

**The Non-Canonical Gospels**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER

1.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2.	APOCRYPHAL GOSPELS.....	4
	Apocryphal Gospels	
	Gospel of Thomas	
	Contents	
	Gospel of Peter	
	Papyrus Fragments	
	Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 654	
	Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1	
	The Fayyum Fragment	
	Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840	
	Papyrus Egerton 2	
	Strasburg Coptic Fragment	
	Jewish Apocryphal Gospels	
	The Gospel of the Hebrews	
	The Gospel of the Nazarenes	
	The Gospel of the Ebionites	
	The Gospel of the Egyptians	
	The Secret Gospel of Mark	
	The Infancy Gospels	
	The Infancy Gospel of Thomas	
	The Protoevangelium of James	
	The Gospel of Nicodemus	
	Conclusion	
3.	JEWISH SOURCES.....	19
	Josephus	
	Roman Historians and Other Writers	
	Rabbinic Writing	
4.	NAG HAMMADI DOCUMENTS.....	23
	Historical Background	
	Discovery	

## The Books and Their Content

The Gospel of Thomas (Codex II, 2)

The Gospel of Truth (Codex I, 3 and XII, 2)

The Gospel of the Egyptians (Codex III, 2 and IV, 2)

The Sophia of Jesus Christ (Codex III, 4)

Teaching of Silvanus (Codex VII, 4)

The Exegesis of the Soul (Codex II, 6)

## Conclusion

5.	CONCLUSION.....	30
	APPENDIX A.....	31
	A List of and Abbreviations for the Nag Hammadi Library	
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	33

## Introduction

Εὐαγγέλιον - the term literally means “good news”<sup>1</sup> There is no shortage of early manuscripts bearing the title “gospel”. The use of this term casts shadows on the canonical term, making it difficult to understand what these “other gospels” are, where they came from and how (or if) they are to be used. The crucial questions are where did these originate, who wrote them, why where they written and for whom. Furthermore, if they are indeed ‘gospels’, why do we as New Testament believers living in this educated age not include them in our studies?<sup>2</sup>

To begin a study of the gospels outside of the canon, the term “gospels” must be identified and quantified to provide an anchor point. Significantly, none of the four canonical gospels have the term “gospel” in their title. All share the simple formula κατὰ ΜΑΘΗΤΙΟΝ.<sup>3</sup> In fact the term is found only sparingly anywhere in the canonical gospels. While εὐαγγέλιον is used frequently in the New Testament<sup>4</sup>, the term, in its noun and verb form, is used only sparingly outside of the Biblical and Christian writings. When it was used, it was used to bring news of victories or other joyful events<sup>5</sup>. Over time, it became a standard word for news, good or bad.

The dissonance over understanding and utilizing these non-canonical gospels can be difficult and pronounced. In Chapter two, a brief history, background and content notes will seek to introduce these mysterious gospels, their historical background, and expound a bit of their content.

The gospel is recognized, although not expressed, in various forms in several Jewish sources. These provide a very different perspective on Jesus and are indeed worthy of an investigation in a study of the gospel outside of the canon. These will be summarized in chapter three.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 317. Cf. H.G. Liddel and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 705.

<sup>2</sup> The question of the possible canonicity of the non-canonical gospels will not be entertained here. cf. F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1988), 251. “These works may be useful to the student; they are irrelevant to the question of canon.”

<sup>3</sup> Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 1. He sets Paul’s letters as the foundation for determining the canonicity of many of the New Testament books.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

A discovery in 1945 in the Upper Nile region of Egypt brought new attention to the extra-canonical gospel discussion. The Nag Hammadi documents<sup>6</sup>, as they have come to be known, opened the door for many discussions regarding the Bible that the early church used for its readings. Chapter four will focus on these documents, giving some general background on the discovery of the documents, the use of them since their discovery and their understanding in the academic realm.

There is little doubt that these Apocryphal gospels and non-canonical sources can be useful. The question is to what extent. Further, should these be considered as a sort of appendix to our present New Testament? The conclusion will attempt to draw some sense of consensus about how significant these documents are and how a New Testament student might find them useful in study.

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<sup>6</sup>Thomas D. Lea, *The New Testament*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 50.

## CHAPTER ONE

## Apocryphal Gospels

Gospel of Thomas

## History, Authorship, and Date

The most recognizable and best known of the apocryphal gospels is the *Gospel of Thomas*. This “gospel” has drawn much attention based on its claim that it preserves an independent witness to Jesus.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, it contains more direct allusions to the New Testament than any other non-canonical gospel.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, an investigation is warranted.

Discovered first in the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> by H. Greenfell and A. Hunt this gospel was written in Coptic, although most likely originally written in Greek.<sup>9</sup> Its date is set somewhere in the second century due to the fact that Hippolytus was acquainted with it in 222-235 A.D..<sup>10</sup> The majority of the text of the Gospel of Thomas was not found until the 1948 discovery of the Nag Hammadi documents.

The author of the Gospel of Thomas is listed as “Didymus Judas Thomas.” There are several possibilities as to the identity of this individual. (1) Judas Iscariot, the betrayer. (2) Judas, son of Jacob listed as one of the 12 with Thomas, the doubter. (3) Judas, the brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55).<sup>11</sup> Of the three most plausible, the later

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<sup>7</sup> Gerald Cowen, *The Nag Hammadi Discovery and the New Testament*, Theological Research Exchange Network, Portland, OR., 1990, 6. cf. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel Green and Scot McKnight, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1992), s.v. “Apocryphal Gospels” by R.J. Bauckham, 286. “It has received more scholarly attention than any other extra-canonical Gospel, mainly because of its claim that it preserves early Gospel traditions independently of the canonical Gospels.”

<sup>8</sup> Cowen, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Bauckham, 286.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., “Hippolytus, writing between 222 and 235, provides the earliest reference to it by name. (It) has been dated as early as A.D. 50-70 and as late as the end of the 2nd century. But since parallels to its more explicitly Gnostic concepts and terminology date from the second century, it is probably no earlier than the second century.”

<sup>11</sup> Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, Trinity Press International, Philadelphia, 1990, 79.

appears preferable, although still somewhat dissatisfactory based on limited knowledge of Judas, a brother of Jesus in the New Testament. What is clear is his (at least) tacit knowledge of the Canonical Gospels and his possible use of them as a source.<sup>12</sup>

### Contents

The first saying states that this gospel contains the “secret sayings” of Jesus as recorded by Didymus Judas Thomas. The Achilles heel of the *Gospel of Thomas* is that these are in fact not secret, but are frequently reflected in the Gospel. Some have gone so far as to say that this may be the elusive “Q” document of sayings thought to exist.

In the *Gospel of Thomas*, one finds 114 sayings of Jesus. Despite the fact that there are no narrative sayings and only limited narrative notes with regard to context, this gospel stands out above the other apocryphal gospels. One reason for this may be that some of the sayings seem to reflect a direct awareness or borrowing from the Canonical Gospels.

