



The Apocrypha

by Jeremy Cagle

One of the most interesting classes I had in Seminary was a freshman course entitled Research and Computing. It was not interesting because it contained some deep, spiritual material that enhanced my relationship with Jesus Christ. It was interesting because, in each of our classes, a different professor talked about his area of expertise. Language professors discussed the importance of knowing the Biblical languages and how to study them. Theology professors discussed the importance of having a solid theological framework when approaching the Scriptures, and so forth and so on.

The class that I remember the most is the one which featured the Seminary librarian as a guest speaker. During his lecture, he discussed the importance of starting a personal library while in Seminary. I remember that because, as he spoke, I thought, “You’ve got to be kidding me! Start a library? With what? I can barely pay rent and you want me to buy books?!”

That was four years ago. Today, after taking his advice, I now have around 300-400 books (I counted them because I am currently in the process of moving). As people have visited my apartment and viewed my collection, I have noticed that many of them are more interested in browsing through the books that discuss error than in the books that discuss truth.

Books like *The Gospel According to Rome*¹ frequently leave the shelf, while books like *The Gospel According to Jesus*² remain untouched. Books that discuss the misuse of the charismatic gifts are examined more than books that discuss the nature of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Books that describe cults are read while books that describe the Holy Spirit are left alone. Why is that? Why are Christians – at least the ones that come to visit me – more interested in error than in truth?

I do not know. I could make several guesses³ but that is not the purpose of this article. The purpose of this article is to “scratch the theological itch” many people have with error. While the other articles in this edition focus on the canon

or the process of canonization,⁴ this article focuses on the books that did not make it into the Bible: the apocrypha.

The word “Apocrypha” has had a rather complicated history . . . At first, it referred, as the Greek root would indicate, to hidden or concealed things. It could describe religious writings as hidden or concealed either because they were thought unworthy or, as often happened, because they were too sacred or important to be made known to outsiders or to beginners in the faith . . . The word came to be used to describe writings that were denied a place in the worship services of the group and so were limited to private use.⁵

Bruce Metzger sheds a little more light on the meaning of the word “apocrypha” in *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*:

From the point of view of those who approved of these books, they were ‘hidden’ or withdrawn from common use because they were regarded as containing mysterious or esoteric lore, too profound to be communicated to any except the initiated. From another point of view, however, it was held that such books deserved to be ‘hidden’ because they were spurious or heretical.⁶

As we will see below, the latter view proves to be correct. The apocrypha were left out of the canon for one of three reasons:

- 1). *authorship* – they were not written by their alleged authors⁷
- 2). *history* – they embellished Old Testament or New Testament history⁸
- 3). *doctrine* – they contradicted Old and New Testament doctrine

Every apocryphal book did not implicate all three of these issues, but all implicated at least one. The following is a brief description of several apocryphal books and the reason(s) they were left out of the canon.

I. OLD TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA

The Old Testament Apocrypha were written between the third century B. C. and the first century A. D. The following is a list of the apocryphal books written during each consecutive century and a brief description of the events of that century.⁹

3rd Century B.C. – While some of the Jews still remained in Babylon, a portion of them had returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. During this century, Alexander the Great captured Palestine and allowed the Jews living there to continue their worship and remain in peace.

Apocryphal Books Written – Tobith (or Tobias)

2nd Century B.C. – This century was marked by fighting amongst the Jews and amongst their conquerors. The fighting came to a head when the Seleucid Governor Antiochus Epiphanes placed a statue of the Greek god Zeus in the Jerusalem temple and commanded it to be worshipped. The Maccabean Revolt¹⁰ soon put an end to the Greek blasphemy, and worship of the God of Israel continued in the Jerusalem temple.

Apocryphal Books Written – Ecclesiasticus (or Wisdom of Ben Sirah), Judith.

1st Century B.C. – During this century, Jerusalem was captured by the Romans. The Jews were allowed to live peacefully under the command of a Roman provincial governor. During this period, the Pharisees emerged as religious leaders in Judaism.

Apocryphal Books Written – I Maccabees, II Maccabees, I Esdras, the Book of Wisdom (or Wisdom of Solomon).

1st Century A.D. – In A. D. 70, due to several revolts and disputes, the Roman army attacked Jerusalem and burned the Jewish temple. Because of this atrocity, there was much Jewish literature written during this tumultuous century. The Jewish historians Josephus and Philo wrote during this time.

Apocryphal Books Written – II Esdras, Baruch, II Enoch, the Assumption of Moses, the Life of Adam and Eve.

