

## Which Books Belong in the Bible?

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*Following is an introduction and definition of basic terms (canon, apocrypha, pseudepigrapha) the development of the Old Testament canon is treated, followed by an appraisal of Old Testament apocrypha. The second section treats the congealing of the New Testament canon, and the vast literature of New Testament apocrypha. The third section considers modern day questions of canon and apocrypha, both from the standpoint of deleting Scriptural books as well as from the viewpoint of adding "new scriptures" to the canon.*

### **Introduction**

A person who is not yet a believer may offer a challenge, "I heard that in the 4th Century it was decided to leave some books out of the New Testament." Or "Why did the Protestants decide to remove about a dozen books from the Old Testament?" Or even worse, "You claim the Bible is the very Word of God, and yet human beings decided which books should be in the Bible! Why 66 books? Why not 166 books, or why not just 26 books? It seems to be the word of man just as much as the Word of God!"

We hope to answer these and other questions in this paper. We limit ourselves to this particular topic: "Which books belong in the Bible?" This means we do not have latitude to explore another question of great interest, "By what means did God's mind get communicated into the minds of the men who wrote the Scriptures?" For our purposes, let us assume that God succeeded in delivering his word authentically and accurately through chosen men. Let us assume the inspiration of God's Word. The question now before us is: How was the distinction made between books

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given by the inspiration of God on the one hand, and on the other hand the books that are hoaxes, forgeries, or good human material but not meant to be included as Scripture?

Let us begin with two terms that are basic in a discussion of "Which books belong in the Bible?"--

*Canon:*

A normative or regulative standard as to what should be included in sacred writings; straight (orthodox) teachings; the Scriptures viewed as a rule of faith and conduct (from the Greek *kanon*, from the phoenician *qana'*, Hebrew *qaneh*, meaning a rod, cane, or reed, usable for measuring).

*Apocrypha:*

Books rejected as unauthentic, of hidden origin, or uncanonical (from the Greek *apokryphos*, hidden away). Closely related is the term *pseudepigrapha*, referring to books written under false (Greek *pseudes*) authorship (Greek *epi* + *graphe*, to write upon), such as Books of Enoch, Psalms of Solomon, etc.

**A Consideration of the Old Testament**

Some argue<sup>1</sup> that the Old Testament books, 39 in the Protestant Bible, were established as a canon as early as 444-400 B.C., in the time of Ezra, contemporary of the Persian King Artaxerxes (465-424 B.C.). This view is supported by the writings of Flavius

Josephus (37-100? A.D.), Jewish soldier, statesman, and historian, who in his "Against Apion" states "We have but twenty-two books. . . . From the days of Artaxerxes to our own times every event has indeed been recorded; but these recent records have not been deemed worthy of equal credit with those which preceded them. . ." (Those twenty-two books were the same as our thirty-nine, since the twelve minor prophets were on a single scroll, and thus counted as one book. Ruth was attached to Judges, and Lamentations tacked on to the Jeremiah scroll. Likewise Ezra and Nehemiah were together. And each pair of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles were treated as one book. This arrangement is well-known and well-accepted.)

This view, which may be oversimplified in dating the canon closed at 400 B.C., has value in that it shows how Josephus, a first century Jew, from a practical point of view based on current usage, considered the canon "well-jelled" by 400 B.C., after which Josephus considered prophetic inspiration to have ceased.

A more precise study reveals that the Pentateuch (the law of Moses, the first five books) was in use canonically as early as 400 B.C.; that the Prophets, a second Jewish division of Scriptures, was closed canonically by 200 B.C.; and that the third division, the Writings, was closed in 100 B.C.<sup>2</sup> (This three-fold division of Jewish Scripture is commonly known, and it has been designated by the acronym *tanak*, which means *torah* (law), *nabiim* (prophets), and Kethubim (writings) .

An important date is 90 A.D. when the Council of Jamnia convened under Johanan ben Zakkai, officially congealing the Old Testament canon in its present form of thirty-nine books without Apocrypha.<sup>3</sup> Prior to this the canon had been socially closed by usage and practice, and discussions about Ezekiel, Daniel, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and Esther, for example, were academic and not of historical and theological

significance. (Such discussions even continued after the formal closing of the canon in 90 A.D.) Perhaps the development of Christian literature, which was coming to the fore, made it prudent for the rabbis to take official action in closing their canon.