For example:

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 79-80. “The writer of the G. of Thomas is, in fact, not an author who deliberately composed his book according to a general master plan. He is rather a collector and compiler who used a number of smaller units of collected sayings, some perhaps available in written form, and composed them randomly. He shows no desire to express his own understanding of these sayings through the manner of composition.

**Saying 90:** “Come unto me, for my yoke is easy and my lordship is mild, you will find repose for yourselves.

**Matthew 11:28-30:** Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls

Further:

**Saying 54:** Jesus said “Blessed are the poor” for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven.

**Matthew 5:3** – Blessed are the poor in spirit, for there is the Kingdom of Heaven.

**Luke 6:20** – Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Again:

**Saying 68:** Blessed are you when you are hated and persecuted, and no place will be found wherever you have been persecuted.

**Luke 6:22:** Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man.

Some parables are also included in the Gospel of Thomas:

**Saying 9:** Now the sower went out, took a handful of seeds and scattered them. Some fell on the road; the birds came and gathered them. Others fell on rock and did not take root in the soil. . . . Still others fell on good soil and it produced a good fruit

**Mark 4:3-9:** Behold, the sower went out to sow. And it happened in the sowing that some fell on the road, and the birds came and ate them. And others fell on the rock where it did not have enough soil. . . . And others fell on good soil and it produced fruit.

Although it clearly exhibits some Gnostic tendencies, there are numerous parallels to the Canonical Gospels and specifically to the Synoptics<sup>13</sup>. “According to the Gospel of Thomas, the basic religious experience is not only the recognition of one’s divine identity, but more specifically, the recognition of one’s origin (the light) and destiny (the repose).”<sup>14</sup>

As has been demonstrated, the parallels are frequent and close to the synoptic tradition. While there does not seem to be any rhyme or reason to the sequence of the wisdom sayings of Thomas, it seems clear that the author had at least tacit knowledge of the Canonical Gospels, or that they borrowed from him. Given the date and origin of the *Gospel of Thomas*, the former appears more likely. It is easy to see why such a stir was created with the discovery and publication of these documents claiming to be an independent witness to the tradition of Jesus.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, while these sayings do not present the reliable and trustworthy foundation of the Canonical Gospels, it is clear that there very well may be considerable value in the study of this document.

### *The Gospel of Peter*

Though not as weighty nor as well backed textually as *The Gospel of Thomas*, the Gospel of Peter can serve as an interesting dissonant chord when played with *Thomas*. Discovered in 1886 during the exploration of Akhmin, Egypt by the French Archaeological Expedition, it was verified in the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* in 1972. It is attributed to at least the second century, since it seem clear that it was known to the Serapion, bishop of Antioch toward the end of the second century. It contains “a narrative which begins at the end of the trial of Jesus, includes the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus and breaks off in the course of a story which must have described a resurrection appearance to a group of disciples.”<sup>16</sup>

However, the knowledge of Serapion of the *Gospel of Peter* should not imply an approval of it for use. In fact, just the opposite is made clear in a letter from Serapion

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<sup>13</sup> *The Nag Hammadi Documents*, ed. James M. Robinson, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1977), 117. Cf. Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Jesus and Early Church Politics*, Arizona State University, Tempe, 1981, 8. “The “living Jesus” of the Gospel of Thomas points one not toward the church,, but toward oneself - toward a solitary, radically individualistic process of spiritual exploration. Such sayings not only tend to undermine the church’s claims, but may render them irrelevant, or even false.”

<sup>14</sup> Robinson, 117.

<sup>15</sup> Koester, 83.

<sup>16</sup> Bauckham, 290. Further, “The gospel is distinguished in the text we have, by its interest in the fulfillment of the passion narrative, its strongly anti-Jewish bias which emphasizes the sole responsibility of the Jews for the death of Jesus, its heightening of the miraculous and its apologetic interest in supplying evidence for the resurrection”

recorded in Eusebius.<sup>17</sup> Upon discovering the gospel in use by the church in Rhossus, he wrote to them forbidding the continuation of this gospel. In light of this, why then the question? Why not simply dismiss this as superfluous?

The reason for further examination of this gospel is its close connection with the *Gospel of Matthew*. Aside from its anti-Jewish sentiments, it appears that this volume may have been in use in Antioch, the traditional city of origin for the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, if the *Gospel of Peter* is an independent source of the *kerygma*, then what role could it play in understanding the canonical Gospels? These questions, however, are rendered mute in light of the fact that it appears to have come from a questionable heritage. Otherwise, certainly it would have been included as a part of the canon. Papyrus Fragments

There are a number of Papyrus fragments that demonstrate some connection with the Canonical Gospels and the New Testament. Some are significant because of their apparent knowledge of a particular discourse of Jesus and reflections on that discourse while others are so small in size that they can only reflect an acquaintance with the Canonical Gospels.

#### Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 654

Discovered as a part of the Egyptian Exploration Fund Expedition led by B.P. Greenfell and A.S. Hunt, the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* are fragments of pieces found in and near the city of El Bahunsa.<sup>19</sup> At one time, El Bahunsa was the capital city of the Oxyrhynchite Nome. In low mounds surrounding the city, it was here that they discovered fragments of Oxy P. 654, “a collection of the sayings of Jesus. . . (consisting) of forty-two incomplete lines on the [back] of a survey list of various pieces of a land survey.”<sup>20</sup> This fragment, now in the London’s British Museum is considered by many to be a reflection of the *Gospel of the Hebrews* being quoted as such by Clement of Alexandria.<sup>21</sup> Although it is indeed a fragment with many gaps, the parallels and knowledge of other Apocryphal gospels can be clearly seen. For example, “These are the words of Jesus that liveth and (. . .)spake to (. . .) and to Thomas. And he said; (Whosoever heareth) these words shall not taste (of death).”<sup>22</sup>

#### Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1

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<sup>17</sup> Eusebius, *H.E.* VI.12.3. “For our part, brethren, we receive both Peter and the other apostles as Christ, but the writings which falsely bear their name, we reject.”

<sup>18</sup> Bauckham, 290.

<sup>19</sup> B.P. Greenfell and A.S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, (Egypt Exploration Fund, 1897), 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>21</sup> M.R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 26.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 25

This fragment, probably originally part of codex rather than a scroll,<sup>23</sup> contains eight sayings from the *Gospel of Thomas*. Sayings 26, 27,29,30/77,31,31,32 and 33 are all found on this small fragment. The significance of this find lends credence to the use of the *Gospel of Thomas* and to the knowledge of the gospel.