The following is a concise description of several books from the Old Testament Apocrypha: I Esdras, II Esdras, Baruch, and the Book of Wisdom (or Wisdom of Solomon).

1.The First Book of Esdras. The Old Testament apocryphal book that came closest to canonization was the First Book of Esdras, chiefly because it repeats information from large sections of 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. It relates Jewish events from 621 B.C. (before the Jewish captivity in Babylon) to 444 B.C. (after the Jewish return from Babylonian captivity).¹¹

First Esdras is primarily a recreation of the events that occurred in Ezra and Nehemiah.¹² Chapter 1 discusses King Josiah's celebration of the Passover¹³ and chapter 2 discusses Israel's return to Jerusalem.¹⁴ Chapters 3-4 are discussed in greater detail below. Chapter 5 describes King Darius' decree commanding Zerubbabel to take charge of the restoration of the city of Jerusalem.¹⁵ Chapters 6-8 discuss various events concerning the restoration of the Jerusalem wall and the rebuilding of the city¹⁶ and chapter 9 describes Ezra's actions against the men who had taken foreign wives.¹⁷

Chapters 3-4 provide an excellent example of 1 Esdras' recreation of historical events. These chapters describe a debate that is held between three young men under the watch of King Darius. The debate is held to answer the question: "What is the strongest?" The first unnamed man claims that wine is the strongest and the second that the king is the strongest. The third speaker is Zerubbabel.¹⁸ He claims that women are the strongest but truth triumphs over all, including women. King Darius then names Zerubabel the victor of the debate and gives him his desired prize: the destruction of Babylon and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple.

1 Esdras was left out of the canon for one main reason: *history*. 1 Esdras discusses historical events that never occurred, as the above discussion of chapters 3-4 illustrates. Consider Bruce Metzger's and Ivor Jones' words:

It will have been observed more than once in the synopsis just given that the author of 1 Esdras leaves much to be desired from a historical point of view. Not only does he contradict other sources, but he is involved in internal inconsistencies. In view of these serious deficiencies the most charitable verdict which one can pass is that the writer aimed more at inculcating a moral lesson than at recounting an accurate chronicle of events.¹⁹

Sometimes the retelling of the story requires an imaginative, creative touch, fantasy even . . . 1 Esdras is in all probability that kind of book.²⁰

Because of its unreliable history, 1 Esdras was left out of the canon by the Israelite community.

2.The Second Book of Esdras. This book does not compare to the first in its content nor in its order. Where First Esdras is a roughly historical book, Second Esdras is an apocalyptic book. Apocalyptic literature is, “A genre of literature presenting revelations regarding the end of the world.”²¹

The outline and content of Second Esdras is confusing, to say the least.

II Esdras consists of a Jewish Apocalypse (chs. 3-14) set in a framework of an entirely different kind, of which the first two chapters are clearly Christian and the last two (15, 16) either Jewish or Christian.²²

Because of this confusing nature, it is best to examine this book in its three chapter divisions, alluded to above: chapters 1-2, 3-14, and 15-16.

Chapters 1-2 provide the identity of the author: a descendant of the priestly line of Aaron. He proceeds to give a genealogy of Ezra and discuss the future of the Jewish race: they will be punished for their sins. As punishment, the kingdom of Jerusalem will be given to a strange race of people: presumably the Gentiles.

Following this prophecy, chapters 3-14 record seven visions allegedly given to Salathiel – an acquaintance of Ezra.

The first vision (3:1-5:19) describes the distress of God’s

people.

The second vision (5:20-6:34) prophesies about a time when “wrongs will be righted and righteousness and truth prevail.”²³

The third vision (6:35-9:25) predicts a four hundred year Messianic age, followed by a seven-day period of judgment, and the end of time.

The fourth vision (9:26-10:59) describes Ezra’s vision of a beautiful new Jerusalem after its destruction. The fifth vision (11:1-12:51) relates a vision of an eagle; the explanation of this vision coincides with the Prophet Daniel’s vision of the four beasts in Daniel 7.

The sixth vision (13:1-58) shows a vision of the return of the Son of Man,²⁴ in which he will wage war against the men of the earth. When they attack him, “he carves out a mountain for refuge from which he attacks them with fire from his mouth.”²⁵

The seventh vision (14:1-48) tells how Ezra is told to rewrite Israel’s Law.

