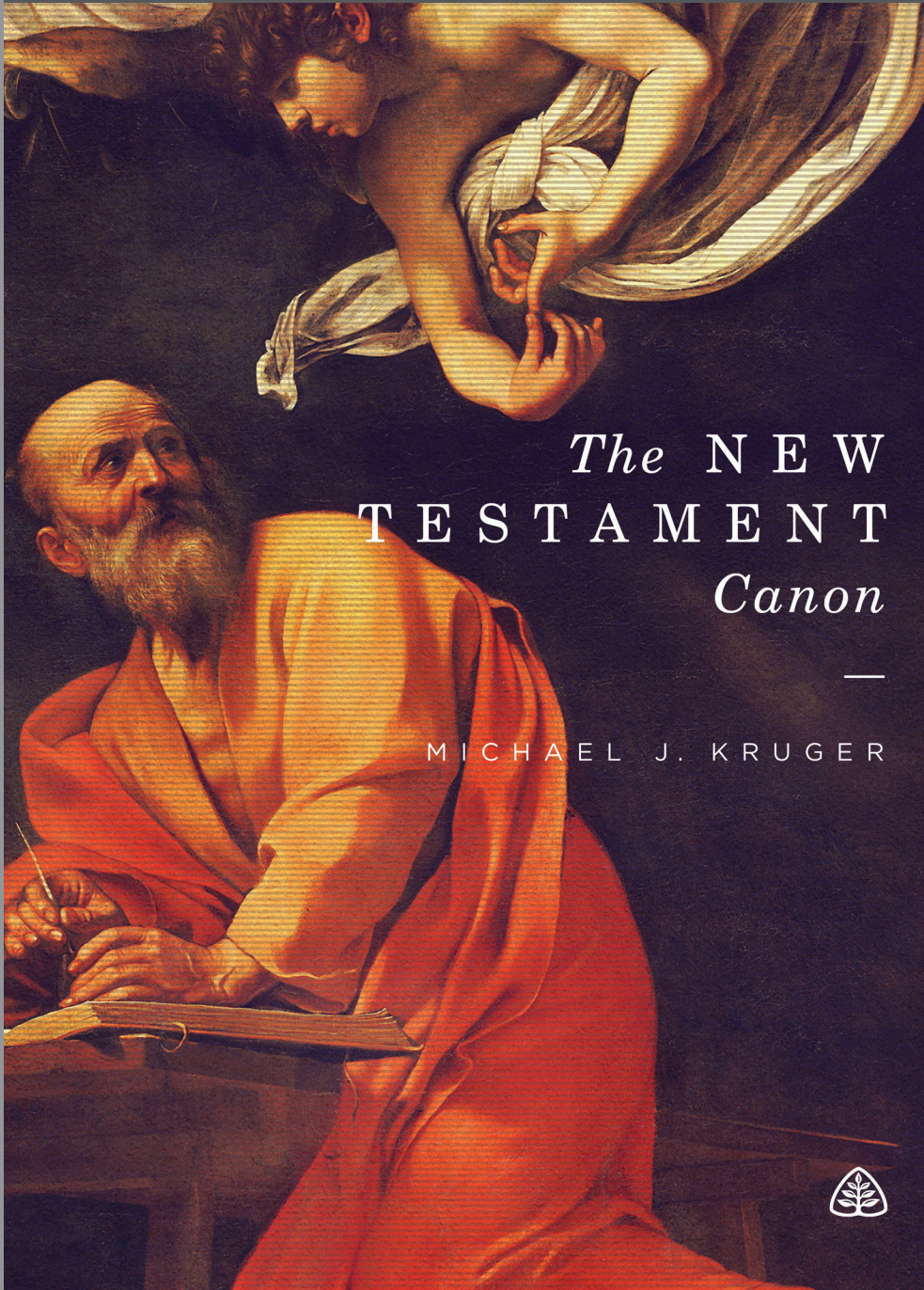


S T U D Y   G U I D E



*The* NEW  
TESTAMENT  
*Canon*

—  
MICHAEL J. KRUGER



S T U D Y G U I D E

# The New Testament Canon

Michael J. Kruger



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

*Renew your Mind.*

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# Introduction

Opponents of Christianity raise challenging questions about the origins, authorship, age, and reliability of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. When the authenticity of the New Testament is questioned, so is the gospel. In this series, Dr. Michael J. Kruger critiques the most common objections to the canonicity of the New Testament and articulates sound reasons to believe with confidence that the New Testament is the authentic, true, and inspired Word of God.