### **Old Testament Apocrypha**

The Apocrypha (and Pseudepigrapha) were produced between 250 B.C. and the early Christian centuries. The Apocryphal books, found in the Douay Version (Roman Catholic), can be roughly divided into three groups:

1. Books that are allegedly *additions and completions* of existing books of the Old Testament canon. (II Esdras adds apocalyptic visions given to Ezra; "The Rest of Esther" seeks to show God's hand in "Esther" in clearer focus; and three additions to Daniel, the first two of which are based on the lion's den setting: Song of the Three Holy Children, Bel and the Dragon, and History of Susanna, add to the heroic feats of Daniel. )

2. Books that can be called "*wisdom literature*", similar to Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. These are Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus.

3. Books that treat *historical narrative*, sometimes with apparent forthrightness, as I and II Maccabees, which relate the Jews' warfare for liberty (175-130 B.C.) against the Syrians under the ambitious and outrageous Antiochus Epiphanes; on other occasions the historical narratives appear legendary (I Esdras regarding Zerubbabel), or infused with romantic love (Tobit and Judith), or mere paraphrases from other books (Baruch paraphrasing the prophets Jeremiah: Daniel, etc.).

What has been the fate of these assorted books? The rabbis did not want to accept them in the Old Testament canon because they appeared in Greek in the Septuagint translation in 150 B.C., and God's

language is Hebrew! (Four were *originally* written in Hebrew.) It is important to emphasize that Jewish usage rejected these books from their canon. They were definitely rejected at Jamnia in 90 A.D.

On April 8, 1546 The Council of Trent of the Roman Catholic Church declared some of these above-mentioned apocryphal books to be canonical or deuterocanonical, offering an anathema against any who ventured a different view. The books were Tobit, Judith The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch (with the Epistle of Jeremy as Chapter 6) and I and II Maccabees. The Rest of Esther was added to canonical Esther and Daniel was expanded by The History of Susanna; Song of the Three Holy Children, and Bel and the Dragon.

In the New English Bible the Apocrypha also includes I and II Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh, which were rejected by the Council of Trent. It is evident that this Apocrypha is about equal in length to the New Testament.

Martin Luther, the German reformer, felt that some of these books favored papal doctrines. He also rejected the Apocrypha. Probably he was over-reacting, as these books are not theologically radical and heretical. More important is the principle that these books were never part of the Jewish canon of the Scriptures. They found their way into the Bible via the Greek Septuagint version, and its translation into Latin in the second century, and the Latin Vulgate which was completed in 405 A.D. by Jerome. Once included alongside canonical Scripture, tradition tended to canonize these apocryphal books also.

It is worth noting that Jesus is not recorded as having quoted from these apocryphal books. There is no explicit reference to them in the New Testament canon. They are useful books in terms of understanding the life and thought of Judaism in the intertestamental period, as a bridge between Old and New Testaments.

We should not be threatened by these books or seek to burn them thinking they are devilish tools. But we do not see sufficient evidence for accepting them as canon material. Likewise historical investigations show the pseudepigraphal documents to be unauthentic and unacceptable.

Representative reading samples from the Apocrypha are offered as an introduction: (1) *Additions and Completions*, see Daniel's vindication of Susanna's innocence, in History of Susanna 49-64. (2) *Wisdom Literature*, see Wisdom of Solomon 14:23-26 for rituals of evil, and a passage to arouse Women's Lib, Ecclesiasticus 25: 19-26. Also 26:9-12 on the loose woman. (3) *Historical Narrative*, see I Maccabees 1:10, 20-24, 41-64 on the outrages of "that wicked man, Antiochus Epiphanes" who set up the "abomination of desolation" on the altar of the temple (175 B.C.).

### **A Consideration of the New Testament**

The Old Testament canon jelled between 400-100 B.C. (first the Law in 400 B.C., then the prophets in 200 B.C. and finally the Writings in 100 B.C.) with a final definitive decision being made at the Council of Jamnia in 90 A.D. In like manner the New Testament canon jelled, between about 75 A.D. and 400. A.D. Again we observe three stages of development in the New Testament canon, culminating in its congealing at the synods of Hippo Regius (393 A.D.) and Carthage (397, 419 A.D.).

