

# Theological Equipping Class

*What books didn't make it into the Bible?*

April 12, 2020

## Introduction

### Old Testament

Books which everyone recognizes as canonical

Books which no one has recognized as canonical

Other historical books mentioned in the OT itself

- book of the covenant, the book of Jasher, the book of the wars of the LORD.

Pseudepigrapha: literally "false writing" - refers to books that typically bear a false attribution of authorship

What books belong in this category? Scholars differ, but generally includes:

- 1-3 Enoch, Sibylline Oracles, 4 Ezra, 2-3 Baruch, Jubilees, Psalms of Solomon, the Apocalypse of Adam, the Assumption of Moses.
- Enoch and the Assumption of Moses referenced in the NT?
  - *One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."* (Titus 1:12) [likely Epimenides, a 6<sup>th</sup> of 7<sup>th</sup> century b.c. Greek philosopher]

Books which some groups have considered canonical

Apocrypha: literally "secret" or "hidden" {Roman Catholic church prefers to call these deuterocanonical rather than apocryphal}

What are the apocrypha or the deuterocanonical books? a collection of intertestamental books typically regarding Jewish history that appear in the original Latin translation of the Bible (the Vulgate) and in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), but do not appear in the Hebrew Bible.

What books are included? Generally includes books like:

- Baruch
- Bel and the Dragon
- Ecclesiasticus
- 1-2 Esdras
- Letter of Jeremiah
- Judith
- The books of the Maccabees
- Prayer of Manasseh
- Sirach
- Song of the Three Jews
- Susanna
- Tobit
- Wisdom of Solomon

RC Position:

...if any one receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin vulgate edition; and knowingly and deliberately contemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema. (Council of Trent, 1546)

Protestant position:

- Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England (1571) "And the other Books (as Jerome saith) the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine."
- Belgic Confession (1561) "The church may certainly read these books and learn from them as far as they agree with the canonical books. But they do not have such power and virtue that one could confirm from their testimony any point of faith or of the Christian religion."
- Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) "The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture, and therefore are of no authority in the church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings."

Why don't Protestants recognize their authority or consider them canonical?

1. It wasn't a part of the original Hebrew Bible.
  - "From Artaxerxes to our own time the complete history has been written, but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records, because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets." –Josephus
  - "After the latter prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi had died, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel..." - Babylonian Talmud
2. It's never said to have divine authority from any Biblical author.
3. It has historical, geographical, and theological errors.
  - Judith says that Nebuchadnezzar was the king over Assyria when he was actually the king over Babylon.
  - Tobit teaches justification by works, specifically paying alms
  - The Wisdom of Solomon has God creating the universe from pre-existing matter rather than from nothing.
  - Sirach 42:14 – "A man's wickedness is better than a woman's goodness; women bring shame and disgrace."
4. They don't claim to be scripture themselves.
  - 1 Macc 4:45-46 "...So they tore down the altar and put the stones in a suitable place on the Temple hill, where they were to be kept until a prophet should appear and decide what to do with them."
5. Jerome, who wrote the Vulgate, said that it wasn't scripture in his preface.
6. It wasn't until the council of Trent in 1546 that it was officially declared scripture and even that was a response to Protestantism.

What about the Dead Sea scrolls?

What are those? They are a collection of religious writings by a Jewish sect called the "Essenes" discovered in 1946 at a place outside of Jerusalem near the Dead Sea called "Qumran."

What makes them so significant?

## New Testament

### Other Apostolic Letters

- *And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.* (Colossians 4:16)
- *I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—* (1 Corinthians 5:9)
- Does it matter? Why or why not?
- What if we found a "lost letter" of Paul?

### NT Pseudepigrapha

Includes: The Gospel of Philip, Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Mary Magdalene, Acts of Paul and Thecla, The Gospel of Mary, etc.

What do you need to know about NT pseudepigrapha?