He is told to take five scribes and to retire with them for forty days. In that time he dictates to them ninety-four books, twenty-four for immediate publication and seventy to be reserved for the ‘wise among the people.’²⁶

Chapters 15-16 claim to be the words of the Lord uttered by an unknown prophet “exhorting the believers to stand firm against the advent times of calamity during which the nations will be punished for their sin.”²⁷

The origin of Second Esdras is unknown, as both its authorship and time of composition have been lost. What is known, however, is that this book was written by three different authors who wrote during three different time periods.²⁸ Chapters 3-14 were written by an unknown Jewish author around the end of the first century A.D. Chapters 1-2 were written by an unknown Christian author around the middle of the second century A.D. and chapters 15-16 were added by an unknown Christian author some time during the third century A.D.

2 Esdras, while violating some issues regarding *authorship*

and *history*, mainly violates the principle of *doctrine*. To rewrite the law, as Ezra does in Second Esdras 15-16, is blasphemy to the Jews. Psalm 19 says that God's law is perfect (v. 7) and Deuteronomy 4:2 says it is not to be added to. Second Esdras violates both of these doctrinal principles and, as a result, it was never canonized.

3.Baruch. Baruch is the only apocryphal book that follows the model of the Old Testament prophets. According to chapter 1, it was written by Baruch the son of Neriah, the companion and secretary of the Prophet Jeremiah.²⁹

The book opens with Baruch reading the contents of his book in the hearing of the Jewish exiles in Babylon.³⁰ In response to the reading of this letter,

The people wept, and fasted, and prayed. Then a collection of money was made, which was sent to Jerusalem, in order that offerings might continue to be made on "the altar of the Lord our God."³¹

He then proceeds to describe the contents of the letter he read to them.

The Book of Baruch is divided into two parts. After describing the author and the timing of his writing, part one presents a long confession of the sins of the Israelites, a prayer for God's mercy, and God's promise to be faithful to the nation of Israel. Part two presents a "homily on Wisdom, largely influenced by the Wisdom literature, and more especially by *Proverbs* and *Job*."³² In this portion of the book, Israel is encouraged to listen to wisdom, which "is the possession of the Almighty alone, but He has given it to Jacob His servant, and to Israel His beloved."³³

The Book of Baruch was excluded from the Old Testament Canon because of the principle of *authorship*: it was written by multiple authors, though it claimed to be written by only one.

Actually it appears to be a composite work of uneven quality written by two or more authors, the latest of whom may have lived during the first century before Christ or even the first century of the Christian era.³⁴

Not only did it contain an uneven quality, but the style

of the first part of the book is very different than the style in the second part.³⁵ Because of this,

The influence of the book of Baruch was much more pronounced in Christian circles than in Jewish circles. At the close of the fourth century Jerome stated that the Hebrews neither read nor even possess this book."³⁶

For whatever reason, some of the early church read and studied the Book of Baruch, while most of – if not all of – early Judaism did not.

4.The Book of Wisdom (or Wisdom of Solomon). In ancient Jewish circles, wise men occupied a place of great honor.

Among the Jews, as well as in other ancient cultures, the wise man occupied a position in national life almost as distinct and prominent as the prophet and the priest (the three are mentioned together in Jer. 18:18 as of equally recognized status).³⁷

Wisdom literature – sayings of the wise – occupied such a great place in the Jewish Scriptures that numerous riddles,³⁸ parables,³⁹ and proverbs⁴⁰ are found in the Old Testament that were not written by "wise men" or found in "wisdom" books.

The most famous collection of wisdom literature is found in the Book of Proverbs. But there are several collections of wisdom literature contained in apocryphal writings as well, including the Book of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus. Regarding these three works, "The Wisdom of Solomon carries the personification of Wisdom to its highest point in the Apocrypha."⁴¹

The Book of Wisdom has 19 chapters that contain the following tidbits:⁴²

1:1-16 – the Lord's righteousness is not attainable without wisdom

2:1-20 – the Godly are persecuted because they oppose the ungodly

4:14-20 – retribution will come upon the ungodly, terrible punishment is reserved for them

6:21-25 – rulers who honor wisdom will have unceasing rule

7:1-14 – the author relates his prayer for and reception of wisdom

9:12-18 – the author meditates on the excellencies of wisdom

12:3-11 – God’s mercy toward Israel and the surrounding countries is related

13:10-19 – it is foolishness to worship idols

17:1-18:4 – the punishment of the Egyptians and God’s righteousness in doing so is relayed in detail

The Book of Wisdom was left out of the canon for two reasons: *authorship* and *doctrine*.

