

NT 101-3 THE CANON AND THE TEXT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The canon of scripture refers to the question of how the 66 books of the New Testament that make up the protestant bible were chosen.

- 1. Canon – An English word from the Greek word “kanon” referring to a form of measurement.**
- 2. The canon of scripture asked how the various books would be measured or analyzed.**
- 3. Protestant Christian convictions concerning the OT simply followed the Jewish beliefs that were in existence at the time of Christ.**
- 4. The Jewish people believed prophecy had ceased with Malachi in 400 BC, and subsequent religious literature was useful but not at same level of authority as the Jewish canonical scriptures.**

Roman catholic emergence in the Christian world -

- 1. Books produced by Jews were treated as valuable.**

Protestant Reformation (Middle ages, Catholic counter-reformation) -

- 1. OT apocrypha officially accepted as canonical.**
- 2. Protestants and Catholics both agree on the precise 27 books of the NT canon.**

Question – Why did Christians come to believe that any books at all should be added to the canon of scripture and treated on par with the OT books?

- 1. Most central answer – The open ended nature of the OT as a collection of books.**
- 2. Open ended nature of the prophetic books at the end of the OT.**
- 3. Record of both the old and new covenants required written records.**
- 4. The record of the life of Jesus and its significant events.**

Question – Why these particular 27 books?

- 1. Content of the books, all were about the nature and the person of Jesus, his work and ministry or immediate developments of these traditions in the first century.**

Criteria for inclusion -

- 1. Widely accepted/recognized.**
- 2. Linked to an apostle or an eyewitness of the life of Jesus**
- 3. Non-contradiction with previous scripture. (OT or Hebrew scripture)**

Question - What was left out?

Books possibly considered but left out mostly came from later areas of Christian history.

- 1. Second century Writings. (Apostlostic fathers)**
- 2. NT apocrypha. (2nd – 5th century gospels)**
- 3. Gnostic writings.**

Question – Why were these left out?

- 1. Failure to satisfy all three of the inclusion criteria.**
- 2. Highly unlikely that any new books will ever be added to the canon.**

Reliability of the text of the NT scripture -

- 1. There are many copies of every portion of the NT books (not so with most other ancient books)**
- 2. Oldest fragments of gospel of John come from first quarter of the 2nd century.**
- 3. First complete copies of the NT preserved date to the 4th century AD.**
- 4. Nearly complete copies of individual NT books emerge by the end of the 2nd to beginning of the 3rd century.**

- 5. More than 5700 Greek manuscripts in existence prior to the printing press.**
- 6. It is considered fortunate to have as many as 10 copies of other ancient books.**
- 7. Meticulous comparison of the various documents provides a 99% or greater ability to reconstruct what was originally written.**

Differences between copies -

- 1. Largely minor errors. Misspellings, minor omissions, and repetition of words.**
- 2. Deliberate changes to clarify thought or harmonize content. (Modern versions contain footnotes to alert reader to differences)**
- 3. No Christian doctrine depends alone only on disputed text.**
- 4. Copies have been preserved with remarkable care allowing us to trust them.**

Verse and Chapter references –

- 1. Not added until middle ages.**

Modern language translations –

- 1. KJV produced in 1611.**

- 2. Ancient scrolls had no chapter or verse references or paragraph divisions.**
- 3. No titles, footnotes, or cross-references.**

Four gospels vice one. How do they resemble and differ from each other?

- 1. First 3 (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) more alike than the fourth (John).**
- 2. Synoptic gospels. Synopsis meaning look at together.**

Question – How do we account for the first three gospels being alike and the fourth different?

- 1. Josephus and other ancient writers verify Jesus' existence and execution.**
- 2. Comparisons between the little historic writing on Jesus compared to the accounts in the gospels.**
- 3. Most historical writings about royalty vice religious leaders.**

Unity and diversity among the gospels –

- 1. Accounts compared side by side for harmonization of the accounts.**
- 2. Chronological order of the life of Jesus does justice to all gospel data.**

- 3. No impossible contradictions, however very minor differences do occur.**

History of modern period of biblical study –

- 1. Begins by the late 1700's, full bloom by mid 1800's.**
- 2. Provides more specific answers as to how the gospels were most likely related.**
- 3. Source criticism referring to analysis by late 19th to early 20th century.**
- 4. Analysis results in the conclusion that Mark was probably the earliest of the three synoptic gospels.**
- 5. In late 20th century, form criticism or form history emerges.**
 - Oral cultures studies.**
 - Initial skepticism.**
 - Accurate preservation of traditions deemed sacred.**
- 6. Minor deviations of wording in passages that occur in more than one gospel.**
- 7. Gospel writers were editors/redactors.**
- 8. Redaction criticism (analysis of editing) emerges in second half of the 20th century.**

9. Matthew and Luke often explain potential confusion in Mark's text.

Most recent years of formal biblical study-

- 1. Many additional methods added.**
- 2. Understanding of sociology.**
- 3. Understanding literary artistry.**

Relationship between the synoptic gospels and John's gospel –

- 1. Theological and stylistic differences.**
- 2. Assumption that John did not rely on the synoptic gospels when writing.**
- 3. Mediating perspective.**
- 4. Consistent pattern of early Christian teaching.**