

“Paul’s Cloak” within the Canonical Process in Early Christianity

Dr. Duane L. Christensen, William Carey International University

©D.L. Christensen, 2000.

Some years ago, in the midst of a personal crisis that cost me much—including my first marriage, I came to a startling conclusion: that nothing is what it appears to be. What we perceive as reality never really matches up perfectly with reality itself. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the laws in the book of Deuteronomy do not allow for capital punishment on the basis of a single witness. Truth seldom, if ever, matches any one perception of it; and it is certainly not measured by consensus of opinion. And on the translation of the Greek word φαλόνην in 2 Tim 4:13 with the meaning “cloak” (i.e., a “thick, upper garment” of some sort) there is virtual consensus.

Another aspect of truth has become increasingly clear to me in recent years as my eyesight has changed. On July 4 of this year, my wife and I drove to San Francisco to enjoy a meal at a Mexican restaurant listed in our Entertainment Book. Needless to say, I was somewhat embarrassed to find out that the discount was not valid, as the waitress called attention to the fine print on the coupon that excludes holidays. I must confess that even when she called attention to that fine print on the edge of the document I held in my hand, I was still not able to read it. I didn’t have the right glasses on. All I could see was a blurred image of unintelligible marks on a piece of paper. It’s amazing what happens, however, when we put on the right prescription glasses—and, suddenly, what is blurred and incomprehensible becomes clear and so obvious. For me, the subject of “Paul’s cloak” in 2 Tim 4:13 is a bit like that.

The term φαλόνην in 2 Tim 4:13 is *hapax legomenon*—it appears only here on the pages of the Greek New Testament. In the great uncials of antiquity the term is spelled φελόνην. Moreover, so far as I have been able to determine, the term φαλόνην does not actually appear in other documents from antiquity.

The common interpretation of the word as “cloak” in various translations of the New Testament (ancient and modern), which is taken from the Greek word φαινόλη (“cloak”), presumes a metathesis. The fact that such a metathesis did take place is demonstrated in two ways. In the first place, the word φελονι (like the word φαλόνη here in 2 Timothy) is used in modern Greek with the meaning of “cloak.” And secondly, in antiquity the diminutive form φαλόνιον, with a similar meaning, appears in Greek papyri of the second and third centuries CE (Oxyrhynchus Papyri [933, 30]; Griech. Pap. zu Giessen [12, 4]; and in Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Museen zu Berlin [816, 24]).

Liddell and Scott do not list the word φαλόνη, as such; but under the word φαινόλη they cite the New Testament (presumably 2 Tim 4:13) with a note that “the forms φαλόνη and φελόνη are dubious.” The use of the word φελονι in modern Greek with the meaning “cloak” is not persuasive in terms of determining the meaning of the word in antiquity; for this usage could be explained from the common interpretation of the word φαλόνην (or φελονι) in the Greek New Testament. Moreover, the discussion of whether the term φαινόλη is a Latin loanword from *paenula* (Hahn, Fraenkel, and Schwyzer), or whether the Latin *paenula* is borrowed from an original Greek φανόλα (Moulton and Milligan) is not relevant to our discussion here; for we are dealing with the word φαλόνην and not the word φαινόλην.

It appears that the word φαλόνην in 2 Tim 4:13 is a rare word, which may in fact be a technical term that was not widely understood by those responsible for transmitting and translating the Greek New Testament, ancient and modern. Thus the fact that the Syriac Peshitta translates the term as “book-carrier” deserves a closer look, particularly when the second half of the verse in 2 Tim 4:13 appears to describe its contents, namely “papyrus scrolls” (τά βιβλία) and “parchment leaves” (τῶ μεμβράνῃ). What we have here may be like the word “jacket” in English, which in addition to its primary meaning of “a short coat” designed to be placed around the upper part of the body, is also used for purposes other than clothing, such as a life jacket.

Moreover, the term “book jacket” is even used in reference to phonograph records and compact disks in the music industry.