Regarding authorship, the book claims to be written by King Solomon. However, this book was not written until some time between 100 B.C. and A.D. 40,⁴³ almost 1,000 years after the death of King Solomon!⁴⁴

Regarding doctrine, the Book of Wisdom is a mixture of Old Testament teachings and Greek philosophy.

For example, the author’s teaching of divine and human wisdom, or objective and subjective wisdom as it may be termed, is an explication of the earlier ideas on this subject expressed in the Book of Proverbs, with a metaphysical twist borrowed from the Stoic conception of the universal Logos, that impersonal mediator between God and creation.⁴⁵

To take this further, the author of this work ignores the Old Testament teaching that the good and bad go to the grave,⁴⁶ and instead teaches that “one’s moral character determines one’s future destiny.”⁴⁷

While early Christians, such as Augustine, honored the Book of Wisdom,⁴⁸ the Jews did not because of its philosophical influences. As a result, this work was left out of the canon.

II. NEW TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA

The New Testament Apocrypha is a collection of books of a very different nature from the collection of apocryphal books from the Old Testament era. Several Old Testament apocryphal works, such as Tobit (or Tobias), Judith, Baruch, Ecclesiasticus, the Book of Wisdom, and First and Second Maccabees are actually included in the Catholic Bible.⁴⁹

The New Testament apocrypha cannot claim even this level of status. Many of these books were not taken seriously by the early Christian church because of the weight given to the books which had been canonized. In the words of the early church father, Irenaeus, the New Testament Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – had been “handed down to us by the will of God in scriptures.”⁵⁰ Clement of Alexandria, another early church father, made a similar remark concerning the New Testament Gospels. He referred to these books as, “The four gospels that have been handed down to us.”⁵¹

Such powerful statements were never given to the apocryphal books of the New Testament. In the words of Solomon J. Schepps, “It is safe to say that a comparison of the accepted books with those rejected may be relied upon, for those books which are accepted are far superior in value to the others.”⁵² Even with that understanding, it is still beneficial to examine some of these “rejected” apocryphal works, since there has been an upswing in controversy in recent years regarding the use of the New Testament Apocrypha in certain Christian circles.⁵³ With that in mind, the following is a brief outline of the dates of authorship of the apocryphal New Testament books and the events that surrounded their authorship:

1st Century A.D. – During this period of time, Jesus walked the earth, ministered, and was crucified and resurrected. Within the next 7 decades, all of the books of the New Testament were finished, starting with Galatians⁵⁴ and ending with Revelation.⁵⁵ It was also during this period that a few apocryphal books and traditions appeared.⁵⁶

Apocryphal Books Written – 1 Clement, Epistle of Barnabas.⁵⁷

2nd Century A.D. – This was a century of great persecution under the pagan Roman emperors, and many apocryphal books were written during this time. According to church historian Philip Schaff:

Men and women of all classes, noble senators and learned bishops, illiterate artisans and poor slaves, loving mothers and delicate virgins, hoary-headed pastors and innocent children approached their tortures in no temper of unfeeling indifference and obstinate defiance, but, like their divine Master, with calm self-possession, humble resignation, gentle meekness, cheerful faith, triumphant hope, and forgiving charity.⁵⁸

Apocryphal Books Written – Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Peter, Gospel of the Hebrews, Gospel of Mary Magdalene, Gospel of James, Infancy Gospel of Thomas, Secret Gospel of Mark, Gospel of the Egyptians.

3rd Century A.D. – The 200's brought a period of heretical influence into the new church. Philosophical movements such as Gnosticism,⁵⁹ Heathenism,⁶⁰ Paganism,⁶¹ and Neo-Platonism⁶² all began to creep into the church. Even though these heresies were already prevalent in earlier centuries, their influences began to spread, and attempts to combine unchristian teachings with Christian ones became quite common, especially in apocryphal literature.

Apocryphal Books Written – Shepherd of Hermas, Acts of Peter and the Twelve, Acts of Paul, Acts of John.

Since we cannot look at each of these works in detail, we will examine the following apocryphal books: the Shepherd of Hermas, the Gospel of the Birth of Mary, the Gospel of the Egyptians, and the Letter of 1 Clement.