This study guide is a companion to the video teaching series. Whether you are using the DVDs, streaming the videos on Ligonier.org, or going through the course in Ligonier Connect, this resource is designed to help you make the most of the learning experience. For each message in the series, there is a corresponding lesson in this guide. Here is what you will find in each lesson:

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| INTRODUCTION   | <p>The introduction is a brief paragraph that summarizes the content covered in the lecture and considered in the study guide lesson.</p> <p><b>How to use:</b> Use the introduction to each lesson to get a sense of the big picture before watching the video. Refer to these statements as you work through the study guide to remind you of what you have already covered and where you are headed.</p>               |
| LEARNING GOALS | <p>The learning goals are the knowledge and skills the study guide lesson will endeavor to equip you with as you work through the lecture content.</p> <p><b>How to use:</b> Familiarize yourself with the goals of each lesson before engaging with its contents. Keeping the overall purpose in mind as you watch each video and reflect on or discuss the questions will help you get the most out of each lesson.</p> |
| KEY IDEAS      | <p>The key ideas are the major points or takeaways from the lecture.</p> <p><b>How to use:</b> Use these ideas to prepare yourself for each lesson and to review previous lessons. They describe specifically the knowledge each lecture is communicating.</p>  |

|                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS | <p>The questions are the guided reflection and/or discussion component of the lesson that are intended to help you prepare for, process, and organize what you are learning.</p> <p><b>How to use:</b> Reflect on individually or discuss in a group the questions in the order in which they appear in the lesson. The timestamps in the right margin indicate where the answers to questions during the video can be found.</p>   |
| PRAYER                            | <p>The prayer section offers suggestions for how to close the lesson in prayer with respect to what was taught in the lecture.</p> <p><b>How to use:</b> Consider using each lesson's prayer section as a guide to personal or group prayer. These sections follow the ACTS prayer model, which you can learn more about in R.C. Sproul's Crucial Questions booklet <i>Does Prayer Change Things?</i> This helpful guide is available as a free e-book at <a href="http://Ligonier.org">Ligonier.org</a>.</p> |
| REVIEW QUIZ                       | <p>The review quiz is a set of six multiple-choice questions that appears at the end of each lesson.</p> <p><b>How to use:</b> Use each quiz to check your comprehension and memory of the major points covered in each lecture. It will be most beneficial to your learning if you take a lesson's quiz either sometime between lessons or just before you begin the next lesson in the study guide.</p>   |
| ANSWER KEY                        | <p>The answer key provides explanations for the reflection and discussion questions and answers to the multiple-choice questions in the review quiz.</p> <p><b>How to use:</b> Use the answer key to check your own answers or when you do not know the answer. Note: Do not give in too quickly; struggling for a few moments to recall an answer reinforces it in your mind.</p>  |

# Study Schedules

The following table suggests four plans for working through *The New Testament Canon* video teaching series and this companion study guide. Whether you are going through this series on your own or with a group, these schedules should help you plan your study path.

|             | <b>Extended<br/>8-Week Plan</b> | <b>Standard<br/>6-Week Plan</b> | <b>Abbreviated<br/>4-Week Plan</b> | <b>Intensive<br/>3-Week Plan</b> |
|-------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Week</b> | <b>Lesson</b>                   |                                 |                                    |                                  |
| 1           | *                               | 1                               | 1                                  | 1 & 2                            |
| 2           | 1                               | 2                               | 2 & 3                              | 3 & 4                            |
| 3           | 2                               | 3                               | 4 & 5                              | 5 & 6                            |
| 4           | 3                               | 4                               | 6                                  |                                  |
| 5           | 4                               | 5                               |                                    |                                  |
| 6           | 5                               | 6                               |                                    |                                  |
| 7           | 6                               |                                 |                                    |                                  |
| 8           | *                               |                                 |                                    |                                  |

\* For these weeks, rather than completing lessons, spend your time discussing and praying about your learning goals for the study (the first week) and the most valuable takeaways from the study (the last week).