When we encounter an unfamiliar word in any language, our first recourse in determining its meaning is its literary context. And here we encounter a problem so far as the traditional interpretation of the word φαίλονην is concerned. In Acts 28:30, we read that Paul “lived there (in Rome) two whole years *at his own expense* and welcomed all who came to him.” Paul had the means to purchase a cloak in Rome to deal with the cold of winter, if he needed one. Why then would he send a message all the way to Asia Minor to obtain his cloak for the approaching winter season? And why did he not fetch this cloak earlier, when he was imprisoned for two years in Caesarea? Moreover, Paul had friends with him who would gladly have made that purchase for him locally in either instance. Paul’s request that Timothy do his “best to come before winter “ (4:21) need not be interpreted as fear of the discomfort he would face shortly in a cold Roman prison. It is more likely that Paul’s concern here reflects his own knowledge of the changing weather, which would make a sea voyage on Timothy’s part dangerous and cause him to delay his journey from Asia Minor to Rome. Paul’s recent experience in his sea voyage off the coast of Crete as the ship departed from Fair Havens on route to a better harbor at Phoenix, where they intended to wait out the winter weather, was fresh in his mind (see Acts 27). The adverse winds of the approaching winter season made that journey from Sidon, past Cyprus, and on to the island of Crete exceedingly difficult. It was an early winter storm that drove the ship across the Mediterranean Sea to Malta and the shipwreck in which Paul and Luke almost lost their lives. Paul knew that if Timothy did not come to Rome before winter, it would be a lengthy wait before Timothy and Mark would join Paul and Luke in their ministry in Rome, which appears to have been focused on canonical activity in regards the formation of the New Testament.

In their study of the origin of the codex in antiquity (*The Birth of the Codex*. London, 1983; see also T. C. Skeat, “‘Especially the Parchments’: A Note on 2 Timothy iv. 13.” *JTS* n.s. 30 [1979] 173-77), C. H. Roberts and T. C. Skeat reached the conclusion that the μὲμβράνῃ here in 2 Tim

4:13 are parchment leaves with writing on both sides. In point of fact, this particular text may be the oldest known reference to a codex in antiquity. This is important because every single fragment of the Greek New Testament recovered from antiquity appears on such a leaf from the pages of a codex. There are no surviving fragments from scrolls. From the very beginning, the New Testament as canonical Scripture was written in the form of a codex. Moreover, it is possible that Paul and others in the life of the early Christian Church are in fact responsible for inventing the codex, in which pages were sewn together to form the first “books” in the way we think of them today. They did this in order to have ready access to the content of the Scriptures in their apologetic activity as evangelists. It is much easier to locate a specific text by turning the pages of a codex than by unrolling a ponderous scroll.

At the time in which 2 Tim 4:13 was written, there was no Greek word for a “book” as such, at least in the manner in which that word is used currently. Our text suggests that the word βιβλίον here refers specifically to a papyrus scroll, whereas the word μεμβράνα refers to the pages of a codex. Our English word Bible, which is derived from the Greek word βίβλος, refers exclusively to a “codex-form” of a book; whereas in antiquity the βιβλία were in fact scrolls. It is easy to see the source of confusion here, and to understand why the translation of a technical term from the nascent book-making industry of antiquity as “cloak” gained wide credence on the part of interpreters and translators of the Greek text through the centuries.

When the Greek text of 2 Tim 4:13 is properly interpreted, the consequences in reading its immediate context are profound. It’s a bit like putting on a new pair of glasses with the right prescription, which enable us to see more clearly at a mere glance what before was blurred and consequently misinterpreted because it was not in focus. The Greek text of 2 Tim 4:10 can be read quite differently from the common interpretation of NRSV: “for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.” If Demas deserted Paul at this point in time, how does one explain other references that present this same man as a loyal colleague of Paul? If these other texts refer to points in time prior to the presumed desertion in 2 Tim 4:10, there is no problem. But a close reading of them suggests that such is not the case.

In Colossians 4:14, Demas is presented in association with Luke, Aristarchus *and Mark* (4:10), Jesus Justus (4:11), and Epaphras (4:12). From this passage in Colossians, it appears that Mark, Aristarchus, and Jesus Justus were Jews (cf. 4:11); but Demas, Epaphras, and Luke were Gentiles. Demas is also mentioned in Philemon 24, in company with Epaphras, Aristarchus, Luke—*and once again Mark*—among those present with Paul during his imprisonment in Rome. In 2 Tim 4:9-13, Demas has parted company with Paul—*before the arrival of Mark*; for Demas departed for Thessalonica, and Luke alone remained there with Paul in Rome (4:11). In other words, Aristarchus, Epaphras, and the others—*including Mark*—have not yet arrived in Rome. As a matter of fact, Timothy is instructed to *bring Mark with him* when he comes to join forces with Paul and Luke (2 Tim 4:11). But Mark is present with Demas in both of these other references. If the “desertion” of Demas took place before the arrival of Mark in Rome, it must have been resolved rather quickly; for Demas is once again present in Rome with Paul, Mark, and the others at the time the letters to the Colossians and to Philemon were written. Both of these letters were written while Paul was in prison in Rome—*in the company of Mark*.