1.The Shepherd of Hermas. The Shepherd of Hermas is an apocalyptic book. Apocalyptic literature, as mentioned earlier, is "A genre of literature presenting revelations regarding the end of the world."⁶³ Regarding this work, Bart D. Ehrman writes,

The Shepherd was a popular book among Christians of the first four centuries. Written by Hermas, brother of Pius, bishop of Rome, during the first half of the second century, the book was regarded by some churches as canonical Scripture. It was eventually excluded from the canon, however, in part because it was known not to have been written by an apostle.⁶⁴

The book is divided into five visions, twelve sets of commandments, and ten parables that were supposedly presented to Hermas by an angel, who appears in the form of a shepherd. Throughout the writings of the book, other angelic beings appear: one in the form of an old woman who represents the church and several in the forms of other human figures.⁶⁵

Due to the length of this book – it contains 66 chapters – it is not possible to thoroughly analyze all of it. So we will simply examine Hermas' first vision.

After his birth, Hermas was sold as a slave to a woman named Rhoda in Rome (1:1). Over the years, he began to love her as a sister and once, after he found her bathing in the Tiber River, he helped her come out and observed her beauty:

When some time had passed, I saw her bathing in the Tiber river; and I gave her my hand to help her out of the river. When I observed her beauty I began reasoning in my heart, "I would be fortunate to have a wife of such beauty and character." This is all I had in my mind, nothing else (1:2).⁶⁶

He then relates how he was traveling through the countryside (1:3) and, after falling asleep, the heavens opened up and he saw the woman he had desired, confessing his sins to God (1:4-6). She then informed Hermas that God was angry at him for sinning against her (1:7).

But she laughed and said to me, "The desire for evil did rise up in your heart. Or do you not think it is evil for an evil desire to arise in the heart of an upright man" (1:8).⁶⁷

To take this one chapter further, while grieving over this sin, (2:1) an elderly woman appeared to Hermas and gave him his first vision (2:2).

Regarding the *Shepherd of Hermas*, there are two reasons it was kept out of the canon: *authorship* and *doctrine*.

One test for canonicity was apostolic authorship. If the author of a disputed book was recognized as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ or an associate of an apostle,

then the book was considered for canonization.⁶⁸ The author of the *Shepherd of Hermas* was not an apostle nor did he claim to be an associate of an apostle.

With respect to doctrine, the *Shepherd of Hermas* makes one very obvious and strange omission from its pages: the name Jesus Christ is never mentioned in any of its 66 chapters! In fact, Jesus is not referred to at all until chapter 59. Here an angel, in the form of a shepherd, (54:1) tells Hermas:

“Listen,” he said; “the Son of God is not represented as a slave, but as one who has great authority and lordship.” (59:1).⁶⁹

Clement of Rome – the alleged author of *1 Clement* – is mentioned by name (8:3)⁷⁰ but in all 66 chapters of this book concerning future events, Jesus, the one who will return to rule the earth for 1,000 years⁷¹ is never mentioned.

This omission is very different from the canonized books of the New Testament. For example, the Book of Jude contains 1 chapter and 25 verses, yet it mentions the name “Jesus Christ” 6 times! Hebrews, which contains 13 chapters, mentions the name “Jesus” or “Christ” 23 times and contains countless other references to Him. The *Shepherd of Hermas* does not even come close to this. Consequently, it was left out of the canon.

2. The Gospel of the Birth of Mary. This anonymous “Gospel,” attributed to the Apostle Matthew by the early church,⁷² dates back to 300 years after the birth of Jesus. “It is to be found in the works of Jerome, a Father of the Church, who flourished in the fourth century, from whence the present translation is made.”⁷³

It is for the most part a history book, describing the events from Mary’s birth until the time of her marriage to Joseph. Chapter 1 describes Mary’s ancestry and the journey of her father and mother to a feast in Jerusalem. Her father, Joachim, is despised for not having any children. Chapter 2 relays a conversation between the “angel of the Lord” concerning the birth of his daughter, Mary.

But if reason will not convince you of the truth of my words,

that there are frequent conceptions in advanced years, and that those who were barren have brought forth to their great surprise; therefore Anna your wife shall bring you a daughter, and you shall call her name Mary (2:9).⁷⁴

Chapter 3 relays a similar conversation between the angel and Mary’s mother, Anna. Here, the angel claims that Mary will be devoted to the Lord in the temple and will give birth to the Lord as a virgin.

She shall be, immediately upon her birth, full of the grace of the Lord, and shall continue during the three years of her weaning in her father’s house, and afterwards, being devoted to the service of the Lord, shall not depart from the temple, till she arrives to years of discretion (3:3).⁷⁵

Chapter 4 describes how Mary is brought to the temple at the age of 3, how she miraculously climbs the temple stairs, and how her parents offer sacrifices and leave her there. Chapter 5 tells how Mary continues to serve in the temple, even against the orders of the High Priest. Chapters 6-8 describe Joseph’s betrothal to Mary and his response in finding that she is pregnant with Jesus.

