

Complete Canon – Excluded Writings

So, we have 66 “books” in the canon of the Bible; 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books.

Why were/are some writings excluded?

As for Old Testament, reasons that certain writings were excluded include: 1) the writing was completed after the time thought to be the end of the prophetic period in Israel (i.e. the reign of Artaxerxes (mid 400s BC) see: Josephus, *Against Apion*, chapter 1, vss. 40-41), 2) the writing contains errors or contradictions, 3) the writing was falsely attributed to an Old Testament person, or 4) the writing, while included in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, was not actually in the Hebrew Bible.

See:

- The Canon and Extra-Canonical Writings. <http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=13&article=968>
- Against Apion, 1. https://lexundria.com/j_ap/1/wst

Generally speaking, the Christian church has accepted as scriptural the writings accepted by the Jews. (For more information, check the section on Complete Canon – Old Testament.)

As for the New Testament, there are early references to specific works that were excluded from the New Testament canon.

As discussed previously, a primary consideration is authorship. So, if a “New Testament” writing was known to be a forgery, i.e. said to be a writing of an apostle and known that it was not, then that writing was excluded.

An example of this is found in the Muratorian fragment (c. 170 AD) in which the writer specifically mentions two writings (the Epistle to the Laodecians and the Epistle to the Alexandrians) as being “forged in Paul’s name”.

See:

- The Muratorian Fragment. <http://www.bible-researcher.com/muratorian.html>
- The Muratorian Canon. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/muratorian.html>

In Catechetical Lecture 4 (c. 350 AD), Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem indicated that the *Gospel According to Thomas* was not written by Thomas.

See: Catechetical Lecture 4. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310104.htm>

In Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History (c. 312-324 AD), Book 3, Chapter 25, he indicated that there are writings:

“...cited by the heretics under the name of the apostles, including, for instance, such books as the Gospels of Peter, of Thomas, of Matthias, or of any others besides them, and the Acts of Andrew and John and the other apostles, which no one belonging to the succession of ecclesiastical writers has deemed worthy of mention in his writings.”

See: Eusebius of Caesarea, Church History [see Book 3, Chapter 25].
http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0265-0339_Eusebius_Caesariensis_Church_History_EN.pdf

Beyond falsely ascribing the writing to an apostle, Eusebius indicated that there were problems with the content of these writings.

“...the character of the style is at variance with apostolic usage, and both the thoughts and the purpose of the things that are related in them are so completely out of accord with true orthodoxy that they clearly show themselves to be the fictions of heretics. Wherefore they are not to be placed even among the rejected writings, but are all of them to be cast aside as absurd and impious.”

See: Eusebius of Caesarea, Church History [see Book 3, Chapter 25].
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In some cases, the author of a writing may be known but the writing was rejected because the author was not an apostle or an associate of an apostle. Again, from the Muratorian fragment: “But Hermas wrote the *Shepherd* very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the chair of the church of the city of Rome. And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among the Prophets, whose number is complete, or among the Apostles, for it is after [their] time.”

See: The Muratorian Fragment. <http://www.bible-researcher.com/muratorian.html>

Finally, in a writing dated 367 AD, Athanasius of Alexandria said this about writings other than the 27 included in the New Testament canon:

“...mention is nowhere made of the apocrypha; rather they are a fabrication of the heretics, who write them down when it pleases them and generously assign to them an early date of composition in order that they may be able to draw upon them as supposedly ancient writings and have in them occasion to deceive the guileless.”

See: Athanasius of Alexandria. <http://www.ntcanon.org/Athanasius.shtml>

To summarize, writings were excluded from the New Testament canon based on one or more of the following: 1) the writing was known to be a forgery, 2) the author of the writing was NOT an apostle or associated with an apostle, or 3) the writing contained teaching contrary to the teachings of known apostles.

While it seems clear that there was some disagreement regarding books that were to be included in the New Testament, there appears to be NO widespread disagreement regarding writings that were to be excluded.