#### The Fayyum Fragment

Although very brief in nature, this fragment exhibits a parallel with Mark 14:27, 29-30. It reads as follows:

. . . All ye in this  
 Night shall be offended according to  
 The scripture: I will smite the shepherd and the  
 Sheep shall be scattered. And when Peter  
 said: Even if all, not I, the Lord  
 said: the cock shall twice crow and thou  
 said: Before the cock crow twice to-day  
 First shalt thrice deny me  
 Thou shalt thrice deny me.<sup>24</sup>

Dated in the third century<sup>25</sup> this fragment was first published in 1885. The first line is partially missing and, as many are apt to do, a number of suggestions have been made as to how to fill in the blank. Regardless of how the first line is to be read, if at all, the parallel between this document and the Markan passage (14:27, 29-30) are clear without need for further redaction.

#### Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840

This document, part of the find of Greenfell and Hunt in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, is dated in the fourth or fifth century. It contains the conclusion of a discourse by Jesus and

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<sup>23</sup> J. Dominic Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, (Chicago: Winston Press, 1985), 16. "This piece found in late 19th century, was slightly smaller than a four by six inch index card was written in medium uncials with a single column on both sides., was broken off across the bottom of the column, was numbered in the top right hand corner as a page 11, and thus was clearly part of a codex rather than a scroll. The external evidence from other fragments found alongside it and the internal evidence from the handwriting, the codex format and the presence of standard abbreviations found in biblical manuscripts indicate that the date. . . probably falls into within the period 150-300 A.D."

<sup>24</sup> James., 25

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. James seems doubtful of the authenticity of this fragment saying "it is not certain that this is a gospel fragment of a Gospel. It may be. . . a somewhat abridged quotation made by a preacher or commentator." Cf. Bauckham, 289.

a visit of Jesus to the Temple. In this visit, Jesus enters a debate with the Pharisaic chief priest Levi about ritual purification.<sup>26</sup>

### Papyrus Egerton 2.

This manuscript, dating from around 150 is one of the two earliest Christian MSS., extant, along with the fragment of the Gospel of John in P<sup>62</sup>. It contains fragments of four pericopes: (1) The conclusion of a controversy between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, in which Jesus has been accused of breaking the law and at the conclusion of which he escapes an attempt to stone him. There appears to be a close verbal relationship with the John 7:53-8:11; (2) The healing of a leper; (3) A version of the question about the tribute money; and (4) An otherwise unknown miracle story. Some question the authentic relationship between this fragment and the canonical gospels. It appears most likely that this draws from an oral tradition which had been substantially influenced by the canonical Gospels.<sup>27</sup>

### Strasburg Coptic Fragment

This Coptic fragment, dated somewhere in the fifth or sixth century, contains a prayer of Jesus, a conversation with his disciples, all in the context of bidding them farewell<sup>28</sup>, somewhat reminiscent of the John 16-17. “Give me now thy (strength) O Father, that (they) with me may endure the world. Amen. (I have) received the crown of the Kingdom.”<sup>29</sup>

### Jewish Apocryphal Gospels<sup>30</sup>

It is no surprise that Jewish gospels sprang up in the early church. After all, the very heart and foundation of the gospel is rooted in Judaism and Jewish history. Thus, a number of Jewish sects arose within Christianity. Each group purported to have some knowledge of Jesus unique to the others. Thus arose the numerous “Jewish gospels”. Unfortunately, many of these survived only in the Church Fathers. There is little or no information available regarding date, authorship or recipients. What does seem to be clear from the church fathers is that at one time, several Jewish Christian gospels did indeed exist.

### The Gospel of the Hebrews

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<sup>26</sup> Bauckham, 288.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> James, 36.

<sup>30</sup> A.J. Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition*, (New York: E. J. Brill, 1992). This is the standard in this field. Anyone interested in this field would be seriously remiss to bypass this volume.

This gospel appears to have been written in Greek, perhaps somewhere in Egypt. The date is somewhat questionable, but from the early dates of those acquainted with it, it must have been written before the middle of the second century.<sup>31</sup>

Klijn asserts that we possess seven quotations from the church fathers that verify the existence of this gospel. (1) Clement of Alexandria<sup>32</sup>: “As it is also written in the Gospel according to the Hebrews: he who has become astonished will become king and he who has become king will rest.”<sup>33</sup> (2) Origen: “If somebody accepts the Gospel according to the Hebrews where the Savior himself says: A moment ago my Mother, the Holy Spirit, took me by one of my hairs and brought me to the great hill, the Tabor.”<sup>34</sup> (3) Didymus the Blind knew the Gospel as well. “It seems that Matthew is named Levi in the Gospel according to Luke. But they are not the same, but Matthais who replaced Judas and Levi are the same with a double name. This appears from the Gospel according to the Hebrews,”<sup>35</sup> and (4,5,6,7) Jerome seems to have been familiar with the Gospel as well,<sup>36</sup> although possibly only a second-hand knowledge.<sup>37</sup>

The quotations found in the church fathers contain no known parallels in the canonical gospels; thus one may assume that it was composed without the aid of other gospels. This gospel may have been a compilation of traditions surrounding Jesus in the early church. It is possibly, even likely that this Gospel was the result of an interpretation of Jewish ideas in a Hellenistic environment. So how is this gospel to be understood? Klijn’s conclusion is best: “All this means is that this Gospel is very important for our knowledge of the origin of the Gospels in general. We may assume that some rudimentary ideas existed of the life of Jesus into whose framework various events have been inserted. This material shows a particular theological development and reflection.”<sup>38</sup>

### The Gospel of the Nazarenes

The Gospel of the Nazarenes possibly originated in the second century. The Nazarenes, a Judaizing sect, apparently made a “free translation of Matthew into

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<sup>31</sup> Bauckham, 289. Likewise, Klijn, 30.

<sup>32</sup> Klijn, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* II IX 45 5.

<sup>34</sup> Klijn, 52.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 78ff.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 33. Klijn adds that Jerome may have added to the text from outside sources he was acquainted with.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

Aramaic<sup>39</sup> or Syriac,”<sup>40</sup> although Klijn asserts that this “does not mean that the author of the Gospel depended upon Matthew.”<sup>41</sup> Klijn assigns 22 quotations as being from this gospel, “but many of those are indications of points where a few words differed from the text of Matthew’s gospel”<sup>42</sup>.

As for the contents of the Gospel, it consists of a life history of Jesus, his baptism, his suffering and his death<sup>43</sup> (no resurrection narrative is included). Although much is made of the numerous parallels to the Gospel of Matthew, there are several passages that show occasional or substantial additions to the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the gospel reflects knowledge of traditions developed differently than the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>45</sup>

In concluding the discussion on this gospel, “We may conclude that the origins of the Gospel according to the Nazarenes are not much different than those of the Gospel according to the Hebrews. . . . One originated in a Greek-speaking (world) and the other in an Aramaic-speaking environment, each with its own cultural and religious background.”<sup>46</sup>

### The Gospel of the Ebionites

This gospel represents an intentional harmonization of the three Synoptic Gospels. Although its date, author and recipients are unclear, it is preserved in quotations of Epiphanius.<sup>47</sup> This gospel represents a predominant tendency of the day to harmonize testimonies<sup>48</sup> into a composite whole. However, this gospel did so with a vicious intent: to further their twisted “theology”.