The Gospel of the Birth of Mary, though interesting, was left out of the canon because of *doctrine*. The Gospel of the Birth of Mary gives Mary an unparalleled status among anyone in the Bible. The first two verses of chapter 5 state:

But the Virgin of the Lord, as she advanced in years, increased also in perfections, and according to the saying of the Psalmist, her father and mother forsook her, but the Lord took care of her. For she every day had the conversation of angels, and every day received visitors from God, which preserved her from all sorts of evil, and caused her to abound with all good things.⁷⁶

Here, the author claims that Mary “increased also in perfections.” What he means by this is unclear, but there is no mention of any sin on Mary’s part in this entire Gospel. That is very rare in Scripture – especially regarding the close followers of Jesus. There are countless examples of the sins of the apostles and the sins of the women surrounding Jesus.⁷⁷ Not only that, but Jesus Christ is the only figure in the Bible who can be called perfect, because He was without sin.⁷⁸

It is also stated that “she every day had the conversation of angels, and every day received visitors from God.” Such a statement is also very unusual in the Bible!

As a matter of fact, such a statement has never been recorded in the Bible. No one received visitors from God “every day” on any occasion of their life, not Moses, not David, not any apostle, not even Jesus Christ Himself. To give such attention to Mary, when the rest of the Bible does not do so, is preposterous. Because of this, the *Gospel of the Birth of Mary* was left out of the canon.

3. The Gospel of the Egyptians. “The so-called Gospel of the Egyptians is a typical work of mythological Gnosticism.”⁷⁹ Written during the 2nd century, this anonymous book was formed as a clear attempt to combine canonical New Testament teachings with ancient Gnosticism.⁸⁰ Since the book is not written in logical order, it would be helpful to summarize the main teachings of the book.

1. There are 4 main sections in this book:
 - a. The origin of the heavenly world
 - b. The origin, preservation, and salvation of the race of Seth⁸¹
 - c. The hymnic section
 - d. The concluding section dealing with the origin and transmission of the tractate⁸²

The following is a portion of chapter 4, discussing the preservation of the race of Seth:

There came forth from him three powers / which are three ogdoads / which the Father brought / from his bosom in silence and / providence, which are / the Father, the Mother and the / Son.

The first ogdoad, the one / because of which the thrice-male child / came forth, which / is the thought, and the world, and / the eternal, incorruptible life / will, mind, / foreknowledge, the androgynous Father.⁸³

2. Praise is offered to several “beings:”
 - a. the great invisible Spirit
 - b. the male virgin Barbelo
 - c. the great Doxomedon-aeon
 - d. the thrice-male child
 - e. the male virgin Youel
 - f. Esephech, the Splenditenens
 - g. the ethereal earth⁸⁴

One example of these praises is found in the first verses of chapter 3:

The holy book of the Egyptians / about the great invisible Father / whose name cannot be uttered / he who came forth from the heights of the perfection of light / of the light of the aeons / the light of the providence / the Father of the silence, the light / of the word and the truth⁸⁵

The rest of the book reads much like these sections, so it is not really necessary to quote it more extensively. *The Gospel of the Egyptians* was left out of the canon chiefly because of *doctrine*, though history and authorship also have played major parts. It goes without saying that most of the above material is blatantly unchristian in its content and in its origin. The Holy Spirit is never referred to as a “great invisible Spirit,” there is no “thrice-male child” anywhere in the Bible, and Scripture never mentions an “ethereal”⁸⁶ earth.⁸⁷ Because of these and other Gnostic creations, *The Gospel of the Egyptians* was left out of the New Testament Canon.

4. The Epistle of 1 Clement. Clement was a major figure in early Christian scholarship and considered by some to be “the father of the Alexandrian Christian philosophy.”⁸⁸ Many of his letters have survived today, including the *Epistle of 1 Clement* that was considered by some for canonicity.

