

Canonicity of the New Testament:

Creation/Organization of New Testament:

All the books of the New Testament were written in a short time frame (50-100 AD). The apostle Paul was actually the first person to write a book of the New Testament (1 Thessalonians) and later the rest of the letters to the churches; and then followed by the Gospels (the first being Mark, written about 30 yrs after the death of Christ). And lastly the book of Revelation around 96 AD by John while imprisoned on island of Patmos.

*The Organization of the New Testament is not based upon their chronological order when written, but instead by their order of events described within the books and can be organized in 3 parts: 1. Five Books of History (Matthew to Acts) 2. Twenty One Books of Doctrine (Romans to Jude) 3. One Book of Prophecy (Revelation).

1. The Five Books of History- The Gospels are named so because they provide the message of God's news revealed through Jesus Christ. They describe the life of Jesus, but are not biographies, but are mere sketches of some of the great teaching and achievements of Jesus' life. The first three Gospels are also known as the Synoptic Gospels because of their similar contents, whereas the Gospel of John was probably written at a later date because it presupposes knowledge of Jesus' life; and the book of Acts is sometimes referred to as Luke-Acts because he wrote them both and they have an interconnectedness.

2. The Twenty One Books of Doctrine- are letters written by various inspired men. The first thirteen were written by Paul. The Pauline letters are broken into two categories, those written before Paul's imprisonment in Rome, and those written after (1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus).

3. The Book of Prophecy- the book of Revelation, written by John while imprisoned on the island of Patmos, and showcases the coming apocalypse.

The Criteria for New Testament Canonicity:

*During the time after the death of Jesus Christ and the apostles (after 100 AD) many books arose with claims to being the **divinely inspired** Word of God. Many of these books were trying to be infiltrated into the Canon, therefore just as was done to establish Canonicity in the Old Testament, a system of determining canonicity had to be established for the New Testament books.

1. Apostolicity: Every book of the New Testament must either be written by an apostle or someone closely associated with an apostle (that is, Mark was under Peter, and Luke was associated with Paul).

2. Reception by the Churches: The books must be universally received by the local churches as authentic at the time of their writing

3. Consistency: They must be consistent with the doctrine that the Church already possessed, namely the Old Testament and Apostolic teaching.

4. Inspiration: Each book must give evidence, internally or externally, of being divinely inspired. The spiritual gift of discernment was used to determine canonicity (1 Cor. 12:10)

5. Recognition: Each must be recognized as canonical in the catalogues of the Church Fathers and must be used by those who had the gift of pastor-teacher.

6. Internal: To be canonical, each book must contain exhortation to public exegesis of the Word (that is, Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; 1Tim. 4:13; Rev. 1:3; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13). Simply put, the books have to make references to other books of the New Testament.

Eusebius (270-340): Eusebius was a great historian and a trusted friend of the Emperor Constantine, and therefore had access to all the church archives. With scholarly precision, he set up a system for classifying the New Testament books. He used the same categories that were set up for the classification of the Old Testament.

The Acknowledged Books: (Homologoumena)

Into this first category Eusebius placed the four Gospels, Acts, the fourteen Pauline Epistles (including Hebrews) , First Peter, First John, and Revelation.

The Disputed Books: (Antilegomena)

This category is made up of actual scriptural books that had been a source of disputation. These included James, First and Second Peter, and Second and Third John.

The Spurious Writings: (Apocrypha)

As in the Case of the Old Testament, there was a New Testament Apocrypha, which included The Acts of Paul, The Epistle of Barnabas, The Shepherd of Hermas, The Revelation of the Twelve, and the Revelation of Peter.

The Heretical or Absurd Writings: (Pseudepigrapha)

This last category contained most of the known forgeries, among them the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Thomas, The Acts of Andrew.

Acceptance of the New Testament Canon:

Church Councils: Four church councils met to settle the matter of the Canon once and for all. The Council of Laodicea (A.D. 336), recognized all the books of the New Testament, except for Revelation. The Council of Damascus (A.D. 382); The Council of Carthage (A.D. 397); The Council of Hippo (A.D. 419), all the remaining three recognized Revelation as canonical within the New Testament.

The Muratorian Fragment:

This fragment was discovered in the Ambrosian Library in Milan in 1740 by a librarian named Muratori. The Fragment showed that cataloguing of the New Testament had been done as early as the second century. This index lists all the New Testament books beginning with Luke as “the third Gospel;”it omits Hebrews, James, the Epistles of Peter, and Second and Third John. The unknown writer also goes into great length to distinguish between the writings which should be accepted by true believers and those that should be rejected.