This twisted theology of the Ebionites is found throughout Epiphanius’ quotations. From these quotations, it seems clear that the Ebionites rejected the virginal conception

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<sup>39</sup> Klijn, 38

<sup>40</sup> Bauckham., 289.

<sup>41</sup> Klijn, 37.

<sup>42</sup> Bauckham, 289.

<sup>43</sup> Klijn, 37.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> E. J. Goodspeed, *The Modern Apocrypha*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), 116. He discusses one volume that asserts this gospel as the underlying foundation to the Synoptic Gospels.

<sup>46</sup> Klijn, 38.

<sup>47</sup> Bishop of Salamais.

<sup>48</sup> Bauckham, 289. “The best example of this type of work is found in Tatian’s *Diatesseron*.”

and held to an adoptionistic Christology. They Christianized several Jewish rituals and Judaized several Christian rituals, specifically the Eucharist. If the Nazarenes were a Christian with Jewish tendencies, the Ebionites were Jews with Christian tendencies.<sup>49</sup> This group radically changed the most definite Gospel traditions, striking at the very heart of the synoptic tradition.

### *The Gospel of the Egyptians*

This gospel “appears to be one used predominantly by the Gentile Christians in Egypt until the arrival of the canonical Gospels.”<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, little is known of this gospel. The only undisputed information available regarding this gospel comes through Clement of Alexandria.<sup>51</sup> It contains a conversation between Jesus and Salome as well as sayings known in the *Gospel of Thomas*.<sup>52</sup> This is not to be confused with a Gospel of the same name found in the *Nag Hammadi Library*.

### *The Secret Gospel of Mark*

The world loves a secret and so the “Secret Gospel of Mark. Very different in character than the previous group of “gospels”, it was discovered in 1958 by Morton Smith near the city of Mar Saba, about halfway between Bethlehem and the Dead Sea.<sup>53</sup> While cataloging documents for the library in Mar Saba, Smith found Isaac Voss’s edition of the six letters of Ignatius, which were printed and published in 1646. At the end of these letters was a partial document, handwritten and incomplete but present nonetheless.<sup>54</sup> The partial document appeared to have been an addition from sometime in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>55</sup>

Upon reading this handwritten document, it seems clear that Clement of Alexandria was acquainted with more than one version of the Gospel of Mark. He seems to be acquainted with the (1) “divinely inspired Mark (The Canonical Gospel of Mark).”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Jacques Hervieux, *What are the Apocryphal Gospels?*, (London: Burns and Oates, 1960), 144. “The Ebionite gospel is not only a deliberate corruption of the Gospel narrative, but also furnishes evidence of practices half Jewish and half Christian.”

<sup>50</sup> Bauckham, 289.

<sup>51</sup> James, 10.

<sup>52</sup> Bauckham, 289.

<sup>53</sup> Crossan, 91.

<sup>54</sup> Bruce, 301.

<sup>55</sup> Crossan, 93.

<sup>56</sup> Bruce, 303. Cf. Crossan, 99 where he refers to this as the “Public” gospel, open to any, not just initiates.

(2) The “Secret gospel of Mark” in which Mark included certain secret traditions which are revealed only to initiates,<sup>57</sup> and (3) The Carpocratian<sup>58</sup> gospel of Mark, a mythical retelling of the passion used to their (the sect) own ends, which added to the “secret gospel” certain traditions for those who truly understood and appreciated the gospel message.<sup>59</sup>

This document, written in the form of a letter, was addressed to Theodore. It appears to be a response to Theodore from Clement, addressing some issues regarding the use and structure of the Gospel of Mark. In it, parallels and interpolations of the Canonical Mark are found. Specifically, Clement addresses how Mark 10:35-45 and Mark 10:46 are understood (or misunderstood) and attacking the misconceptions and misunderstandings surrounding this text. There were perhaps more at one time, but the bottom of the page dealing with this issue, is broken off.<sup>60</sup>

How is all this to be understood? If it is accepted that this was a return letter to Theodore from Clement, then it can be understood as a polemic against the secretive interpretation. Apparently, the Caprocrations, whom the letter railed against, held to a belief that Jesus taught conventional morality for public, but communicated a more uninhibited expression to select souls in private.<sup>61</sup> This does not seem to be in keeping with either the Canonical Gospel of Mark or any of the other gospels, therefore, this should be dismissed as excursus.

### The Infancy Gospels

The early life of Jesus was particularly interesting to many. Especially interesting was the background of Jesus’ parents and the “dark” years of Jesus’ life when he was an adolescent and young man. Several narratives seek to fill in the gaps with information from this time period. Interesting as they may be, they are untrustworthy at best. However, an investigation of early history and writings surrounding the gospels would be incomplete without them.

### *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*

<sup>57</sup> Bauckham, 290.

<sup>58</sup> Bruce 312. He states that “Carpocrates was an Alexandrian Platonist of the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century who taught the world was created by angel-archons, not by the supreme God and held that Jesus was a man whom the divine power descended. The same power might be received by the souls of all, who like Jesus, set the archons at naught and conquered the passions which exposed men to their penalties.”

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Bruce 304.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 314.

The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* seeks to offer information regarding the years between Jesus' appearance in the manger in Bethlehem (Luke 2) and his baptism at thirty years of age. The stories found within are entertaining if not insightful into some of the early traditions surrounding Jesus' childhood.

Usually, the stories told are miraculous in nature. For example, in *Infancy XVI*, Jesus makes gates, milk-pails or boxes larger or smaller according to the order Joseph received.<sup>62</sup> A leprous girl is said to have been healed by washing herself in the same water in which Jesus washed himself, found in *Infancy VI*.<sup>63</sup> In *Infancy XV*, perhaps one of the better known pericopes of this narrative, Jesus is depicted as playing with a group of boys, making clay birds. In a contest to demonstrate the most exceptional work, Jesus outdoes them all by bringing his clay sparrows to life!<sup>64</sup> These and stories like them are found throughout this unusual "gospel", this fails to qualify as a gospel based on the fact that it does not present the kerygma anywhere within its pages.

### *The Protoevangelium of James*

In much the same way that the *Infancy Gospels* provide background on the early life of Jesus, the *Protoevangelium of James*, tells the story of the birth of the Virgin Mary and her parents, Anna and Joachim. Known to the church fathers, this book is attributed to James, the brother of Jesus. The birth of Mary, of course, is ascribed to the miraculous. In *Proto IV*, an angel appears to Anna and tells her she will conceive. In *Proto VII*, Mary and Joseph meet and are betrothed, somewhat against Joseph's will since he is a widower (with children already from his previous marriage!) and Mary is still a young girl, perhaps a teenager. In *Proto XI-XV*, the birth narrative is conveyed from the perspective of a third party observing all that is happening. This "gospel" is in fact no gospel at all. It is of late date with little textual backing. Its place in history is only as a sidebar.<sup>65</sup>

### *The Gospel of Nicodemus*

This title is given to a work joining two separate pieces: *The Acts of Pilate* and *Descensus ad Infernos*.<sup>66</sup> Dated in the fourth or fifth century,<sup>67</sup> it would appear to draw

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<sup>62</sup> *The Lost Books of the Bible and the Forgotten Books of Eden*, ed. Frank Crane, (Cleveland: World Syndicate Publishing Co., 1926).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> James, 38.