# The Problem of Canon

## INTRODUCTION

Opponents of Christianity are launching bold new attacks against the foundation of Christian belief: the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Directed at the average person and calculated to undermine confidence in the Bible, these popular and destructive ideas about the origins of the New Testament have gained a widespread audience. In this lecture, Dr. Kruger describes these contemporary challenges to Christian belief and explains why Christians cannot afford to allow these challenges to go unanswered.

## LEARNING GOALS

When you have finished this lesson, you should be able to:

- Describe the problem of canon and explain its significance
- Identify three ongoing factors that contribute to the problem of canon

## KEY IDEAS

- Contemporary attacks against the nature and reliability of the New Testament are focused at persuading ordinary Christians and are not going away.
- Christians need to be able to articulate the reasons they have confidence in the New Testament.
- Skepticism over the canon of the New Testament has been fueled primarily by doubts about authorship, discoveries of previously unknown writings, and the thesis that early Christianity was theologically diverse.



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## REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Before the Video

#### *What Do You Think?*

Take a moment to answer the following questions. They will prepare you for the lecture.

- What assumptions about the nature of the New Testament are common in our culture?
- Do challenges to the New Testament pose a serious threat to the credibility of the Christian faith? Explain your answer.

#### *Scripture Reading*

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

—2 Timothy 3:16–17

- What does this passage reveal about the origin and intent of the New Testament?

### During the Video

Answer the following questions while you watch the video. They will guide you through the lecture.

#### *Doubts about Authorship*

0:00–12:58

- Why does the topic of canon appeal to critical scholars who want to discredit Christianity?
- What is the deeper challenge posed by the claims that critical scholars make about New Testament authorship?

#### *New Discoveries*

12:58–18:23

- Why is the lost city of Oxyrhynchus significant to the study of ancient documents?



- What are the names of some of the noncanonical “gospels” that have been discovered?

### *Bauer's Thesis*

18:23–22:30

- What was Walter Bauer's central thesis? Why is it significant?

### After the Video

Answer the following questions after you have finished the lecture. They will help you identify and summarize the major points.

- What is the problem of canon? Why does this represent a challenge to Christian belief?

If you are in a group, have the members discuss factors that have made it challenging for them or for people they know to believe the Bible.

- How does Dr. Kruger respond to the suggestion that Christians should simply ignore the claims of critical scholars and focus on the Bible?

If you are in a group, have the members discuss ways that Christians can prepare themselves to respond to the rapid spread of critical scholarship in mainstream culture.

- In your opinion, which of the three “tributaries” mentioned in this lecture poses the greatest challenge to Christianity? Which of these tributaries is easiest to respond to?

If you are in a group, have the members identify the “tributary” that they consider to be most influential. How have you seen these ideas expressed in the news or in popular culture?

### PRAYER

Commit what you have learned in this lesson to prayer.

- Praise God for recording His perfect and inerrant Word in the New Testament.
- Confess any doubts you may have about the trustworthiness of the New Testament.

- Thank God for His sovereign preservation of the New Testament over the centuries.
- Ask God to answer any difficult questions you have about the New Testament canon.

## REVIEW QUIZ

Use these multiple-choice questions to measure what you learned from this lesson.

