non-Western contexts, such as the India Commentary on the New Testament series (Primalogue Press); the Africa Bible Commentary series (HippoBooks and Zondervan); the one-volume *Africa Bible Commentary*, edited by Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi: WordAlive; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006); and *The New African Bible* (Nairobi: Paulines Africa, 2011), from the Roman Catholic Church in Africa. These basic resources are available in many countries.

5

Significant Noncanonical Writings

Christopher W. Skinner

The writings of the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament) and the New Testament did not emerge in a vacuum. They share a rich cultural, philosophical, and religious heritage with many other texts that did not find their way into the Jewish and Christian **canons**. Numerous writings from outside the Bible have proved useful for helping us understand some of the different theological trajectories within Judaism, especially of the **Second Temple** period, as well as the various shapes that devotion to Jesus took in the first four Christian centuries. In this chapter we consider five different groups of literature: the Old Testament **Pseudepigrapha**, the **Dead Sea Scrolls**, the **Nag Hammadi** library, the New Testament **Apocrypha**, and the **Apostolic Fathers**. Our primary aim in examining these writings is to consider their contributions to our knowledge about and study of the Bible. For each corpus (body of literature) introduced below, there is a discussion of pertinent background information, a description of its writings, and a representative text.

The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

The term "pseudepigrapha" derives from two Greek roots meaning "falsely attributed" and refers to a diverse group of Jewish and Jewish-Christian writings that appeared between 200 BCE and 200 CE. These writings were

originally composed in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. However, the spread of Judaism and Christianity throughout the ancient world also meant the translation of their respective sacred writings into other languages. Since we possess no original texts from this period, some pseudepigrapha have survived only as translations. As with some of the other literature covered in this chapter, there is no officially recognized list of pseudepigrapha, and it is probably the case that most of these writings were never formally associated with one another. Rather, the grouping of these writings into a larger corpus is a modern task undertaken by scholars.

The standard reference work on the OT Pseudepigrapha outlines the commonly accepted criteria used in classifying these documents: (1) they are Jewish or Christian; (2) they are attributed to ideal figures in Israel's past; (3) they claim to contain a message from God; (4) they often claim to build upon ideas found in the OT; and (5) with a few exceptions, they appeared between the late second century BCE and the early third century CE.[1] Thus, the Pseudepigrapha are writings falsely attributed to important biblical characters, such as Abraham, Moses, Job, David, and Elijah, as well as nonbiblical figures venerated within Judaism, as a means of establishing **authority** with the specific aim of relaying a message from God. Several common themes run throughout the Pseudepigrapha, most of which will be familiar to readers of the Bible. These themes include the fall and redemption of humanity, the triumph of God over evil, the existence of angels, the end of the world, and the resurrection of the dead. In addition, the identity and characteristics of a coming messiah form a particularly prominent theme in the Pseudepigrapha.

Numerous **genres** of literature make up the OT Pseudepigrapha. Here is an abbreviated list of works that fall under those genres:

(1) Apocalyptic literature: 1 Enoch, Sibylline Oracles, 4 Ezra
(2) Testamentary literature: Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Testament of Moses
(3) Expanded OT legends: Letter of Aristeas, Joseph and Aseneth, Life of Adam and Eve, Jubilees
(4) Wisdom literature: 3–4 Maccabees, Pseudo-Phocylides
(5) Prayers, Psalms, and Odes: Other Psalms of David, Psalms of Solomon

The OT Pseudepigrapha are important to our study of the Bible for several reasons. First, they exercised religious authority and social influence among

1. James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (1983–1985; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 1:xxiv–xxv.

Jews and especially among Christians even though, with rare exceptions, they did not ultimately make their way into either tradition's canon.[2] Also, some Christians continued to use these texts even after their canon was considered more or less closed. Thus, twenty-first-century Christian understandings of biblical authority and its relationship to a closed canon were foreign to the experience of many early Christians. Furthermore, these texts often reflect developments in theological thought that provide insights into how conversations were taking place among people of faith. The road to **orthodoxy** for both Jews and Christians was ultimately a long one, and these writings give us a glimpse into various stops and detours along the way. The Pseudepigrapha provide a wide context for helping us come to grips with how certain theological ideas were developed and articulated in the centuries between the writing of the Hebrew Bible and the canonization of the New Testament.