<sup>66</sup> Bauckham, 290.

<sup>67</sup> James, 95.

from outside sources. The *Acts of Pilate* is an account of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus and of an investigation by the Sanhedrin which received evidence of the resurrection of Jesus. Supposedly authored by the Nicodemus in John 3, The work is noted for its anti-Jewish sentiment and its apologetic tendency.<sup>68</sup>

The second portion of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* is a later addition to the text.<sup>69</sup> The *Descensus ad Inferno* was appended on, for reasons unclear, no earlier than the fifth century<sup>70</sup> this story is narrated to the reader by Leucius and Karinus, they relate the fullest account from the early church of Christ's activity over the realm of the dead between his death and the resurrection.<sup>71</sup> However, due to its late date and questionable (at best!) heritage, this "gospel" is to be excused as well.

### Conclusion

In summary, the non-canonical gospels are abundant. Time does not permit to cover several more of similar style and nature, such as *The Preaching of Peter*, *the History of Joseph the Carpenter*, *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, *The Life of Saint Issa: Best of the Sons of Man* and many more. The plethora of early gospels is not surprising. Their value, while limited, is without question. Why? Because there exists the possibility, as far fetched as it may seem, that within one or more of these "gospels", some authentic words and deeds of Jesus may appear. Moreover, the external gospels provide a picture of the social context of their writing as well as the information they provide. Therefore, with a careful and patient eye, these so-called gospels are to be examined for their kernels of truth.

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<sup>68</sup> Bauckham, 290.

<sup>69</sup> James, 95.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Bauckham, 290.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Jewish Sources and Statements about Jesus

As well as the apocryphal gospels, a number of Jewish sources recognize the existence and influence of Jesus, of His disciples and His works. Throughout Jewish literature and Jewish history, allusions to Jesus are found. While usually (and expectedly) polemical in nature, these can prove to be significant as an outside verification of the internal evidence of the Gospels<sup>72</sup>. Furthermore, they can provide some contextual data not found in the canonical gospels.

#### Josephus

No investigation of Jewish sources would be complete without addressing Flavius Josephus (37-100). He is one of the chief sources for information regarding the first-century Judaism. His numerous historical works provide a crucial historical foundation to understanding the social context of the first century. In his volume *Jewish Antiquities*, Josephus refers to Jesus. “And so he (Ananus the High Priest, son on Annas) convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man called James, the brother of Jesus, who was called the Christi and certain others<sup>73</sup>”.

In other translations of his works, Josephus is attributed to have spoken further about Jesus, to be aware of John the Baptist and of the torn temple veil story.<sup>74</sup> Regardless as to their accuracy or authenticity, these volumes can be of great use as a corroboration of the canonical Gospels.

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<sup>72</sup> *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel Green and Scot McKnight, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1992), s.v. “Jesus in Non-Canonical Sources” by C.A. Evans, 364.

<sup>73</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.9.1. The outline of this chapter is borrowed from this source.

<sup>74</sup> *Dict.Jesus*, 365. Note the discussion regarding the Arabic version of Josephus work and the disputed *Testimonium Flavium* in which Jesus is plainly spoken of as the “Messiah”. The Passion narrative is also there in very abbreviated form. Due to its late date (this version was unknown to the church Fathers) and the fact that it is absent in the Greek versions, its veracity and authenticity are questionable at best. If Josephus had indeed believed Jesus to be the Messiah, surely he would have asserted it more openly in his works.

### Roman Historians and Other Writers

Although the secular historians said little regarding Jesus, their perspective can also be instructive. Mara bar Serapion (c.A.D. 73) asks, “For what advantage did . . . the Jews (gain) by the death of their wise king<sup>75</sup>?” Tacitus (c.a.A.D. 110) says that the name Christians originates from ‘Christus’ who was sentenced to death by the governor, Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius.<sup>76</sup> Pliny the Younger (A.D. 110) is cited as having said Christians regularly assemble to recite “a hymn antiphonally to Christ as God” and to “partake of a meal”<sup>77</sup>, presumably the Eucharist.

Origen, in his polemic *Contra Celsus*, attributed to Celsus the belief that Jesus was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier and that he performed miracles through the power of magic.<sup>78</sup> While each of these is a tenuous speculation, the fact that they exist and thus recognize the existence of Jesus at all is further verification of Gospels and the *kerygma*.

### Rabbinic Writings

Although there are relatively few references to Jesus in the Talmud and the Midrash, he is periodically referred to under a pseudonym or pseudonyms such as “Yeshu, Yeshu ha Notzri, “Balaam, ben Pandira, ben Pantera” or others<sup>79</sup>. While most of these sources are inconsequential, representing little more than a second-hand acquaintance with the Gospels and later polemical against Christians<sup>80</sup>, it would be a mistake to ignore them altogether.

Regarding the life and ministry of Jesus, there is evidence that Jesus had five disciples: Matthai, Nakai, Nezer, Buni and Todah<sup>81</sup>. Although Matthai appears to be similar to Matthew and there is some tradition connecting the name Buni with Nicodemus, there is no evidence that these are necessarily synonymous.

Regarding the teachings of Jesus, there is a proverbial statement that sums up the Rabbinic view of Jesus’ teachings. “Since the day that you were exiled from the land the Law of Moses has been abrogated and the law of the εὐαγγέλιον has been given”<sup>82</sup>.

Not surprisingly, the information regarding Jesus crucifixion is present in specific detail. In speaking about the death of Jesus,

“On the eve of Passover, they hanged Jesus the Nazarene.  
And a herald went out before him for forty days saying ‘He

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> *Ann.* 15.44. *op. cit.* *Dict. Jesus*, 365.

<sup>77</sup> *Epp* 10.96 *op. cit.*, *Dict. Jesus*, 365,

<sup>78</sup> *Contra Celsus*, 1,38 *op. cit.* *Dict. Jesus*, 366.

<sup>79</sup> *Dict. Jesus*, p. 366

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 366. cf. *b. Sanh.* 107b.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., cf. *b. Sanh.* 116a.

is going to be stoned, because he practiced sorcery and enticed and led Israel astray. Anyone who knows anything in his favor, let him come and plead in his behalf. But, not having found anything in his favor, they hanged him on the eve of Passover.”<sup>83</sup>.

Furthermore, in *b. Sanhedrin*, “They brought him to the Beth Din (house of judgement) and stoned him. They hanged him on the eve of Passover”<sup>84</sup>. Perhaps these were written as a warning to other presumptuous “Messiahs”. No matter what their purpose, this information seems to fit within the Johannine chronology and narrative in John 18-19.