(1) In the period of the apostolic church there were hints and allusions that make us suspect that authoritative Christian writings were in the making. For instance, Jesus Christ was a person of authority who spoke with authority, e.g., "You have heard that it was said. . . but I say. . . ". One would expect that sooner or later such sayings would be recorded, along with his memorable parables, and narratives of his mighty deeds. Paul the apostle claimed, in his letter to the Galatians, to have received instructions directly from the risen and ascended Christ concerning the breadth of the gospel for both Jew and Gentile, and concerning all men being made right with God by faith; one would expect these apostolic revelations to be written. Indeed, Paul did develop his concepts in letters, and instructions were given to Christian churches to circulate these letters and read them. Peter referred to Paul's writings in his letters, comparing them with "other scriptures" (II Peter 3:16). Paul, in his first letter to Timothy, quotes the words of Jesus and refers to his source as "scripture". All this gives a feeling that there is developing a Christian canon, even as there was a Jewish canon.

As new false teachers arose here and there, Christian leaders in the generation following the apostles wrote letters to combat these wrong ways and encourage the Christians. In so doing, from 95 A.D. to 150

A.D. we find Clement of Rome quoting from half a dozen sources that we presently have in our New Testament canon. In like fashion the letters of Polycarp and Ignatius, the Didache, Papias, the Epistle of Barnabas, Justin Martyr, and Tatian all quote freely from authoritative sources that they had (although the New Testament canon was far from being jelled), and their sources read the same as they do in our New Testaments.

Two of the false movements are worthy of special note.<sup>5</sup> The heretic Marcion (about 140 A.D.) challenged the church with an assorted set of Christian writings which he put forth as a canon. They included his own mutilated arrangement of Luke and ten of the letters of Paul. Needless to say, this made the church ponder, as early as 140 A.D., just what should be the correct limits for a New Testament canon. The church responded with a larger canon close to our 27 New Testament books. In the second place, we call attention to the school of the Montanists, who had exaggerated claims of inspiration in their own utterances, making necessary written teachings from the apostolic era, closer to the time of our Lord Jesus Christ.

By the time of 180-200, things had jelled to a degree that a "New Testament" was clearly and definitely present. The church was conscious that it possessed documents from the apostolic age, and these documents were regarded as canonical and of apostolic authority. Evidence for this comes from three great writers of the period, Irenaeus (of Asia Minor and Gaul), Tertullian (of North Africa), and Clement (of Alexandria, Egypt). There was discussion about whether Hebrews and Jude belonged in the canon, and also about the status of James, II Peter, II and III John, and Revelation.

(2) During the years 200-325 A.D. discussion about "fringe books" continued. Origen of Alexandria

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faced all the literature that claimed to be apostolic and classified it "genuine", "doubtful", and "rejected". The canon was beginning to solidify. Eusebius, leader from Caesarea and an historian, followed Origen, and in 330 A.D. wrote that seven doubtful books had been accepted (Hebrews, James, II Peter, II and III John, Jude, and Revelation). Other literature, such as The Epistles of Barnabas, The Shepherd of Hermas, and the Didache, which had been fringebooks, were accepted as useful but not included in the canon. By now the canon was becoming well-shaped, twenty-seven books in all, just as our New Testament.

(3) From 325-400 A.D. we see the church taking an official position on the canon. Christianity was no longer persecuted, for Emperor Constantine had embraced the Christian gospel. It is reasonable to imagine that leaders could breathe more easily. Furthermore, communication was opened more freely, making it possible for church leaders to appreciate why certain letters had been directed to churches in distant areas. Authoritative pronouncements on the canon began on local levels, by bishops of provincial churches. Later councils and synods endorsed the canon on a larger geographical basis. Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, in his Easter Letter of 367 A.D. listed our twenty-seven books as canonical. Then at the synods of Hippo Regius (393 A.D.) and Carthage (397 A.D. and 419 A.D.) the same twenty-seven books were accepted. (This canon was supported by Augustine (354-430 A.D.), bishop of Hippo, one of the great Latin church fathers.) The canon issue of the New Testament was thus settled.

Let us note these conclusions about the New Testament canon.

(1) In making its choices, the early church was greatly influenced by "apostolic authority". They accepted the scriptures clearly attributed to apostles.