Excerpt: 1 Enoch

Enoch, a character described in Genesis as the seventh descendant from Adam, inexplicably developed an important status within the religious culture of Judaism. He is the enigmatic figure about whom it is written, "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him" (Gen. 5:24). Three different writings are attributed to him, the most important of which is 1 Enoch. First Enoch was written sometime between the second century BCE and the first century CE and was widely used; it is even cited in the NT letter of Jude (vv. 14–15).

In this largely **apocalyptic** work, Enoch is the protagonist who tours heaven, earth, and **Sheol** (the place of the dead) as the eschatological age unfolds and gives way to the final judgment of humanity. First Enoch reveals the complexity of Jewish thinking during this period of history, and it contains a cluster of the themes that often appear in isolation throughout the Pseudepigrapha. The text below is an excerpt from 1 Enoch that contains language and imagery strikingly similar to that found in the NT teachings of Jesus, as well as in the book of Revelation:

> Then there came to them a great joy. And they blessed, glorified, and extolled the Lord on account of the fact that the name of that Son of Man was revealed to them. He shall never pass away or perish from before the face of the earth. But those who have led the world astray shall be bound with chains; and their ruinous congregation shall be imprisoned; all their deeds shall vanish from before

2. 1 Enoch and Jubilees appear in the Ethiopian Christian canon, 3 Maccabees and Psalm 151 in the Greek and Russian Orthodox canons, and 4 Maccabees in the Greek Orthodox canon.

the face of the earth. Thenceforth nothing that is corruptible shall be found; for that Son of Man has appeared and has seated himself upon the throne of his glory; and all evil shall disappear from before his face; he shall go and tell to that Son of Man, and he shall be strong before the Lord of the Spirits. Here ends the third parable of Enoch. (69.27–29)[3]

The Dead Sea Scrolls

In the winter of 1947, a young Bedouin shepherd named Muhammed edh-Dhib and several of his friends were searching for a lost goat on the cliffs of the northwest shore of the Dead Sea, near an area called **Qumran**. Approaching one cave in which he presumed his goat might have wandered, Muhammed tossed a stone, hoping to startle the animal. Instead, he heard a crashing sound. Upon entering the cave (known today as Cave 1), Muhammed and his friends found ten oddly shaped clay jars. After investigating the jars further, they discovered seven ancient scrolls wrapped in linen cloths. They could not read the ancient script but presumed the scrolls were valuable, so they tucked them away with the intent of selling them on the antiquities market. This initial discovery set about a series of events as Bedouin treasure hunters and archaeologists feverishly scoured the surrounding caves for more scrolls—a search that eventually culminated in the discovery of nearly nine hundred scrolls or fragments in eleven different caves, dating from around 200 BCE to 68 CE. Because of the proximity of the discoveries to the Dead Sea, these writings were dubbed the **Dead Sea Scrolls** (DSS). They are sometimes also called the Qumran writings, the Qumran library, or simply the Scrolls.

The Dead Sea Scrolls were primarily written in Hebrew, though there are numerous texts in both Aramaic and Greek. Most scholars believe that a group known as the **Essenes** was responsible for copying, composing, and preserving these documents.[4] The Essenes were a separatist Jewish group that rejected the legitimacy of the temple leadership in Jerusalem. It appears that some Essenes moved into the Judean desert to form an ascetically oriented community at Qumran. Among their distinctive practices were ritual baptisms and communal meals, and they believed in an apocalyptic end of the world. They referred to themselves as "sons of light" and to their enemies as "sons of darkness," and they followed the instruction of a figure known as the

3. From the translation by E. Isaac in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:49.

4. For more on the Essenes and their presumed association with the Dead Sea Scrolls, see VanderKam, *Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 97–156.

