

Why Only Four Gospels?

Some of the alternative gospels have been known for centuries, others we knew about but were unknown in their actual text, and some other texts have been discovered of which we know very little. Who decided what became part of the New Testament and what was left out? Why don't we have more gospels in the New Testament than the current four? There are some very clear reasons for this and some of these help us to understand better the uniqueness of the Christian message.

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- I. Why Only Four Gospels?
 - A. Genuine question asked within the church
 - B. Question asked as accusation outside the church
 - C. The alternative gospels that we know of
- II. Argument 1: We do not have reliable alternatives
 - A. Most of the alternatives are incomplete
 - B. Most of the alternatives are incomplete or absent in the original language
 - C. Therefore the text of these is highly uncertain
- III. Argument 2: All of the alternatives were produced too late
 - A. Dates of the canonical gospels
 - B. Dates of the non-canonical gospel
 - C. Why this chronology matters
- IV. Argument 3: The alternatives do not contain apostolic teaching
 - A. Characteristics of canonical gospels
 1. Jesus is the announced Messiah
 2. Who lived in first-century Palestine
 3. Who died physically for our sins
 4. To save those who repent and believe

B. Some of the alternatives reflect middle-Platonic dualistic worldview

C. Some of the alternatives reflect full-blown Gnosticism

D. Some of the alternatives present a 'different' Jesus

V. Conclusions

A. Most non-canonical gospels fail on all three points

B. The sceptics conundrum

1. Maintaining that the gospels are not reliable because the text is corrupt
2. *and* maintaining that alternatives should be included even though their text is corrupt
3. 'Wanting to have your cake and eat it'