Expectedly, the statements regarding the resurrection of Jesus are accusatory in nature. “He went and raised Jesus by incantation”<sup>85</sup> and further “Woe to him who makes himself alive by the name of God”<sup>86</sup>. Green attributes these to the accusation that Jesus was a magician<sup>87</sup>.

### Conclusion

While there is no doubt that the Jewish sources are polemical in nature and not favorable toward Jesus and his works, the fact that Jesus, his disciples and his works appear at all lends further credibility to the Gospel narratives and the veracity of the truth itself. Their recognition of the significance of the events surrounding them in the first-century speaks of the far-reaching influence of Jesus and disciples. So permeating was their influence that even those who opposed them had no choice but to recognize their existence. Therefore, these sources, while much different in character than the apocryphal gospels or the *Nag Hammadi* library, are worthy of investigation.

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

<sup>84</sup> *b. Sanh* 67a.

<sup>85</sup> *b. Git.* 57a.

<sup>86</sup> *b. Sanh.* 106a

<sup>87</sup> *Dict.Jesus*, 367.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Nag Hammadi Documents

#### Historical Background

In 1945, a large library of ancient writing was discovered in Upper Egypt, near the city of Chenoboskion.<sup>88</sup> This library became known as the Nag Hammadi documents in reference to the base camp where the archaeologists resided during their expedition. These documents, written in Coptic from a Greek translation,<sup>89</sup> represent the only large body of primary evidence on Gnosticism as a sect and thus form an important link to further understanding this widespread first century heresy.

The Nag Hammadi documents provide a perspective on Gnosticism that was heretofore only available through allusions found in the Church Fathers. These Gnostic books provided information about Gnosticism on a first-hand level and thus provided a thorough theological framework for a better understanding of this sect. For example, the soteriology of Gnosticism was rooted in doceticism. Awareness of this heresy when reading the text allows one to more fully understand how they arrived at such a solution. What then is the overall emphasis (if there is but one) of these documents. In short, “these writings emphasize that salvation consists of receiving knowledge imparted by Jesus.”<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, these documents also demonstrate that Gnosticism borrowed from Christianity, not vice versa.<sup>91</sup>

#### Discovery

The background and discovery of the documents is the stuff of legends.<sup>92</sup> In the Upper Nile region of Upper Egypt in 1945, two brothers, Muhammed Ali and Khalifah Ali hobbled their camels on the south side of a fallen boulder. Upon digging around the base, they discovered a jar. At first Muhammed was afraid to break it for fear of the

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<sup>88</sup> Gerald Cowen, *The Nag Hammadi Discovery and the New Testament Canon*, (Portland, OR.: Theological Research Exchange Network, 1990), 1.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. cf. James M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, (New York, Harper and Row, New York, 1977). F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1988), 146. Cf., Christopher Tuckett, *Nag Hammadi and the Gospel Tradition*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 14.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas D. Lea, *The New Testament*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 50.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. cf. Cowen, 6.

<sup>92</sup> Robinson, 21ff. A complete reading of this story is both interesting and entertaining.

spirit that might live within. But thinking that a treasure of gold might be within, he recovered his courage and broke the jar with his hammer. Inside, he discovered neither gold nor a spirit, but thirteen leather bound codices. He gathered the books, loaded them into his tunic and took them home to his home in al-Qusr.<sup>93</sup>

Some six months before the discovery of the documents, Muhammed's father was a night watchman guarding a field of irrigation equipment. While on duty on the night of May 7, 1945, he killed a marauder. By mid-morning the next day, he had been killed in a blood vengeance of the marauder's family.

Six months later, shortly after the discovery of the documents, Muhammed found his father's killer asleep and killed him in vengeance for his father's death.<sup>94</sup> Because the killer was a member of a hated family, there were no eye-witnesses to testify against Muhammed, thus he was not charged with the crime. For years, Muhammed refused to return to the site of his discovery (since he would have to pass through his enemies territory) for fear that his vengeance would in turn be avenged. After some persuasion, including a governmental escort, camouflage, and, of course, financial considerations, Muhammed was persuaded.

However, the authorities still regularly searched his home. Fearing the government would charge him for possessing the thirteen leather bound books, Muhammed hid them at the home of Coptic priest, Basiliyus 'Abd al-Masih.<sup>95</sup> This priest was married and had a brother-in-law, Raghیب Andrawus, who taught English in a circuit riding fashion in the parochial schools of the Coptic Church. Once a week when he taught in al-Qasr, he stayed at his sister's home. Upon Raghیب's arrival, the priest showed his brother-in-law the manuscript. Immediately, he recognized its potential worth and took it to Cairo to have it evaluated. When he arrived there, he showed it to a Coptic physician, George Sobhi, who called in the authorities from the Department of Antiquities. They took control of the book and agreed to pay Raghیب £300. After many delays, they paid Raghیب £250 and donated the other £50 to the Coptic Museum. The book was then deposited at the Cairo Museum on October 4, 1946.<sup>96</sup>

As for the other twelve codices, they were scattered far and wide. Fearing the books were some sort of bad luck or a curse, the widowed mother of Muhammed had burned parts of them. Illiterate Muslim neighbors purchased them for next to nothing. For some, the books meant great wealth.<sup>97</sup> For others, the books meant academic endeavor, as with the Albert Eid.

Eid purchased Codex I of the Nag Hammadi and took it back to his home Belgium. It was purchased from him by the Jung Institute of Zürich, Switzerland, and named the

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 22. In gruesome detail, Robinson conveys the murder of the offender.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. Robinson tells of one individual who came upon one of the codexs, took it to Cairo and sold it for enough to open a shop there.

“Jung Codex.”<sup>98</sup> Through a litany of similar stories, the other twelve books were divided and then eventually regrouped at the Coptic Museum in Cairo where they still reside.<sup>99</sup>

### The Books and Their Contents<sup>100</sup>

“The library is made up of thirteen leather bound codices which are estimated to have consisted of about 1239 pages, 1156 of which remain at least partly intact. The codices contain 52 works, six of which are duplicates.”<sup>101</sup> Some have argued that these books provide evidence of a Gnostic influence over Christianity.<sup>102</sup> However, as has already been noted, the evidence seems to favor the reverse. Moreover, “Several texts are widely recognized as showing no clear Christian influence at all (and thus no Synoptic allusion).”<sup>103</sup> In light of what they do not contain, what can be gleaned from what they do contain?<sup>104</sup>

### The Gospel of Thomas (Codex II, 2)<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *The Jung Codex*, trans. and ed. F.L. Cross, (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1955).

<sup>99</sup> Unfortunately, space does not permit to tell the history of each codex.

<sup>100</sup> Please note Appendix A for a full list of The *Nag Hammadi* Library, their location within the thirteen books and their abbreviations.