Numerous scholars have called attention to the fact that the description of Demas as “in love with this present world” is eschatological language. Moreover, it should be noted that Demas went to Thessalonica; and the subject of 2 Thessalonians, in particular, is the matter of eschatology. In 1 Thessalonians, the “second coming” of Jesus is imminent, and the author’s concern is to prepare the church for this approaching day of the Lord (1 Thes 4:13-5:11). In sharp contrast, the author of 2 Thessalonians is taking pains to refute the idea that this return of Jesus is near and to remind the church of a number of events that must precede it (2:1-12). The situation faced here is one of keen apocalyptic expectations fueled by persecution (1:4). The author draws on a rich reservoir of apocalyptic tradition to show that the church’s present affliction will be reversed on the day of the Lord (1:5-10). Since that climactic day has not yet arrived (2:1-12), actions in the present circumstances continue to be important (2:15-3:16).

Though many scholars conclude that Paul is not the author of 2 Thessalonians, it is possible to read this letter as a conscious attempt on Paul’s part to correct his earlier views on matters of

eschatology. The content of this letter may also be interpreted as an attempt on Paul's part to restore Demas as a colleague, when he departed for Thessalonica because he was not yet ready to accept Paul's new teaching on the subject of eschatology.

In the middle of the first century CE there was widespread belief in the approaching dawn of a new age among both Christians and Jews within the Roman Empire. And for many, including the apostle Paul, the year 63 CE was a cardinal year in prophetic expectation. According to Wacholder (*HUCA* [1973] 153-96), a new sabbatical cycle of seven years in the Jewish calendar commenced in the fall of that year. For Jews, the sabbatical cycles were important prophetic indicators. The book of Daniel had predicted that there were to be seventy sabbatical cycles of seven years until the Kingdom of God would arrive on earth. Daniel divides those 490 years into a period of 49 years (seven times the seven-year sabbatical cycle), another 434 years (62 x 7 sabbatical cycles), and a final seven-year period that is divided into two parts of 3½ years each. Regardless of what the author of the book of Daniel may have originally meant, many in the first century believed that the "seventieth week of years" in Daniel's prophecy was near at hand. They specifically thought that it would coincide with the sabbatical cycle scheduled to begin in 63 CE and to end in 70 CE. These final seven years of Daniel's prophecy were thought to embrace a period of great trouble for Israel, the city of Jerusalem, and the Temple. The conclusion of this final seven years was expected to witness the advent of the messianic Kingdom of God. For Paul and others in the early Christian Church, this meant that Jesus would return at this time to begin his millennial reign as king in Jerusalem.

As early as 49 CE, according to Suetonius (*Claudius* 25), Jews in Rome were expelled because of tumults caused by Chrestus, a messianic pretender. Josephus informs us that in the first year of Nero's reign (54 CE), so many false messiahs began to appear among the Jews in Judaea that hardly a day went by that the Roman procurator did not put some of them to death (*Antiquities* XX.8,5 §§ 160-161). Jesus had prophesied that such imposters would arise who would lead people into the desert where their new "Moses" (the Christ) would lead the Jews to victory over the Romans: "Wherefore if they shall say unto you, 'Behold, he is in the desert ...

believe it not” (Matt 24:26). In his account of the first year of Nero’s reign, Josephus said: “Imposters and deceivers called upon the mob to follow them into the desert. For they said that they would show them unmistakable wonders and signs that would be conducted in precise agreement with God’s will. Many people were in fact persuaded to follow them and they paid for their folly” (*Antiquities* XX.8,6, § 168). Moreover, a certain Egyptian false messiah led some 30,000 people to the Mount of Olives and/or the desert at this time, proclaiming that he would cause the walls of Jerusalem to be destroyed. Though Felix, the Roman procurator was able to restore order, the Egyptian himself escaped, and about two years later the Roman authorities thought the apostle Paul to be that Egyptian renegade (*Antiquities* XX.8,6 §§ 169-172).

Paul believed that the glorious return of Christ would be an occasion when “the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thes 4:16-17). These words were written around 50 CE. Some years later Paul elaborated on his eschatological beliefs in greater detail to the church at Corinth: “But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when (Christ) hands over the kingdom of God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death... When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:23-28). Paul was so certain of the soon arrival of God’s kingdom that he told the Romans that “Satan would be crushed under their feet very soon” (Rom 16:20).