1. How many distinct ancient writings were contained in the codices discovered at Nag Hammadi, Egypt?
  - a. 13
  - b. 30
  - c. 52
  - d. 77
2. According to the Gospel of Thomas, salvation is found through which of the following?
  - a. Faith alone
  - b. Animal sacrifice
  - c. Higher knowledge
  - d. Righteous works
3. What does the term *apocryphal* mean?
  - a. Counterfeit
  - b. Forbidden
  - c. Heretical
  - d. Hidden
4. Accounts of the life of Jesus have been found that claim to have been written by all of the following *except*:
  - a. Judas
  - b. Paul
  - c. Peter
  - d. Thomas
5. Who wrote a book titled *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*?
  - a. Karl Barth
  - b. Bart Ehrman
  - c. Bruce Metzger
  - d. Walter Bauer
6. What is ultimately at stake in contemporary debates about the New Testament canon?
  - a. The intellectual credibility of Christian scholars
  - b. Our access to new archaeological discoveries
  - c. Our religious freedom
  - d. The gospel

# Answer Key—The Problem of Canon

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## REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Before the Video

#### *What Do You Think?*

*These are personal questions. The answers should be based on your own knowledge and experience.*

#### *Scripture Reading*

- What does this passage reveal about the origin and intent of the New Testament?

*This passage reveals that the origin of all Scripture, including the New Testament, is God Himself. God has graciously revealed Himself in His Word, and it is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” God’s ultimate purpose for breathing out these inspired words is that His people will be “complete, equipped for every good work.”*

### During the Video

#### *Doubts about Authorship*

- Why does the topic of canon appeal to critical scholars who want to discredit Christianity?

*Critical scholars believe that most Christians are not prepared to answer questions about why certain ancient writings belong in the Bible and others do not. They suggest that all of these ancient writings are equally reliable and that it is a blind leap of faith to claim that the twenty-seven books of the New Testament are uniquely authored by God. By labeling this topic the “Achilles’ heel of Christianity,” critical scholars hope to discredit the Christian faith by undermining confidence in the New Testament.*

- What is the deeper challenge posed by the claims that critical scholars make about New Testament authorship?

*Critical scholars do not merely raise questions about our ability to know who the authors of the New Testament are. They take this challenge a step further by suggesting that the authors intended to deceive their readers by falsely claiming to be Apostolic figures like Peter and Paul. These critical theories imply that the books of the New Testament are simply elaborate forgeries, unworthy of the trust that Christians place in them.*

### New Discoveries

- Why is the lost city of Oxyrhynchus significant to the study of ancient documents?

*The lost city of Oxyrhynchus is a significant archaeological site that was discovered in the late nineteenth century. Excavations in this city have revealed a wealth of ancient manuscripts. Many of the extracanonical books that fascinate critical scholars were discovered in the garbage heap at Oxyrhynchus.*

- What are the names of some of the noncanonical “gospels” that have been discovered?

*A variety of extracanonical books have been discovered that claim to be gospels—that is, accounts of the life of Jesus. These writings include the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Mary, and the Gospel of Judas. Unlike the four Gospels of the New Testament, these books are all forgeries, written long after the deaths of their alleged authors.*

### Bauer’s Thesis

- What was Walter Bauer’s central thesis? Why is it significant?

*In 1934, the German scholar Walter Bauer argued that early Christianity was theologically diverse, encompassing a broad array of views about Christology, the nature of God, and the meaning of salvation. This thesis is significant because it implies that traditional Christianity is merely one of many ancient forms of Christianity. Modern critical scholarship has embraced this thesis and used it to argue that all of the ancient Christian texts—canonical and extracanonical—speak with equal authority.*

### After the Video

- What is the problem of canon? Why does this represent a challenge to Christian belief?

*The problem of canon refers to the burden imposed on Christians by contemporary critical scholarship to explain why certain ancient writings are considered part of the canon of God’s Word and other ancient writings are not. The problem of canon is expressed most simply in the question, “How can we know which books belong in the New Testament?” If the New Testament, as a foundation of Christian belief, is questioned, so is Christian belief itself.*

- How does Dr. Kruger respond to the suggestion that Christians should simply ignore the claims of critical scholars and focus on the Bible?

