

The New Testament Canon

Why trust it?
(Apologetics, Week 6)

The Big Questions

- How do we know the right books are in the New Testament?
- What process was used to pick the books of the New Testament?
- Were other gospels suppressed?
- Was it...
 - Chosen by men?
 - Altered for power or control?

What is “The Canon?”

- “Canon” means rule, standard, or measuring rod
- It refers to the collection of inspired books
- Scripture has inherent authority
 - Luke 10:16 - apostolic authority
 - 1 Timothy 5:18 - Luke quoted as Scripture
 - 2 Peter 3:15-16 - Paul’s letters as Scripture

The NT was Scripture while it was being written

How were books recognized?

Canon Recognition Criteria

- Apostolic origin
- Doctrinal consistency
- Widespread early use
- Evidence of divine inspiration

Canon Timeline

Date	Event
AD 30-60	Oral apostolic preaching
AD 50-95	New Testament books written
AD 95	Clement of Rome quotes NT books as Scripture
AD 110	Ignatius and Polycarp cite NT writings
AD 170	Muratorian Fragment lists most NT books
AD 180	180: Irenaeus writes <i>Against Heresies</i> , affirming the fourfold Gospel and quoting nearly every NT book
AD 250	Origen distinguishes accepted vs. disputed books
AD 367	Athanasius lists all 27 NT books
AD 397	Council of Carthage confirms what was already recognized

Refuting Common Myths

What the Evidence Shows

- Constantine did not decide the canon
- Nicaea addressed Christology
- “Missing books” fail the criteria

What Alternatives Arose?

Enter Gnosticism

- “Gnosis” = secret knowledge
- Matter is evil; spirit is good
- Salvation through enlightenment
- Jesus redefined

The Gnostic Worldview

- Creation is a mistake
- Salvation is escape
- Jesus is a messenger, not a Savior

Christianity vs. Gnosticism

Christianity	Gnosticism
Creation is good	Matter is evil
Incarnation	Incarnation denied
Public gospel	Secret knowledge
Bodily resurrection	Escape from body

Books written against Gnosticism:
1 & 2 John, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy

Why Gnostic Books Failed

They Failed the Canon Test

- Too late
- False apostolic claims
- Anti-Jewish theology
- Undermined the gospel

Disputed but Accepted Books

Temporary Questions

- Hebrews - authorship
- James - faith & works
- Revelation - symbolism

Key Point:

Discernment \neq conspiracy

Examples of Rejected Books

Why These Didn't Qualify

- Gospel of Thomas (c. AD 140-180) - secret knowledge
- Gospel of Peter (c. AD 120-150) - false suffering
- Infancy Gospel of Thomas (c. AD 140-170) - distorted Jesus
- Shepherd of Hermas (c. AD 140) - late devotional
- Acts of Paul & Thecla (c. AD 160-180) - pious fiction

Other Rejected Writings

- Gospel of Thomas
- Gospel of Judas
- Gospel of Philip
- Gospel of Mary
- Apocryphon of John
- Gospel of Truth
- Gospel of Peter
- Gospel of the Hebrews
- Gospel of the Ebionites
- Infancy Gospel of Thomas
- Protoevangelium of James
- Acts of Paul and Thecla
- Acts of Peter
- Acts of John
- Acts of Andrew
- Didache
- Epistle of Barnabas
- Apocalypse of Peter
- Apocalypse of John
- 1 & 2 Clement
- 3 Corinthians

Why This Matters

Confidence in God's Word

- Faith “once delivered” (Jude 3)
- God preserves His Word (Isaiah 40:8)
- Strength for evangelism & doubt

Final Takeaway

Why We Can Trust the New Testament

- God inspired Scripture
- God preserved Scripture
- The church recognized God's voice

Assignment: Read 2 Timothy 3, 2 Peter 1

Next Week...

Dealing With Doubt

Discussion

- What explanations have you heard about how the Bible was formed?
- Why is recognition better than “selection” when discussing canon?
- How would you respond to someone who asks about the Gospel of Thomas?
- How does trust in the canon affect your daily faith?