The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Letter of James express similar belief in the imminence of Christ’s return from heaven. Hebrews speaks of “these last days” (1:2), “the end of the age” (9:26), the day of reckoning is “approaching” (10:25), for “in a very little while, the one who is coming will come and will not delay” (10:37). James was martyred in the spring of 62 CE and, in

the months that followed, Paul found occasion to rethink his eschatological beliefs. The apostle James told his readers it was “the last days” and that they should be patient “until the coming of the Lord ... for the coming of the Lord is near” (Jas 5:3,7,8). The apostle John was no less urgent in his appeal that the end of the age was near: “Children, it is the last hour! As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18). The return of Christ in that generation seemed an assured thing because Jesus himself was thought to have taught it: “Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place” (Matt 24:34). Jesus told his disciples that some of them would not die before they would “see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom” (Matt 16:27-28).

In popular belief, two important events had to take place before the last sabbatical period of Daniel’s prophecy could begin. According to Dan 9:26-27, the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple would take place first. Moreover, the Roman Empire had to be overthrown; for there was hardly a prophetic interpreter at that time who did not consider the Roman Empire to be the “iron legs” of the Babylonian image in Daniel 2. The “iron legs” would break into ten divisions, some strong as iron and others weak as miry clay. In 63 CE, when the new sabbatical cycle began, those “iron legs” were as strong as ever. The anticipated world war that would overthrow the “iron legs” of the Roman Empire never happened.

Instead of a world war starting between the East and the West in 63 CE, followed by a revolt of the various kingdoms within the Roman dominion, to fulfill what Christians thought to be Christ’s prophecies (Matt 24:6-7), the opposite occurred. Rome was stronger than ever. With the passing of that year, Paul came to the conclusion that the “iron legs” of Rome were going to remain in power for a long time to come. Paul realized that the prophesied ten kings, and the “little horn,” were not going to appear in the first century. And not long afterwards, Peter also became convinced of the fact that a great deal of time was still left in world history before the second coming of Jesus would take place. That’s what Peter has in mind in his second letter when he

says that a day with the Lord is as a thousand years. Peter indicates that Christ did not really delay his coming. The final “generation” would happen many years in the future.

By the end of the year 63 CE (if not earlier) it was obvious to Paul (and soon to Peter and John as well) that it was necessary to establish a standard body of sacred writings for use in the Christian community until those end-time events would actually take place. Paul took the first step to that end by editing his nine Ecclesiastical Letters to seven churches in a form that parallels that of the Writings of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh), as a fifth segment of the canon of sacred Scripture. Peter followed suit with his second letter, which recognizes Paul’s letters as Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16). After the execution of Paul (ca. 66 CE) and Peter (ca 67 CE) in Rome, however, the task of completing the canon of the Christian Bible fell to the apostle John and his followers. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE brought with it a measure of renewed credibility to the apocalyptic eschatology of former days. But by then the eschatological beliefs of Paul and others had shifted and a canon of the “Apostolic Writings” emerged in the writings of four “primary apostles”—Paul, James (the brother of Jesus), Peter, and John. By the time the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, John was the only one of those four who was still alive. It was John who completed the canonical process that produced the Christian Bible as a “Completed Tanakh” (a 49-book canon = $22 + 5 + 22 = 7^2$). Though this particular concept of the canon of the Scriptures was subsequently forgotten within the main stream of the Christian movement, as the center of Christianity moved farther and farther from its origins within Judaism in Palestine, that canon was never actually lost. To the present time, it represents the number, and the correct order, of the books in the Second Testament. The content of that canon may be outlined as follows:

The Forty-Nine Books of the Completed Tanakh in a Menorah-Pattern

- A Genesis as introduction—from creation to Moses (the true prophet)
- B Twelve Writings—by Moses (4) and the Prophets (8)
- C Nine Writings of the 1st Testament—on life and worship in the 2nd Temple
- X New Torah: Gospels and Acts—Jesus as the “Prophet Like Moses”
- C’ Nine Writings of the 2nd Testament—on life and worship in the Church
- B’ Twelve Writings—by Paul (4) and the four “Pillars” (8)
- A’ Revelation as conclusion—judgment and new creation (the final prophet)