*While it may be tempting simply to ignore such claims, Dr. Kruger states that Christians no longer have this luxury. Critical scholars intentionally market their ideas to laypeople in the form of popular-level books and articles. These challenges are not going to go away, and Christians who are not armed with answers to these questions are in danger of losing confidence in God’s Word.*

- In your opinion, which of the three “tributaries” mentioned in this lecture poses the greatest challenge to Christianity? Which of these tributaries is easiest to respond to?

*In this lecture, Dr. Kruger identifies three distinct factors that function as tributaries that feed the growing river of skepticism about the New Testament canon. These tributaries are doubts about the authorship of New Testament books, the increasing discoveries of extracanonical writings that claim to be gospels or epistles, and Bauer’s thesis that ancient Christianity lacked a clear doctrinal and canonical consensus. Opinions about which of these factors represents the greatest challenge will vary.*

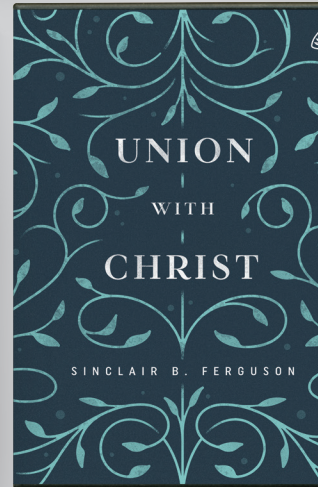
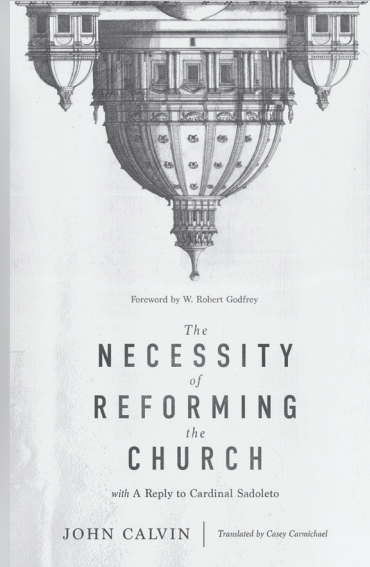
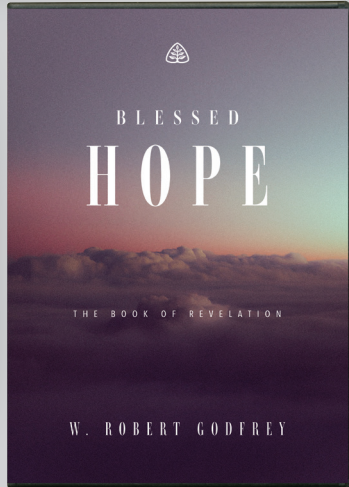
## REVIEW QUIZ

### Lesson 1

1. **C.**  
*The collection of ancient manuscripts uncovered at Nag Hammadi included thirteen codices, which collectively held a total of fifty-two individual writings.*
2. **C.**  
*The Gospel of Thomas articulates a view of salvation that is radically different from the gospel message of the New Testament. According to the Gospel of Thomas, salvation is obtained through higher knowledge. The author of this ancient text claims that we can save ourselves by gaining and mastering such knowledge.*
3. **D.**  
*The term apocryphal means “hidden.” To describe an ancient writing as apocryphal is to note that it appears to be similar to books of the Bible but is not considered part of the canon of Scripture.*
4. **B.**  
*Various apocryphal gospels have been discovered that claim to have been written by Judas, Mary Magdalene, Peter, Philip, Thomas, and many others. However, an apocryphal “Gospel of Paul” has yet to be found.*
5. **D.**  
*German scholar Walter Bauer wrote Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity in 1934. Translated into English in the 1970s, this book has profoundly influenced contemporary critical scholarship.*
6. **D.**  
*The very gospel that Christians preach, teach, and believe is at stake. If Christians cannot respond to the challenges of contemporary critical scholarship, then we cannot credibly claim to have a coherent New Testament. If there is no coherent New Testament, then there cannot be a coherent New Testament message. The gospel message would lose the foundation on which it stands.*



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