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They screened out forgeries supposedly written by apostles. They accepted literature from sources that had apostolic authority by approval or inference, such as Luke's writings.

(2) Although the collection of twenty-seven books into one volume was slow, the belief in a written rule of faith came very early. Furthermore the time span gave the church ample opportunity to sift out the possibilities. It is perhaps better that we do not rely on a hastily-made decision of one solitary church council, say, from 100 A.D.

(3) The proof on which we should accept the

books today is historical evidence. We need not accept blindly those church councils' decisions of 393-419 A.D. Modern scholarship has been applied to the New Testament canon, and these twenty-seven books fare very well as authentic, when subjected to scientific inquiry.

(4) This scholarship which promotes our assent to the credibility of the canon is added to our personal certitude that Almighty God has been faithful and not left himself without accurate witness. The certitude of our faith in God is more important than our assent to careful scholarship.

### **New Testament Apocrypha**

No Christian Bibles of today (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant) include New Testament apocryphal writings. Pastoral experience indicates that laymen are less knowledgeable about New Testament Apocrypha than they are about the Old Testament Apocrypha. Yet the collection of such writings is huge, comprised of false gospels, false Acts of the Apostles, false epistles, and false Revelations. Its content quickly appears to be vastly inferior to the tone of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament.

An admirable collection of these documents has been published by the Oxford Press, under the direction of Montague Rhodes James, editor and translator.<sup>6</sup> Here are some excerpts.

The Gospel of Thomas reports that the boy Jesus went with his mother to the house of a dyer. Various pieces of cloth were here and there, brought by sundry customers, waiting to be dyed different colors. The boy Jesus plunged them all into the black dye. This "sore vexed" the craftsman and irritated Jesus' mother who had to "amend that which" the boy Jesus had done. But "the beautiful child Jesus" pulled out the fabrics, and each was dyed a different color. (Page 67).

In the same Gospel of Thomas the boy Jesus changed a group of children into goats for a short time, and made this ethnocentric statement to the amazed women onlookers:

Verily the children of Israel are like unto the black folk among the natives, for the black ones seize the outer side of the flock, etc. (Page 68)

The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew has Jesus get off his mother's lap to be worshipped and adored by dragons, lions, leopards, and wolves, once fearsome but now docilized. On the third day Jesus caused a very tall palm tree to bend down to give Mary fruit; when it rose again a spring issued from its roots. (Pages 74, 75)

When Jesus was four he was playing by the Jordan and arranged seven pools. Another lad messed up the pools. He "was struck dead", but when his parents complained Jesus resurrected him. But when the son of Annas the priest broke up the pools with a stick, one word from the four year old Jesus sufficed to wither the bully, who was not raised up. From the pools he also made clay sparrows, "clapped his hands", and twelve feathered birds took flight. (Page 76)

At age eight he crossed the Jordan River whose waters parted, in company with a group of docilized lions, saying ". . . the beasts know me and are tame, while men know me not". (Page 76)

Concluding the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, we make reference to Jesus' stretching a cut beam of wood to a correct length, after it had been cut too short by a lad working for Joseph who had a contract for a bed nine feet long. Then in school, on his second day, the teacher demanded: "Say Alpha". Jesus replied that the teacher must first tell him what Beta was, and then Jesus would explain Alpha. When the teacher struck Jesus, the teacher died. (Page 78)

The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy relates how Jesus, when placed on the back of a mule, restored the mule into a man. Later Jesus carried water in his cloak when his earthen jug had been broken. And the account of the boy Jesus in the temple is enlarged to specify his having been questioned about law, astronomy, and philosophy, answering all questions perfectly. (Pages 81, 82)

Passing now to spurious Acts accounts, we refer to The Acts of John for a narrative in which beautiful Drusiana, who had no sexual relations with her husband Andronicus, due to John's directives, was almost seduced by a man named Callimachus. In sorrow she died. While John was trying to console the relatives evil Callimachus was attempting to have intercourse with the corpse of Drusiana. Fortunately a serpent appeared and slew him. Later John and the unfortunate widower went to the tomb. First John raised, the seducer Callimachus from the dead. Then he raised the wife Drusiana. Callimachus instantly became a believer and Drusiana forgave him. Another man, incidental to the plot, was also raised from the dead by John, but he said he did not want to be raised, and after John had prayed this man was bitten by a snake, had blood poisoning, died, and the corpse turned black. (Pages 243-250)