The situation in early Christianity parallels that of Judaism in the time of the Masoretes of Tiberius in Palestine. For all practical purposes, the canon of the Jewish Bible (the Tanakh) is the Masoretic Text. In particular, the Aleppo Codex together with Codex Leningrad (which the academic community has published as an official critical edition of the Hebrew Bible in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* [BHS]) is the de facto canonical version of the First Testament. At the same time, however, it should be noted that the publication of the Masoretic Text in BHS does not present the order of the books as promulgated by the Masoretes, who put 1 and 2 Chronicles at the beginning of the Writings rather than at the end. No popular version of the Tanakh in the tradition of the Jewish synagogue follows the order of the Masoretic Text in Codex L(eningrad). It is as though the people themselves know better than to accept the work of the scholars who put the books of the Bible in a more logical, presumably “correct order.” The same is true of the Second Testament among Christians. In spite of the consensus among ancient Greek manuscripts, which present another order of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament, with the so-called general epistles before the letters of Paul, popular tradition down through the centuries prefers another order of these books. That order appears to be the order of the “Completed Tanakh” in the hands of the apostle John near the end of the first century CE in Palestine. Jewish tradition within the synagogues and popular tradition in various segments of Christendom have exercised wisdom through the years in their suspicion of the work of those who call themselves biblical scholars.

In my personal opinion, the canonical process in early Christianity began at least as early as Paul’s third missionary journey; and the Gospel of Luke was part of that process from the beginning. The Gospel of Luke was written to be a definitive presentation of the person and work of Jesus Christ who was seen as the completion, or fulfillment, of the Hebrew Bible (see Luke 1:1-4). The first stage in this canonical process appears to have been the composition of an abbreviated version of the “Apostolic Writings”—in a collection of nine books—as a counterpart to the Hebrew Writings of the Tanakh. Luke and Paul envisioned this collection of

“Apostolic Writings” as the concluding fifth section of the canon of the Jewish/Christian “Tanakh” (Torah, Prophets, and Writings) as follows:

- Torah—five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
- Former Prophets—four books: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings
- Latter Prophets—four books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve (minor prophets)
- Former (Hebrew) Writings—nine books (arranged in a 4 + 1 + 4 pattern)
- Latter (Apostolic) Writings—nine books (arranged in a 4 + 1 + 4 pattern)

The “Latter (Apostolic) Writings,” which were intended to be canonical Scripture from the beginning by Paul, Luke, and others (ca. 57-62 CE), were structured in a 4 + 1 + 4 pattern as follows:

| | | | | |
|---------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|
| Romans | 1 Corinthians | Gospel of Luke | Ephesians | Philippians |
| 2 Corinthians | Galatians | | Thessalonians | Colossians |

The eight letters of Paul in this collection are addressed to seven churches. These letters are arranged in two groups of four, with the Gospel of Luke in the center. Each of these sub-groups is structured in the form of a simple chiasm.

2 Thessalonians was subsequently added in the second stage of the canonical process, which took place during Paul’s imprisonment in Rome (ca. 61-62 CE), as a correction of Paul’s earlier teaching in matters of eschatology. In that stage, the “Apostolic Writings” were arranged in twenty-two books as a reflection of the twenty-two-book canon of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh). Paul was apparently already at work in the canonical process before he made his fateful journey to Jerusalem (ca. 58 CE). Paul states that he left his “book-carrier” φαιλόνην (and the manuscripts contained in it) at Troas (2 Tim 4:11-13; cf. Acts 20:5), a port city in Asia Minor. It would appear that Luke first met Paul in Troas before they sailed to Neapolis, the port city of Philippi in Macedonia on an earlier occasion (Acts 16:11-12). The account here marks the beginning of the so-called “we-sections” in the book of Acts, which indicate the sections where

Luke himself was actually present in the narrative he has written. It is possible that Luke was the “man of Macedonia” that Paul saw in his night vision there in Troas (Acts 16:8-9).

Luke, who resided in Philippi, was apparently already working with Paul on canonical matters before the two of them set sail for Troas on route to Jerusalem in ca. 58 CE (Acts 20:5). They left their literary work with Carpus, who may have been a key figure in the emerging publishing industry in Troas, which subsequently became a book-making center in the Roman world. Together, Luke and Paul produced what we have called here the “Latter (Apostolic) Writings,” which were conceived from the outset as a fifth and concluding section of the canon of sacred Scripture. They had arranged the nine books of their writings in a 4 + 1 + 4 pattern to correspond with the nine books of the “Former (Hebrew) Writings” as they knew them.