<sup>101</sup> Cowen, 1.

<sup>102</sup> Elaine Pagels *The Gnostic Jesus and Early Christian Politics*, (Tempe, AZ: Department of Religious Studies, Arizona State University, 1988), 8. “I believe that we own the survival of Christian tradition to the organizational and theological structure that the Orthodox church developed. But the discovery at Nag Hammadi allows us to see, for the first time, what was lost in the process - some remarkable views of Jesus and his message.”

<sup>103</sup> C. Tuckett, 14. “These include the three Hermetic discourses in Codex VI, *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, the *Prayer and Asclepius*. Further, it is probably that one can include in this category the version of Plato’s *Republic* which also appears in Codex VI. Others in this same category are the *Letter of Eugnostos* (III.3 and V.1), the *Thunder* (VI.2), *The Three Steles of Seth* (VII.5) *Zostrianos* (VIII.1), *Norea* (IX.2), *Marsanes* (X.1) and *Allogenes* (XI.3).”

<sup>104</sup> In light of the topic at hand, only those documents with influence from/on the Gospels will be entertained. The many other Biblically based books such as the *Apocalypse of Peter*, *The Acts of Peter*, *The Acts of Paul*, and others will not be entertained for the sake of brevity.

<sup>105</sup> Not to be confused with *Thomas the Contender*, a quite unusual book where Jesus, shortly before his ascension, imparts to Thomas unique and significant wisdom.

The Gospel of Thomas is the portion of the Nag Hammadi library that has received the majority of scholarly attention. Prior to the discovery of the Nag Hammadi, only small fragments of this gospel were known in the Oxyrhynchus Papyri.<sup>106</sup> However, how does the discovery of this significant full document contribute to understanding the Canonical Gospels?

The foundational question is to discover the historical person of Jesus. Is the Gospel of Thomas a reliable witness? Does this represent an independent witness to the events of Jesus life? If one accepts Thomas as a valid source, then one must account for the origin of his writings. This could be accounted for in the oral stage, but it seems more likely that this Gospel is founded on a second-hand account.<sup>107</sup> Further, it does not appear that the author had any sort of chronological order in mind. Therefore, while it is indeed significant as an outside source of information and verification of the canonical gospels, it should be treated as apocryphal and thus read for history and not scripture.

What does seem clear from the Gospel of Thomas is that this is a book filled with wisdom sayings, proverbs, parables, rules for Kingdom life and sayings regarding the coming Kingdom of God.<sup>108</sup>

*The Gospel of Truth (Codex I, 3 and XII, 2)*<sup>109</sup>

This gospel is a gospel only in the sense that it contains some allusions to the message of Jesus and the results of his message. Clearly Gnostic in nature, it refers repeatedly to knowledge and particularly self-knowledge.<sup>110</sup> It does not contain any direct quotations of the Old or New Testaments, but seems to exhibit at least tacit knowledge of both through its numerous allusions. Unfortunately, despite its power and beauty,<sup>111</sup> this gospel is a prime example of Gnostic interpretation of the Gospel.

The Gospel of the Egyptians (Codex III, 2 and IV, 2)<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Please see discussion regarding the *Gospel of Thomas* in Chapter Two.

<sup>107</sup> Tuckett, 8.

<sup>108</sup> Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, Trinity Press International, Philadelphia, 1990, 80.

<sup>109</sup> Bruce, 146. "This title does not imply a rival gospel; it indicates rather that the treatise presents a mediation on the true Gospel of Christ." Cf. Tuckett, 57. Tuckett asserts this as the "most Gnostic of the library."

<sup>110</sup> Robinson, 37.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Included only to clear the air in regards to possible confusion between this narrative and the Apocryphal gospel by the same name.

This gospel is to be distinguished from the gospel of the same title in the Apocryphal gospels. Authorship is attributed to Seth, the son of Adam and a key figure in Gnosticism.<sup>113</sup> It is divided into four sections. The first section deals with the origin of the heavenly world.<sup>114</sup> The second section discusses the origin, preservation and salvation of the race of Seth.<sup>115</sup> The third section is “hymnic in nature”<sup>116</sup> and the fourth section contains an account of the Sethian origin and communications.<sup>117</sup> In a manner similar to the way the Gospels present the life of Christ, this “gospel” chronicles the life of Seth.

*The Sophia of Jesus Christ* (Codex III, 4)<sup>118</sup>

According to this version, Jesus came down from the super-celestial region to enlightening those who would listen. Jesus came to break the bonds of sin and imprisonment. He came to teach others to do the same.<sup>119</sup> According to this, two types of people will be saved: (1) those who know the Father in “pure knowledge” and (2) those who know God “defectively.”<sup>120</sup> Those who know God via pure knowledge will go to be with him. Those who know God defectively will go to the “Eighth.”<sup>121</sup>

*Teaching of Silvanus* (Codex VII, 4)

There are some books in the Nag Hammadi Library that are not Gnostic in nature and contain a non-Gnostic soteriology.<sup>122</sup> This book is just such a text. A Christian wisdom piece, this document contains no “explicit quotations”<sup>123</sup> of the teachings of Jesus. Its

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<sup>113</sup> Robinson, 195. Since Seth was the father of Abraham, it follows that he must take primacy over Abraham.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid..

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 206. This text is inherently connected to *Eugnostos the Blessed*.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Tuckett, 42. Tuckett lists *Authentic Teaching*(VI,3 ) as another such book of this same type.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

“theology is not dualistic, its Christology is not docetic”<sup>124</sup> and it exhibits the humanity of Christ. This is the second-most similar book to the Canonical Gospel tradition in the Nag Hammadi Library.

*The Exegesis of the Soul (Codex II, 6)*

This is the most unique in giving the most biblical material in its argument.<sup>125</sup> Within its pages, this writing cites many Old Testament and Homeric quotes, but relatively little synoptic material. The most significant portion of synoptic material found in this document is a quotation of the ‘Savior’.

“. . . the Savior said ‘Blessed are those who mourn for it is they who will be pitied; blessed those who are hungry, for it is they who will be filled.’ Again he said, ‘If one does not hate his soul, he cannot follow me.’ For the beginning of salvation is repentance. (135.13-20).”<sup>126</sup>

From this, it is possible to suspect a Lukan source or at least influence of the Gospel of Luke.

Conclusion

Many other such documents are found within the Nag Hammadi Library, each with a unique tenor and shape toward the gospel tradition. Books such as *The Gospel of Phillip*, *The Treatise on the Resurrection* and *The Letter of Peter to Phillip* are examples of the remainder of the Nag Hammadi Library.

The benefit found in studying these is not the same as the study of the canonical Gospels, but these serve as an outside brace to the fortress of the Canonicals, both drawing strength and lending strength. In understanding how to recognize falsehood, the truth of reality becomes all the more clear. Therefore, it is in this manner that they should be read – not as a document of faith, but a document of support to the already fortified Canonicity of the Gospels.