Figure 5.1. Some of the caves near the Qumran community on the edge of the Dead Sea, where the community hid its scrolls from the world until their accidental discovery in 1947.

"Teacher of Righteousness." Scholars believe the documents were deposited in the various caves near the end of the **First Jewish Revolt** (ca. 66–74 CE).

The writings discovered at and near Qumran can be divided into two groups: biblical texts and nonbiblical texts. With the exception of the book of Esther, every book from the Hebrew canon appears at least once among the Dead Sea Scrolls; some appear numerous times, including twenty-five copies of Deuteronomy, thirty copies of the Psalms, and nineteen copies of Isaiah. What is perhaps even more significant is that some of the biblical texts found at Qumran predate our earliest previously known manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible by nearly one thousand years!

By and large, the nonbiblical writings discovered at Qumran reflect the sectarian theological emphases of the Essene community. Among these nonbiblical writings is the Temple Scroll, which contains a revelation given to Moses by God and describes an ideal Jewish temple, along with regulations for those worshiping there. Another important text is the War Scroll, which outlines a seven-stage confrontation between the "sons of light" and the "sons of darkness" culminating in the defeat of darkness and the restoration of the Jewish temple. Yet another is the so-called Thanksgiving Scroll, containing psalms in which the author speaks (in the first person) of his persecution by those opposed to his ministry.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are important to our study of the Bible for the large amount of comparative material they provide. Most of the Jewish writings known to us from the time of Jesus or shortly thereafter reflect a rabbinic or **proto-rabbinic** form of Judaism. However, the Dead Sea Scrolls reflect a nonrabbinic, apocalyptic, and separatist worldview that unveils a very different theological trajectory within Judaism. Also, although the Essenes are never mentioned in the NT, our awareness of their connection to the Dead Sea Scrolls provides us with evidence of another sectarian Jewish group contemporaneous with John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul.

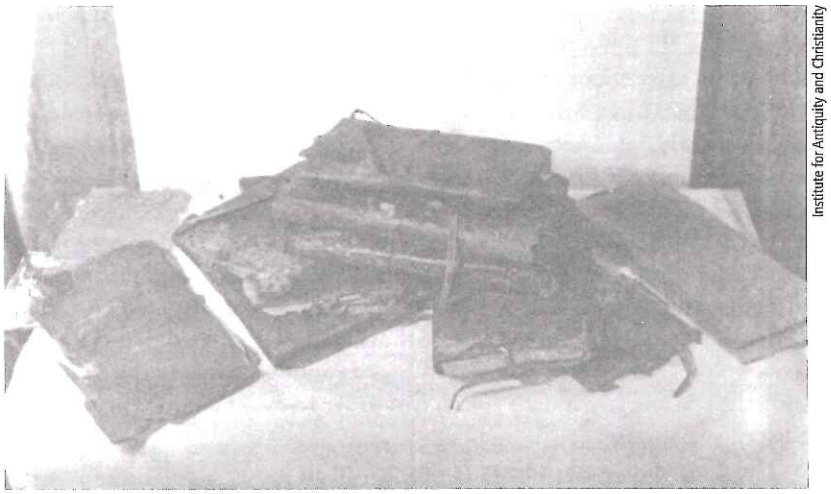
Excerpt: The Rule of the Community

The Rule of the Community (sometimes called the Manual of Discipline) was one of the original scrolls discovered in the winter of 1947. It is largely concerned with outlining communal practices such as **ritual purity** by immersion and protocol for common meals. This text, like others among the scrolls, sheds light on developments within Judaism that can help us situate important ideas in the NT. For example, for decades scholars assumed that dualistic categories found in the NT (e.g., light vs. dark; truth vs. lie, and so forth), arose from the influence of Greek philosophy. However, both the Rule of the Community and the War Scroll reveal an explicit emphasis on these very dichotomies, which has immediate implications for our study of the Bible, and notably for the Gospel of John. Practically, it means that some NT writings could have been influenced by these seemingly Hellenistic ideas that actually arose within a contemporary Jewish setting rather than a Greek philosophical framework.

