who “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17; 14:12).

The entire book of Revelation is much like the parables that Jesus spoke. Revelation was written to reveal to the people of God what the world will be like in the end times. Only those who have the Spirit of God, love God and keep His commandments will fully understand. Hiebert writes: “The book of Revelation makes serious demands upon the would-be interpreter.... Like other Scriptures, it demands that the interpreter attentively ‘hear what the Spirit saith to the churches’ (2:7).... As the capstone of the biblical revelation, the Apocalypse is rightly to be understood only in the light of that prior revelation” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, pp. 233-234).

The writer of Revelation identifies himself four times as “John” (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). This was none other than the apostle Jesus loved, the one who wrote the Gospel of John and three Epistles. While some scholars do not accept the apostle John’s authorship of the book of Revelation, the early historical evidence and traditions of the early Church point to him as the author. Indeed, it was fitting that the disciple whom Jesus especially loved was granted the blessing of writing the final book of the New Testament and Bible.

A Final Summary

Scripture has informed us that God the Father and Jesus Christ specifically chose certain deeply converted men to write the most important and magnificent book in the world—all through the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Yet, in all the commentaries that have been written about the New Testament, one obvious fact has been emphasized: **God used only eight men to write the entire New Testament.** Six of them were chosen apostles of Jesus Christ. Three were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life, His transfiguration and ministry—the apostles Peter, James and John. Two were brothers of Jesus Christ—James and Jude. One, Paul, was specially called to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and for three years Jesus Christ personally taught him in visions. The last two were Mark—who wrote the Gospel of Mark under Peter’s supervision—and Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke and Acts under Paul’s supervision.

Still, the apostle John had a distinguished role, as he was used by God to complete the final canonization of the New Testament. As will be brought out in a later chapter, John was of the Aaronic blood line, making him uniquely qualified for the task.

Indeed, the New Testament was written by, or its writing was supervised by, the chosen apostles of Jesus Christ. Therefore, one can have full faith and confidence that the original Greek text—as preserved in the Byzantine text—is the very Word of God.