1. The practice itself is mentioned in the Bible:
  - *not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.* (2 Thessalonians 2:2)
  - *I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write.* (2 Thessalonians 3:17)

2. There is absolutely no evidence that the early church ever knowingly accepted a pseudonymous document as authoritative. In fact, the opposite is true, where there was suspicion of a false writing, the church universally rejected it.
- "For our part, brethren, we receive both Peter and the other apostles as Christ, but the writings which falsely bear their names we reject..." (Serapion, Bishop of Antioch, 200AD)
  - [Certain writings] "are brought forward by heretics under the name of the apostles; they include gospels such as those of Peter, Thomas and Matthias and some others as well, or Acts such as those of Andrew and John and other apostles. None of these has been deemed worthy of citation in the writings of any in the succession of churchmen. Indeed, the stamp of their phraseology differs widely from the apostolic style, and the opinion and policy of their contents are as dissonant as possible from true orthodoxy, showing clearly that these are the figments of heretics. Therefore they are not to be reckoned even among 'spurious' books but must be shunned as altogether wrong and impious..." (Eusebius, 4<sup>th</sup> century)
  - "In the patristic church apostolic pseudepigrapha, when discovered, were excluded from the church's canon. This applied whether or not the pseudepigraph were orthodox or heretical." (E. Earle Ellis)
  - "It is problematic to argue that these works were written under a false name since the early church clearly excluded from the apostolic canon any works they thought to be pseudonymous. While critics point to the common practice of pseudonymous writing in the ancient world, they usually fail to point out that this practice, though common in the culture, was not common in personal letters, and was categorically rejected by the early church (cf. 2 Thess. 2:2; 3:17; also *Muratorian Canon* 64-67; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.12.3). Tertullian (c. A.D. 160-225) wrote that when it was discovered that a church elder had composed a pseudonymous work, The Acts of Paul (which included a purported Pauline letter, *3 Corinthians*), the offending elder "was removed from his office" (*On Baptism* 17). Accepting as Scripture letters that lie about their origin is also a significant ethical problem. Thus, there is a good basis for affirming the straightforward claim of these letters as authentically written by Paul." (ESV Study Bible)

### Gnostic Gospels: 1945 at Nag Hammadi, Egypt

Was Gnosticism a more tolerant and inclusive alternative to orthodox Christianity?

Were the gnostic gospels suppressed?

- The Gospel of Philip has been dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century.
- The Gospel of Barnabas from the 16<sup>th</sup> century was written in Spanish and Italian.

- The very earliest of the gnostic gospels has been dated to the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century, nearly 100 years after most of the NT documents were written and half a century after Revelation.

Were the gnostic gospels originally accepted by the church?

Do the gnostic gospels simply present alternative accounts of Jesus and the gospel?

- the Gospel of Thomas: "Simon Peter said to him, 'Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.' Jesus said, 'I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.' "
- The Gospel of Judas: Jesus tells Judas, "You will exceed all of them. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me."
- The infancy gospel of Thomas.
  - A puddle of water and a shriveled kid
  - An accident and blind complainers
  - A fallen buddy and a miracle
- "The Gnostic schools lost because they deserved to lose" (FF Bruce)

### Early Christian writings

In this category we would have early Christian writings like

- The Shepherd of Hermas from the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century
- Didache from maybe the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century
- the writings of church fathers like Ignatius, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, & Clement.

attributes of canonicity:

- Apostolicity
- Universality
- Orthodoxy

### Later religious writings

Includes the writings of other religions that borrow from Christianity and Judaism such as the Koran (which was written in the 600s) or the religious writings of cults such as

- the book of Mormon for the Latter Day Saints
- the New World Translation of the Bible by Jehovah's Witnesses
- Science and Health by Mary Baker Eddy and the Christian Science Movement
- Dianetics by L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology

What do you need to know about these?

- All of these were written well after the Bible.
- They all actually contradict the Bible.