The letter of 1 Clement was an important document in the early church. Some proto-orthodox Christians quoted it as canonical Scripture; it was included in several manuscripts, including the famous fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus, as one of the books of the New Testament. Eventually, though, the book fell into disuse and was lost from view until rediscovered in the seventeenth century.⁸⁹

The letter was sent from Rome to Corinth (1:1) by an anonymous source. It was written to address a division in the Corinthian church (1:1) that had overthrown its leaders and replaced them with new ones (3:2-4). The author of 1 Clement decries such a vile action:

It is shameful, loved ones, exceedingly shameful and unworthy of your conduct in Christ, that the most secure and ancient church of the Corinthians is reported to have created a faction against its presbyters, at the instigation of one or two persons (47:6).⁹⁰

Much of the 66 chapters in the book are references to Jewish Scriptures and pleas and commands to the Corinthians to repent of their sins, and are very similar to New Testament teachings. For instance, compare 1 Clement 46:7 with Ephesians 4:25-27:

1 Clement 46:7 – Why do we mangle and mutilate the members of Christ and create factions in our own body? Why do we come to such a pitch of madness as to forget that we are members of one another?⁹¹

Ephesians 4:25-27 – Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.

Yet, for all the similarities, there are also some contrasts between the doctrines in 1 Clement and the doctrines in the New Testament. One example of this is the continuation of the office of apostle. 1 Clement 44:2 states,

For this reason, since they [the apostles] understood perfectly well in advance what would happen, they appointed those we have already mentioned . . . to the effect that if these should die, other approved men should succeed them in ministry.⁹²

Such a sentiment is not echoed in New Testament writings for several reasons:

1. No New Testament apostle referred to any of his successors as apostles, nor did they teach any specific apostolic duties to their predecessors.

2. In a discussion of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to the apostles in 1 Corinthians 15:8, Paul states that Jesus Christ appeared to him last of all, implying that he was the last apostle.

3. While some believers during the early years of the church considered themselves to be apostles, these pretensions ceased shortly after the first two centuries and did not continue until recently with the charismatic movement.

Because of *doctrine*, *The Letter of 1 Clement* was never canonized.

It was also left out of the canon for reasons of *authorship*.⁹³ In order for a book to be canonized, it must have been written by an apostle or an associate of an apostle. *1 Clement* did not claim to be written by an apostle (it did not claim to be written by anyone, for that matter) and the early church never took it to be divinely inspired. Because of that, it was left out of the canon.

Conclusion

Bible-believers have no reason to question the reliability and authenticity of the books of the Old and New Testament. A simple study of some of their "canonical competitors" – the apocryphal books – proves that there is no competition for the divinely inspired canon of Scripture.

End Notes

¹ James G. McCarthy, *The Gospel According to Rome* (Eugene, Or.: Harvest House, 1995).

² John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

³ One guess is that believers are interested in learning about error – cults, wrong doctrines – so that they can evangelize those who practice them. A second guess is that there is a greater moral obligation to truth than to error. If I read a book about repentance, I will feel obligated to repent. If I read a book about the misuse of the charismatic gifts, the only obligation I will have will be to refrain from misusing those gifts. Consequently, it is much easier to read a book on the misuse of charismatic gifts because I do not have to act on what I read.

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000). The word "canon" refers to "the list of all the books that belong in the Bible" (1237). The canon is a completed list of books that the Christian church regarded as Holy Scripture. Canonization is the process by which this list was recognized. For more information on the canon,

see “What Is the Canon?” For more information on canonization, see “The Close of the Canon.”

⁵ Floyd V. Filson, *Which Books Belong in the Bible: A Study of the Canon* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956) 73-74.

⁶ *An Introduction to the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955) 5.

⁷ In this category, apocryphal books that claim to be written by an Old Testament author or New Testament Apostle were written by someone else. This can be proved by examining the date of writing, grammatical style, events recorded, etc.

⁸ “Embellished,” in this context, means that the apocryphal books fabricated historical accounts; they described historical occurrences that the Old and New Testament writers never cited and, in some cases, even denied.

⁹ The following timeline is taken from L. H. Brockington’s *A Critical Introduction to the Apocrypha* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1961) 4-12.

¹⁰ The Maccabees were a Jewish family who led the Jews in a revolt against the Syrian Army – specifically against the Seleucids – a province of Syria. Due to the Maccabees’ military success, the Jews were allowed to continue worship at their temple. The apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees describe these wars.

¹¹ Metzger, 11.

¹² The following material concerning 1 Esdras is taken from Ivor H. Jones’ *The Apocrypha* (Werrington: Epworth Press, 2003) 1-14.

¹³ 2 Chron 35:1-19.

¹⁴ 2 Chron 36:20-23; Ezra 1-2.

¹⁵ This decree is not mentioned in 2 Chronicles, Ezra, or Nehemiah.

¹⁶ Some of these events are mentioned in Ezra and Nehemiah but most of them are not.

¹⁷ Ezra 10:1-44.