In the Acts of Andrew, this apostle healed one Maximilla of a fever and she was raised up and converted. Andrew instructed her to abstain from relations with her husband, with whom she had lived and borne children. Andrew told her that marriage is a "foul and polluted way of life", and he encouraged her, to resist the "artful flatteries" of her husband. For this Andrew was imprisoned, scourged, and crucified. He hung on the cross for three days preaching. When he died, Maximilla embalmed his corpse and buried it. (Pages 349, 352)

Of course a more extensive perusal of these apocryphal New Testament narratives will fill in the contexts of the selected passages listed above. However even in context these events appear fanciful, even absurd and often purposeless, quite different qualitatively from the blending of miracle and teaching in the Gospel of John, or from the skillful composition of the Gospel of Luke. One is not surprised to know these accounts were rejected by the early church.

### **Some Review Questions and Answers**

In drawing some modest conclusions, we return to our original question, "Which books belong in the Bible?" Let us evaluate our understanding by a few review questions and answers.

1. Did humanity receive the Old and New Testaments, bound in sixty-six books, directly from God in a once-and-forever package, as when a phone directory is brought to our door by a company representative? (Answer: No.)
2. Are Biblical teachings and our understanding of God distorted more seriously by the Old Testament Apocrypha or by the New Testament Apocrypha? (Answer: The New Testament Apocrypha.)
3. What were the dates when the Old Testament canon was

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firmed up?, (Answer: Pentateuch 400 B.C., Prophets 200 B.C., Writings 100 B.C. All the thirty-nine books at the Council of Jamnia, officially, in 90 A.D.)

4. Did the Roman Catholics, invent and add the Old Testament Apocrypha to our Bibles about 1546? (Answer: No, the Old Testament Apocrypha found their way into the Scriptures as a caboose attachment by means of early translations into Greek and Latin, about 150 B.C. and 150 A.D., long, before lines of disagreement were drawn between Catholics and Protestants.)
5. Do the Jews recognize the Old Testament Apocrypha as canonical books? (Answer: No.)
6. Did the Christian church have a definite New Testament of twenty-seven books at the time of Paul's life and ministry? (Answer: No.)
7. The New Testament canon was firm at twenty-seven books, the same books as are found in our New Testaments, by the year 325 A.D. (Answer: True.)
8. It can be argued that the fixing of the canon over long periods of hundreds of years helped careful evaluation and helped avoid hasty and dogmatic determination. (Answer: True.)
9. The authenticity of New Testament books is based on a two-fold approach involving (1) apostolic authorship or apostolic approval, and (2) historical scholarship which determines if writings are genuine or forged. (Answer: True)
10. Do we have certitude that God has given to the world a reliable written record of his actions in history, and that this record is a rule of faith and life?

### **Modern Opinions and Modern Apocrypha**

Here are some practical issues today.

(1) How do you evaluate a contemporary claim that ecstatic words spoken under the anointing of the Holy Spirit are directly the words of God himself, and thus by implication, equal in authority to the Bible's words?

(2) How do you evaluate the books of Mormon,

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the writings of Mary Baker Eddy, or the scriptures of Bahai, for example, in their claim to be authoritative rules from God, intended to be added to the historic canon?

(3) How do you weigh the claims of a modern scholar to the effect that the Gospel of John should be removed from the Bible, for certain reasons expressed, such as its difference from Matthew, Luke, and Mark, etc.?

(4) How do you react on reading a newspaper claim that the Epistle to Laodicea, mentioned by Paul in Colossians 4:16, has been found in a cave in Palestine (not far from where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found)? This discovery is sensational, because no one has ever seen this letter. The newspaper says it may date from earlier than 200 A.D. It is not known if it is a copy or the original.

(5) How would you respond to a friend who quotes to you from "The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus Christ"? What questions would you ask?

These vital questions are worthy of thought and discussion. Light is shed on their solutions from the foregoing data on how the books of the Bible were chosen and why the apocryphal books were rejected.