The Gospel of Luke played a central role in this second stage of the canonical process that produced the “Completed Tanakh” as well, this time as the central book in a “New Torah”—the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. This second stage in the canonical process took place in Rome when Luke re-joined Paul, after sending a Greek translation of the Epistle of Hebrews on ahead to Paul in Rome, as Luke waited for Timothy to join him in that voyage by sea (Heb 13:22-23). Timothy did not come in time and Luke went on to Rome without him—to continue his canonical activity with Paul (ca. 61-62 CE), where he completed the writing of the Acts of the Apostles. In the meantime, Paul invited Timothy to join him and Luke on the “editorial board” there in Rome, and to bring the manuscripts Paul and Luke had left in Troas (cf. Acts 20:5)—and, perhaps more importantly, to bring Mark with him (2 Tim 4:11-13). When Mark and Timothy arrived in Rome to work with Paul and Luke, the Gospel of Mark became the center around which the Gospel of Matthew and a revised edition of the Gospel of Luke were edited in what we now call the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). This three-part literary work was conceived from the outset as an integral part of a “New Torah,” which was made up of four Gospels (including John) and the Acts of the Apostles (written by Luke). At this point in time (ca. 62 CE), the “New Testament” of the “Completed Tanakh” was conceived as a twenty-two-book

counterpart to the twenty-two-book canon of the Hebrew Bible (as subsequently described by Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.8).

The martyrdom of James, the brother of Jesus and head of the church in Jerusalem, in the spring of 62 CE served as a catalyst to speed up the canonical activity in Rome. The apostle Peter joined Mark, Paul, Luke, and others in Rome. The subsequent martyrdom of both Paul and Peter some time after the great fire of 64 CE in Rome left only the apostle John among the original “pillars” of the early Christian Church. John lived on through the Jewish Revolt and the destruction of Jerusalem (66-70 CE), and beyond to the reign of Domitian (81-96 CE). It was John and his followers who produced a forty-nine-book canon, in which the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles function as a “New Torah” connecting the two testaments, each of which is made up of twenty-two books. Though the nature of the conceptual design of forty-nine books structured around a “New Torah” was forgotten in the subsequent life of the expanding Christian Church within the larger Roman world, the design itself survived in popular tradition. This is what we have called here the “correct order” of the books of the Bible. It is seen in the traditional order of the twenty-two (or twenty-four) books in the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) within Jewish tradition, and the popular order of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as we now have it in Christianity.

The arrangement of the “Latter (Apostolic) Writings” in the initial stage of the canonical process that ultimately produced the “Completed Tanakh” reflects the structure of the “Former (Hebrew) Writings,” which may be outlined as follows:

| | | | | |
|--------|------------------|--------|--------------|--------------|
| Psalms | Proverbs | | Ezra | Nehemiah |
| Job | <i>Megilloth</i> | Daniel | 1 Chronicles | 2 Chronicles |

The term “Megilloth” here refers to the five Festal Scrolls (Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Esther). In this structure the book of Daniel serves as a connecting bridge between two groups of four books, each of which is arranged in the form of a simple chiasm.

The book of Daniel also functions as a bridge connecting the Prophets (Former and Latter) with the Writings in the Tanakh:

| | | | |
|--------|------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Joshua | Judges | Isaiah | Jeremiah |
| Samuel | Kings | Ezekiel | The Twelve |
| Daniel | | | |
| Psalms | Proverbs | Ezra | Nehemiah |
| Job | <i>Megilloth</i> | 1 Chronicles | 2 Chronicles |

Though the book of Daniel is unique in several respects, the above structures suggest that early Christian readers were correct in seeing the book as primarily a prophetic work. It includes narrative history, prophetic word (including an apocalypse), and wisdom tales. As such it constitutes a fitting bridge between the major sections in the Bible as a whole. And since its subject is the “Kingdom of God,” it also plays a significant role in tying the two testaments together and in pointing to the eschatological future beyond them both. In short, the book of Daniel becomes the “prescription lens” that brings the whole of sacred Scripture into sharper focus. By reading both the First Testament and the Second Testament through the “lens” of the book of Daniel, the mysterious meaning of the Kingdom of God within the context of the “Completed Tanakh” takes on fresh meaning.

An initial draft of a paper to be presented at the 63rd International Meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association of America, August 5-8, 2000, at Loyola Marymount University (Los Angeles).