¹⁸ Zerubbabel was one of the leaders of Israel during the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its wall (see Ezra 3:2, 8; 4:2).

¹⁹ Metzger, 18.

²⁰ Jones, 1.

²¹ Millard J. Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001) 14.

²² Brockington, 20.

²³ Ibid., 23.

²⁴ Dan 7:13-14.

²⁵ Brockington, 24.

²⁶ Ibid., 25.

²⁷ Ibid., 21.

²⁸ Scholars have determined this from an analysis of the language and religious references in this book (Metzger, 22).

²⁹ Jeremiah 32:12 makes mention of a “Baruch son of Neriah.”

³⁰ The following material concerning Baruch is taken from W. O. Oesterley’s *An Introduction to the Books of the Apocrypha* (London: S.P.C.K., 1958) 256-267.

³¹ Ibid., 257.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 258-259.

³⁴ Metzger, 89.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 93.

³⁷ Ibid., 65.

³⁸ Judges 14:4.

³⁹ 2 Sam 12:1-6.

⁴⁰ Ez 18:2.

⁴¹ Metzger, 67.

⁴² The following information is taken from W. O. Oesterley's *An Introduction to the Books of the Apocrypha*, 196-201.

⁴³ Metzger, 67.

⁴⁴ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006). King Solomon ruled Israel from 971-931 B.C. (862).

⁴⁵ Metzger, 73.

⁴⁶ Ecc. 8:8. Genesis 3:19 also mentions that part of man's curse was to return to the ground from which he came. In other words, part of his curse was death.

⁴⁷ Metzger, 74.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 75-76.

⁴⁹ Downloaded from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03267a.htm> as of June 8, 2007. I would have cited these books from my Catholic Bible but it is currently in a box somewhere! Apologies.

⁵⁰ Quoted in *The Canon Debate*, ed. by Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002) 295.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It Into the New Testament* (Oxford: University Press, 2003) 13.

⁵³ Consider the words of Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders in *The Canon Debate*,

In the last forty years interest has been growing not only in the origins of the biblical canon but also in its development, continuing viability, and future as a fixed collection of sacred writings. Despite the stability of the various biblical canons over the last four hundred years, the twentieth century brought significantly increased interest in canon formation (3).

⁵⁴ MacArthur, 1755. Galatians was written shortly after the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. Most scholars date this council around A. D. 49.

⁵⁵ "Revelation was written in the last decade of the first century (ca. A.D. 94-96) (Ibid., 1959).

⁵⁶ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. I (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002) 163.

⁵⁷ The following information regarding the writing of New Testament apocrypha is borrowed from www.earlychristianwritings.com and www.answers.com as of June 8, 2007.

⁵⁸ *History of the Christian Church*, vol. II, 75.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 444-459.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 109-114.

⁶¹ Ibid., 88-89.

⁶² Ibid., 95-101.

⁶³ Erickson, 14.

⁶⁴ Solomon J. Schepps, *The Lost Books of the Bible* (New York: Bell Publishing Company, 1979) 251.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 252.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ For more information regarding this test of canonicity, see Adam Chiappellone and Jeremy Cagle's "The Close of the Canon." Also see Jeremy Cagle's "What is the Canon?"

⁶⁹ Schepps, 275.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 255.

⁷¹ Rev 20.

⁷² Schepps, 17.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 19.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 21.

⁷⁷ Consider the conduct of Martha in Luke 10:38-42.

⁷⁸ 2 Cor 5:21.

⁷⁹ *The Gospel of the Egyptians* in Nag Hammadi Codices, ed. by Martin Krause, James M. Robinson, and Frederik Wisse (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975) 24.

⁸⁰ Gnosticism is "A movement in early Christianity, beginning already in the first century, that (1) emphasized a special higher truth that only the more enlightened receive from God, (2) taught that matter is evil, and (3) denied the humanity of Jesus" (Erickson, 77).

⁸¹ Seth was Adam's third son (Gen 5:3), after Cain (Gen 4:1) and Abel (Gen 4:2).

⁸² *The Gospel of the Egyptians*, 26.

⁸³ Ibid., 59.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 39.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 52.

⁸⁶ *Webster's New World Dictionary*, ed. by Michael Agnes (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2003). "Ethereal" is "not earthly; heavenly; celestial" (224).

⁸⁷ For all these references, see footnote 88.

⁸⁸ Schaff, 782.

⁸⁹ Schepps, 167.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 180.

⁹¹ Ibid., 179.

⁹² Ibid., 178.

⁹³ See "The Close of the Canon."