

24 January 2026

ABSTRACT

The earliest Christian thought and literature took shape within the context of canon consciousness. This consciousness was not primarily an awareness of a canonical list(s) but rather an awareness of an authoritative tradition. This tradition shaped the Jesus movement in two ways. One is an awareness of texts already functioning authoritatively within Second Temple Judaism (i.e., Israel's Scriptures). A second is how the movement's own canonical message (i.e., the kerygma proclaiming the Christ event) emerges within this context of the authoritative texts of Second Temple Judaism. This message then also exercises a norming function over the movement's interaction with Israel's Scriptures and decisively shapes the movement's own growing body of scriptural literature (i.e., the New Testament). A combination of older (i.e., Israel's Scriptures) and newer (i.e., the kerygma, the New Testament) authoritative traditions then exercises a norming function with regard to (a) the assessment of which texts were canonical and (b) the relationship(s) canonical texts and testaments have to each other. Ironically, this tradition even shapes the content of emerging literature not broadly judged to be canonical (i.e., New Testament apocrypha). The combination of these traditions has influenced readers of these canonical texts in subsequent centuries to the modern period, including how readers understand the relationship between the two testaments of Christian Scripture. Therefore, this group explores how canon-consciousness manifests itself in Israel's Scriptures, the New Testament, the earliest Christian writers (i.e., apologists and earlier), and this consciousness's ongoing hermeneutical implications for modern interpreters. To join the group's mailing list, please register at j davidstark.com/ibr.

SCHEDULING

All participants have been notified that (a) they will have to register for the SBL conference and that (b) they will also need to have a current membership unless they have reached out regarding a membership waiver and received approval for one.

The group has been well attended in recent years, last year having about 120, which was more than double the attendance from the previous year (about 45–50). To accommodate a group in the usual range (45–50) with additional capacity, should the group continue drawing larger attendance, we would prefer a theater-style room where presenters stand. In this setup, we would prefer 4 seats at the head table from which speakers can present. And if the group will be assigned a larger room, it would be helpful to have access to whatever audio equipment IBR can provide to make it easier for all participants to hear, including those who may have some degree of hearing impairment.

Our group can meet either Friday or Saturday, but we need to avoid scheduling conflicts with both the Scripture and Church Seminar and Scripture and Hermeneutics Seminar sessions as we both have commitments in those sessions also. Any other scheduling

conflicts that can be avoided with Kirby Laing Centre sessions will be helpful, as a number of our group's attendees have commitments in those seminars also, but not strictly necessary.

PREVIOUS YEARS' PAPERS

This section is superfluous and can be ignored for the IBR program, but have kept it here to help coordinate material for presenters about what has already been covered and, therefore, what they should avoid duplicating.

2024

- David Stark (Faulkner University), "Canon-consciousness as the Relationship between the Testaments"
- Dana Harris (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), "Interpreting and Reinterpreting the Canonical Whole: The Appropriation of Zechariah in Revelation"
- Collin Cornell (Fuller Theological Seminary), "The Bible Is Not One Big Unilinear Story: Canon Consciousness and the Geometric Bible"

CURRENT YEAR'S PROGRAM

Dana Harris (Trinity International University), moderator, introduction, welcome, and promotion of *Hebrews's Scriptural Hermeneutic*, 15 mins

Heath Thomas (Oklahoma Baptist University), "Canonical Pressure from the Other Direction: Mal. 3:19–24 [MT] in the Law and Prophets and the Presentation of Jesus," 25 mins

Malachi 3:19–24 [4:1–4 English] concludes the Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets by centering upon the Law of Moses, given at Horeb, and the divine *missio* of Elijah, a paradigmatic prophet. Scholars have explored how this conclusion in Malachi (1) concludes the book of Malachi, (2) concludes the Twelve Minor Prophets, and (3) creates intertextual linkage to the two canonical sections of *Torah* (Law) and *Nevi'im* (Prophets), recognizing an early bi-partite association of the canon. However, such analysis has been complicated by research into the empirical ordering of the canon. This essay opens a different horizon to the discussion of canon and Mal. 3:19–24 [4:1–4 English] by exploring how this text exerts pressure canonically toward understanding the ministry of Jesus, recorded in New Testament writings, with particular emphasis upon the day of the Lord in the New Testament writings. As such, Mal. 3:19–24 [4:1–4 English] becomes a canonical marker by which New Testament writers frame their presentation of Jesus.

SBL program tags: Methods - Theological Interpretation, Methods - Ideology & Theology - Christian, Biblical Literature - Hebrew Bible/Old Testament/Greek OT (Septuagint) - Latter Prophets - The Twelve - Malachi

Stephen B. Chapman (Duke University), "Testamentary Priority: Canon-Consciousness in Contemporary Christian Biblical Interpretation," 25 mins

There are at least three recognizable types of biblical "canon-consciousness": author-oriented, text-oriented, and reader-oriented. This paper will reflect on one aspect of reader-oriented canon-consciousness: namely, the challenge of reading both Testaments of the Christian Bible together in a contemporary context. In practice, one Testament is frequently preferred over the other in the consideration of specific theological and ethical topics, although usually without a sufficient hermeneutical or theological rationale being provided for the preference. Perhaps surprisingly, the Old Testament is sometimes preferred over the New Testament in practice, even while the New Testament is often assumed to possess a theoretical privilege in Christian discourse. Through a discussion of concrete examples, the issue of testamentary priority will be illustrated and critical questions for future work will be identified.

SBL program tags: Methods - Theological Interpretation, Methods - Ideology & Theology - Christian, Ideology & Theology - Ethics

Craig Bartholomew (Kirby Laing Centre for Public Theology in Cambridge), respondent, 25 mins

Discussion, 30 mins