

Bible Basics – Are there other biblical texts?

Overview

Interest in ancient Judeo-Christian writings that were not in the bible became more popular with the discovery of some ancient manuscripts in Egypt in 1945. Other writings found in the Dead Sea scrolls in 1947 sparked further interest.

What is the issue?

Very early in the history of God's people, the first canonical books were recognized and preserved.

Deuteronomy 31:24-26 tells us that the writings of Moses were kept within the Ark of the Covenant so they would not be forgotten.



The books which formed the canon of the Old Testament were routinely used in the Temple and later in the synagogue for worship services and instruction.

When we say that the Bible is the canon, it means two things:

1. Firstly, it means those specific books, which currently compose the Bible.
2. Secondly, it means that every book in the Bible has measured up to the requirement of divine inspiration. The books of the Bible are called canonical because they have met the standard for being in the Bible.

The Old Testament original canon was established by one of the early church first councils of Carthage in 397. Since then the Apocrypha has been dropped from the Protestant versions along with a few other minor alterations. The New Testament canon has remained unchanged for over 1600 years.

During the Council of Trent in A.D. 1546 they officially declared 12 additional Old Testament books to be part of the canon of the bible. This made the canon very similar to that of the original Jewish Canon.

What are these other biblical texts?

There are many ancient biblical texts that did not make it into the current canon of the bible. They range from other gospels to letters similar to Saint Paul's writings. Many of these writings are clearly questionable while others have some historical merit – but that they did meet the canonical standards discussed previously.

These writings have been recorded in several books such as *"The Lost Books of the Bible"* and others. Most of these were as written well after the last book of the bible (Revelation) – and appear to be a local effort to expand upon another book in the canonical bible. A few examples are offered as follows:

- *The Gospel of Thomas* is an interesting account and reads more like one of Saint Paul's epistles. Some Catholic seminaries use this as an additional study text.
- *The Gospel of the Birth of Mary* is delightful to read and seems to echo some of the visions of the mystics.
- We find additional Psalms in the book *"The Psalms of Solomon"* which follow the similar format and style of the current Book of Psalms.
- I found *"The First Book of Adam and Eve"* to be an extension of the accounts in Genesis. That is – it tries to describe what happened to them after they were exiled from Paradise.

What does it mean?

These writings may be worthy of reading by the faithful but they should never replace nor contradict the writings of the official canon.