

Do The Books Of Matthew, Mark, Luke, And John Belong In The New Testament?

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“The four gospels were written, primarily, for different groups of readers. Each has its peculiar design, and each evangelist his own method of writing. Only by comparison of all four, can one obtain a complete view of the history of our Lord’s life on earth. All four gospels place great emphasis on the closing events of the life of Christ. More than half of all the narratives describe the events of the last year. More than one third is devoted to the few weeks which closed with the death and resurrection of our Lord. Matthew gives the longest sermons—he writes as a preacher. Mark pictures events as they occurred, one after the other. Luke arranges incidents with reference to their relation—he is a historian. John selected such facts and discourses as would prove a given truth. All were guided and directed by the Holy Spirit. All wrote what God wanted written. The purpose of the four gospels is to prove that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God so that men might believe and have life through His name.

“A knowledge of the written word of God is the greatest need of the world today. This is the final and complete authority in religion” (George W. DeHoff, *DeHoff’s Bible Handbook* (Murfreesboro, TN: DeHoff Christian Bookstore, 1964, reprint ed., 1995), p. 200).

The Specific Purpose And Audience Addressed By Each Gospel

Matthew’s gospel appeals to a Jewish audience and presents Jesus Christ as the King over his coming kingdom, which is the church.

Mark’s gospel appeals to a Roman audience and presents Jesus Christ as the Servant of God.

Luke’s gospel appeals to a Greek or Gentile audience and presents Jesus Christ as the perfect man.

John’s gospel appeals to all and presents Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son of God. John’s gospel contains an inspired purpose statement that not only applies to his work but also weighs in equally upon the fourfold gospel presentation of the one

gospel message that is the power of God unto salvation. “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (Jn. 20:30-31).

What Is Meant By “The *Canon* Of Scripture”?

The word “canon” is from the Greek word “*kanon*” meaning a staff, or measuring rod and comes to be used as a term denoting a rule of doctrine and practice. “The canon of scripture” means “the word of God.” The fact that the Bible is intended to be such a rule is affirmed in Galatians 6:16 and Philippians 3:16.

Galatians 6:16

“And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.”

Philippians 3:16

“Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.”

How Is The Canon Of Scripture Determined?

“(1) Any production from the pen of an apostle of Christ is obviously entitled to a place in the canon inasmuch as the apostles are expressly declared to be inspired (John 16:7-13).

“(2) Any writing, such as Mark or Luke, written while in association with an apostle, is equally entitled to inclusion.

“(3) All writings attributed to inspiration by the early Christians, by the first Christian writers and by the scholars of the ancient church, are to be regarded as canonical, since these people were in position to determine by personal investigation and documentary research the reliability of the claims of each book to a place in the canon.

“(4) Soon after the close of the inspired period catalogues circulated bearing the names of the books which the early church accepted as of divine origin. It is remarkable that the majority of these documents, (catalogues listing the inspired books of the New Testament), were in circulation in about a hundred years after

the death of John, the apostle, and they agree with the collection composing our New Testament” (Guy N. Woods, *Questions And Answers* (Henderson, TN: Guy N. Woods, 1976), p. 185).

What Is The Evidence Proving The Gospels Belong In The New Testament?

“*First*, passages are quoted from Matthew as from an authoritative work by the author of the epistle ascribed to Barnabas, by Clement of Rome, by Hermas, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Hegesippus, Irenaeus, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen. (See Smith’s Dictionary and citations in Milligan’s *Reason and Revelation*.) This list of writers extends in point of time from the close of the first century to within the third century; and some of them lived within the time when living men, both inspired and uninspired, could testify as to the exact origin of all the books of the New Testament.

“*Second*, Irenaeus, of the second century, recognized our present four gospels; Tatian, who died A.D. 170, recognized them and composed a harmony of them; Theophilus, 168, wrote a commentary on them; and Clement of Alexandria, 189, distinguished them from an uncanonical gospel according the Egyptians” (J.W. McGarvey, *The New Testament Commentary. Vol. I.—Matthew and Mark* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company, 1875, reprint ed., n.d.), p. 10).

Third, “In 1935 some papyrus fragments were published by the British Museum trustees (*Fragments of an Unknown Gospel and other Early Christian Papyri*, ed. H.I. Bell and T.C. Skeat), which appear to be the remnant of a manual designed to teach people the Gospel stories. Their importance for our present purpose is that they belong to the first half of the 2nd century and were certainly written by someone who had the fourfold Gospel before him and knew it well, for all four Gospels are drawn upon” (F.F. Bruce, “The fourfold Gospel” in *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, Donald Guthrie and J.A. Motyer, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p. 64).

The Irresistible Conclusion From The Evidence

“This age has been characterized by unusual activity in the department of Biblical Criticism. There never was a time when the Bible was more severely attacked. But it is equally true, there never was a time when the friends of the Bible felt more secure in their plea for its genuineness and divine authenticity. Opposition has only stimulated earnest inquiry, and this has brought to light a vast amount of heretofore unknown evidence, as well as developed an exegesis which promises the best results to all earnest students of the sacred volume.

“We think it may be fairly claimed that the Bible, as a divine revelation, has been fully vindicated. It only remains to apprehend the truth which the Bible teaches, and then we may hope for the complete realization of the blessed influence which it is designed to exert in the salvation and civilization of our race” (J.W. McGarvey, *The New Testament Commentary. Vol. I.—Matthew and Mark* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company, 1875, reprint ed., n.d.), p. iii.).