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<sup>124</sup> Robinson, 346.

<sup>125</sup> Tuckett, 51.

<sup>126</sup> Robinson, 185. Cf. Luke 14:27ff..

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, what value can be drawn from these Apocryphal “gospels”, Jewish citations of our Lord and the “gospels” in the *Nag Hammadi* Library? First, in these documents we have our best and most clear examples of Gnosticism and Gnostic thought. This allows us to make assessments of Gnosticism outside of the early church fathers polemical treatment of this sect.

Second, from this information, it seems clear that Christianity was the predecessor, not any sect. For instance, it was Christianity who influenced Gnosticism, not vice versa. If the opposite were true, one might expect to see Gnostic thought reflected in the Gospels. Since this is not true, one can rightly surmise that Christianity was primary.

Third, it seems clear that the Gospel message, the *kerygma*, took on many variations as it was transmitted. While some sought to twist the message for their own means and interpret history with a revisionistic viewpoint (specifically the Jewish sources), the truth remained untainted.

Fourth, it is clear that each of the extra-canonical sources drew their information from one of the Canonical sources, either the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. The echoes of the Canonical gospels may be heard and seen throughout all of the Non-canonical sources.

Therefore, these are to be strictly studied, not embraced. Reading them can only serve to broaden our understanding of the early church and how the Gospel message was transmitted and, in many cases, distorted. An understanding of these documents can enable scholars to be more aware of the early church, their literature, their thought, their canon, their theological struggles and their philosophies. Such first hand information can enable us to all the better understand how God preserved His word through centuries of misuse and abuse.

## APPENDIX A

List and Abbreviations for the Nag Hammadi Library

<i>Tractate</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>
I, 1	<i>The Prayer of the Apostle Paul</i>	<i>Pr. Paul</i>
I, 2	<i>The Apocryphon of James</i>	<i>Ap. Jas.</i>
I, 3	<i>The Gospel of Truth</i>	<i>Gos. Truth</i>
I, 4	<i>The Treatise on the Resurrection</i>	<i>Treat. Res.</i>
I, 5	<i>The Tripartite Tractate</i>	<i>Tri. Trac.</i>
II, 1	<i>The Apocryphon of John</i>	<i>Ap. John</i>
II, 2	<i>The Gospel of Thomas</i>	<i>Gos. Thom.</i>
II, 3	<i>The Gospel of Phillip</i>	<i>Gos. Phil</i>
II, 4	<i>The Hypostasis of Archons</i>	<i>Hyp. Arch.</i>
II, 5	<i>On the Origin of the World</i>	<i>Orig. World</i>
II, 6	<i>The Exegesis on the Soul</i>	<i>Exeg. Soul</i>
II, 7	<i>The Book of Thomas the Contender</i>	<i>Thom. Cont.</i>
III, 1	<i>The Apocryphon of John</i>	<i>Ap. John</i>
III, 2	<i>The Gospel of the Egyptians</i>	<i>Gos. Eg.</i>
III, 3	<i>Eugnostos the Blessed</i>	<i>Eugnostos</i>
III, 4	<i>The Sophia of Jesus Christ</i>	<i>Soph. Jes. Chr.</i>
III, 5	<i>The Dialogue of the Savior</i>	<i>Dial. Sav.</i>
IV, 1	<i>The Apocryphon of John</i>	<i>Ap. John</i>
IV, 2	<i>The Gospel of the Egyptians</i>	<i>Gos. Eg.</i>
V, 1	<i>Eugnostos the Blessed</i>	<i>Eugnostos</i>
V, 2	<i>The Apocalypse of Paul</i>	<i>Apoc. Paul</i>
V, 3	<i>The (First) Apocalypse of James</i>	<i>1 Apoc. Jas.</i>
V, 4	<i>The (Second) Apocalypse of James</i>	<i>2 Apoc. Jas.</i>
V, 5	<i>The Apocalypse of Adam</i>	<i>Apoc. Adam</i>
VI, 1	<i>The Acts of Peter and the 12 Apostles</i>	<i>Acts Pet. 12 Apost.</i>
VI, 2	<i>The Thunder: Perfect Mind</i>	<i>Thund.</i>
VI, 3	<i>Authoritative Teaching</i>	<i>Auth. Teach.</i>
VI, 4	<i>The Concept of Our Great Power</i>	<i>Great Pow.</i>
VI, 5	<i>Plato, Republic 588a-589b</i>	<i>Plato Rep.</i>
VI, 6	<i>The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth</i>	<i>Disc. 8-9</i>
VI, 7	<i>The Prayer of Thanksgiving</i>	<i>Pr. Thanks.</i>
VI, 8	<i>Asclepius 21-29</i>	<i>Asclepius</i>

VII, 1	<i>The Paraphrase of Shem</i>	<i>Paraph. Shem</i>
VII, 2	<i>The Second Treatise of the Great Seth</i>	<i>Treat. Seth</i>
VII, 3	<i>The Apocalypse of Peter</i>	<i>Apoc. Peter</i>
VII, 4	<i>The Teaching of Silvanus</i>	<i>Teach. Silv.</i>
VII, 5	<i>The Three Steles of Seth</i>	<i>Steles Seth</i>
VIII, 1	<i>Zostrianos</i>	<i>Zost.</i>
VIII, 2	<i>The Letter of Peter to Philip</i>	<i>Ep. Pet. Phil.</i>
IX, 1	<i>Melchizedek</i>	<i>Melch.</i>
IX, 2	<i>The Thought of Norea</i>	<i>Norea</i>
IX, 3	<i>The Testimony of the Truth</i>	<i>Testim. Truth</i>
X	<i>Marsanes</i>	<i>Marsanes</i>
XI, 1	<i>The Interpretation of Knowledge</i>	<i>Interp. Know.</i>
XI, 2	<i>A Valentianian Exposition</i>	<i>Val. Exp.</i>
XI, 2a	<i>On the Anointing</i>	<i>On Anoint.</i>
XI, 2b	<i>On Baptism A</i>	<i>On Bapt. A.</i>
XI, 2c	<i>On Baptism B</i>	<i>On Bapt. B.</i>
XI, 2d	<i>On the Eucharist A</i>	<i>On Euch. A.</i>
XI, 2e	<i>On the Eucharist B</i>	<i>On Euch, B.</i>
XI, 3	<i>Allogenes</i>	<i>Allogenes</i>
XI, 4	<i>Hypsiphron</i>	<i>Hypsiph.</i>
XII, 1	<i>The Sentence of Sextus</i>	<i>Sent. Sextus</i>
XII, 2	<i>The Gospel of Truth</i>	<i>Gosp. Truth</i>
XII, 3	<i>Fragments</i>	<i>Frm.</i>
XIII, 1	<i>Trimorphic Protennoia</i>	<i>Trim. Prot.</i>
XIII, 2	<i>On the Origin of the World</i>	<i>Orig. World</i>

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