### Rejection of Biblical Books

From the sixteenth century, during the Reformation, a most interesting situation presents itself involving the great German reformer, Martin Luther, to whom we owe an enormous debt. Luther's method will interest the scientist because a principle was established as an axiomatic foundation, from which all interpretation Scriptures proceeded. Thus he studied more by deduction than by induction, more like our classical study of Euclidean geometry than like the modern physicist's gathering of bits and pieces of data.

We are uneasy when theologians assert that they

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have a "key", a basic center for interpreting Scripture. For if one chooses his basic premise slightly off center, the whole system will wobble. We regard with appreciable tentativeness such alleged keys as Darby's dispensations, Bultmann's demythologizing, or Van Til's philosophical argument for the inerrancy of the original Biblical documents even in matters of astronomy, botany, mathematics, historical numbers, etc. Our approach by inductive study frees us for fresh discovery.

Yet who can fault Martin Luther for his choice of the key principle? Just as we are guided in our Bible study by a profound underlying certitude of faith in the God who revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ, and we admit that this causes us to see the Scriptures through the converted sensors of our new nature, even so Luther chose as his great premise the gracious, redeeming, justifying Christ. How could anything have possibly gone wrong?

The result was that Luther was not concerned to stress the total range of the canon. He wanted the world to hear the heart-beat of Jesus Christ. He expected that all Scriptures should be rejudged according to whether or not they magnified the gracious, redeeming and justifying Christ. While this may appear admirable and defensible, let us pause to remember that this also means that Luther expected his own principle to evaluate the authenticity of the canon.

One would expect that Luther might have thrown out the books of Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Esther, among others, from the Old Testament. But he left the Old Testament alone. It was in the New Testament that he seriously questioned four books. He discounted Hebrews because it appeared to refuse a second forgiveness to apostates, James because it seemed to teach salvation by works rather than by faith, Jude because it appeared to give no clear-cut witness to Jesus Christ but merely to paraphrase some of II Peter, and Revela-

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tion because it was so enigmatic and presented what were apparently bizarre pictures of Jesus Christ.

He placed these four books at the end of the New Testament in his German translation. First he listed his twenty-three acceptable books in the Table of Contents, numbering them from one to twenty-three. Then there was a blank space followed by "Hebrews", "James", "Jude", and "Revelation", unnumbered, and apparently excluded as second-class documents. This was the outcome of Martin Luther's postulate of a "key to interpretation". It is ironical that he appeared to remove something from the canon when the Roman Catholic institution was busily putting too much in (that is, along the lines of ecclesiastical traditions and non-canonical authoritarianism)! In the sovereignty of the God of history, who is also the God of the church and the God of the canon, the church has adhered to a New Testament canon of twenty-seven books, while at the same time appreciating Martin Luther and the intensity of the struggles of his day.

### **Addition of Nonbiblical Books**

#### 1. 1926--*Newspaper accounts of the "Unknown Life of Christ"*

This twentieth century hoax is one of sixteen modern apocryphal (hidden) books that have sprung up rather recently. This genre of uncanonical writings specifically includes attempted additions to the canon. They are described in a slim volume, *Modern Apocrypha*, by Edgar J. Goodspeed, in which the noted scholar, translator of the "Goodspeed translation" (over one million copies sold) and the first scholar to translate the Old Testament Apocrypha directly from Greek to English, turns detective to expose these sensational books that have attracted a lot of attention.<sup>7</sup>

The *Unknown Life of Christ* was sensationalized and popularized by newspapermen in 1926 in this country. It sold like hotcakes. It originated from the travels of a Russian war correspondent, Nicolas Notovich, in 1887, to India and Tibet. Notovich claimed he was laid up with a broken leg in a monastery in Tibet. The chief lama was persuaded to read him the "Life of Saint Issa, Best of the Sons of Man", which Notovitch published in fourteen chapters of 244 short paragraphs.

The most fanciful part deals with the "silent years" of Jesus' life, ages 13-30. It is claimed that at age thirteen, instead of taking a wife, the divine youth took a trip. He went with a caravan of merchants to India to study the laws of the Buddhas. He spent six years with the Brahmins and six years with the Buddhists in India. He also visited Persia and preached to the Zoroastrians before returning to Palestine at twenty-nine.

How did this "Unknown Life of Christ" fare under scrutiny? The chief lama indignantly repudiated Notovitch's visit. The existence of the manuscript in the monastery was described by the lama as "Lies, lies, lies, nothing but lies." No one could find the manu-

script claimed by Notovitch, either in the monastery or in the Vatican library, where Notovitch claimed the account was included here and there in sixty-three Oriental manuscripts referring to this matter. The great Orientalist Friedrich Max Muller took an interest in exposing this hoax, but claimed little credit for the expose, since it was never taken seriously by scholars of Buddhism, Sanskrit, or Pali. Furthermore, students of early Christian literature passed it by because it did not stand the test of literary and textual criticism: its own internal content was obviously fraudulent. A lesson here is to hold all newspaper accounts of sensational discoveries in abeyance, and patiently to allow a few years of serious scholarship to evaluate things. The Dead Sea Scrolls, from Jordan, and the Oxyrhynchus papyri from Egypt, for example, have been scientifically studied and evaluated. They have stood the tests, both externally and internally, and have been accepted as genuine.

2. 1911 -- *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*

This "gospel" is of interest to us because of the way Dr. Levi H. Dowling obtained it. Unlike Nicolas Notovitch's claim to some remote and mysterious original document, Dr. Dowling claims to have received his gospel by revelation. Here in California Dr. Dowling (1844-1911), chaplain, doctor, and Sunday School worker, in the "quiet hours" between two and six in the morning, by meditation came into harmony with the rhythms and vibrations of truth preserved in the Supreme Intelligence or Universal Mind, the "Akashic Records," the imperishable records of life.

The material is called "The Aquarian Gospel" from an astrological teaching that with the life of Christ the sun entered the sign Pisces and that it is now entering the Sign Aquarius. This is a new gospel for the Aquarian age. First published in Los Angeles in 1911, it was in its twenty-first printing in 1954, and today it should be selling just fine.

In this "gospel", Mary and Elizabeth get lessons in the history of religions, relating to Tao, Brahm, Zarathustra, and Buddha, the entire content being flavored strongly of Christian Science. John the Baptist is educated by an Egyptian priest for eighteen years. Jesus first studies with the great Jewish teacher Hillel. Then he goes to India, where he spends years among the Brahmins and the Buddhists. Then to Tibet where he meets Meng-ste, the greatest wise man of the far East. Then to Persia to meet the Magi. Then to Assyria and Babylonia, everywhere learning sacred books and talking to sages. Then to Greece, first to Athens, then to the Delphic oracle who declares its day is done. Then to Egypt where he joins the sacred brotherhood at Heliopolis. Finally a council of the seven wisest men of the world is held at Alexandria. They formulate seven great religious postulates and ordain Jesus for his work. At the end of his life and after his resurrection Jesus appears in a fully materialized body to friends in India, Persia, Jerusalem, Greece, Italy, Egypt, and Galilee. He declares himself to have been "transmuted to the image of the AM".

Externally, this fanciful account turns out to be an historical heresy, unsubstantiated by the customary evidence of history demanded by scholars. Internally, potentially profound confrontations with eastern religions are artlessly treated, theosophy flavoring everything, and as Dr. Goodspeed says, "The principal impression is one of literary and religious commonplace". Its origin, having to do with astrology and vibrations, cannot be placed in the same ballpark with the documents of the Biblical canon and their God who works in history.

With these two modern attempts to add books to the Bible we close this introduction to a fascinating area of study, the Biblical canon, or "Which books belong in the Bible?", and we quote an appropriate passage from an appropriate book, the book of Jude:

Beloved, being very eager to write to you of our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 3)

May the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, bless his people and keep before them the written Word of God, in its purest possible form, until the living Word of God, Jesus Christ, comes again. This is our prayer and hope, and it is also our certitude and confidence.

#### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup>For example, see Henry H. Halley, *Pocket Bible Handbook*, Henry H. Halley, Chicago, Ill. 1948 pp. 356-357
- <sup>2</sup>John D. Davis and Henry Snyder Gehman, *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1944 pp. 90-92
- <sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup>Floyd V. Filson, *Which Books Belong in the Bible?*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1962 pp. 120-121
- <sup>6</sup>Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford Clarendon 1955 594 pp.
- <sup>7</sup>Edgar J. Goodspeed. *Modern Apocrypha*, Beacon Press, Boston 1956 124 pp.