Here is an excerpt from the Rule of the Community:

> Those born of truth spring from a fountain of light, but those born of injustice spring from a source of darkness. All the children of righteousness are ruled by the Prince of Light and walk in the ways of light, but all the children of injustice are ruled by the Angel of Darkness and walk in the ways of darkness. The Angel of Darkness leads all the children of righteousness astray, and until his end, all their sin, iniquities, wickedness, and all their unlawful deeds are caused by his dominion in accordance with the mysteries of God. Every one of their chastisements, and every one of the seasons of their distress, shall be brought about by the rule of his persecution; for all his allotted spirits seek the overthrow of the sons of light. But the God of Israel and His Angel of Truth will succour all the sons of light. (3.19–24)[5]

5. From Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin, 2004), 101.



Institute for Antiquity and Christianity

Figure 5.2. Some of the leather-bound codices of gnostic texts in Coptic that were discovered at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945.

The Nag Hammadi Library

In December 1945, two brothers searching for fertilizer in the **Nag Hammadi** region of the Egyptian desert (on the west bank of the Nile, north of Luxor) inadvertently uncovered an earthenware jar containing twelve leather-bound codices. The books contained fifty-two ancient texts, all of which were written in **Coptic**, and most of which were previously unknown to scholars of early Christianity. The majority of these texts were written between the mid-second and the mid-fourth centuries CE, though there are a few exceptions. Some of the texts were most likely composed in Greek and later translated into Coptic. Because of the location of their discovery, these writings are often referred to as the Nag Hammadi library.

While we cannot paint this entire corpus with a broad brush, most of the writings found at Nag Hammadi reflect a **gnostic** theological outlook, stressing the reception of specially revealed knowledge for salvation. Among the documents discovered at Nag Hammadi were previously unknown gospels, including the Gospel of Truth, the Gospel of the Egyptians, and the Gospel of Philip, along with enigmatic works such as the Hypostasis of the Archons, Trimorphic Protennoia, Pistis Sophia, and Eugnostos the Blessed. In a number of Nag Hammadi texts, Jesus is the central character, though the picture of him that emerges is quite different from what we see in the NT. He appears as a divinized, quasi-mystical being who dispenses esoteric teaching. Numerous

other Nag Hammadi writings feature characters from the Bible; these include texts about NT figures such as Jesus' disciples, his brother James, and Paul, along with texts about OT figures like Adam, Shem, Seth, and Melchizedek. Other writings from this collection, such as Plato's *Republic* and the Sentences of Sextus, while not gnostic in origin, were probably included because their ideas were appealing to early gnostic Christians.

In 367 CE, Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, used the occasion of his Thirty-Ninth Festal letter, or Easter letter, to provide an authoritative list of the twenty-seven books of the NT (see ch. 6). He did this with the intention of both ending discussions over the authority of certain disputed books and with a view to forbidding their use. Scholars have speculated that the Christians who regarded these gnostic writings as authoritative hid the collection sometime in the late fourth century in order to avoid complying with the edict of Athanasius.

The Nag Hammadi library is important to our study of the Bible for numerous reasons. First, it shows us that many of the early christological disputes reflected in the NT were still not resolved even into the fourth century. Rather, interpretations of the significance of Jesus' life continued to evolve in the teaching and preaching of various early Christian groups. Second, this collection also shows us some of the different ways gnostic expressions of Christianity diverged from what eventually became known as orthodoxy. Finally, the history behind this collection helps us better appreciate some of the struggles that emerged during the process of NT canonization as well as some of the early attempts to resist that formalization process.

Excerpt: The Gospel of Thomas

One of the most important texts discovered at Nag Hammadi for our study of the Bible is the Gospel of Thomas (not to be confused with the Infancy Gospel of Thomas noted below under "The New Testament Apocrypha"). This writing was previously known to scholars only by name because it was mentioned by Hippolytus of Rome and condemned by Origen of Alexandria, both of whom were writing in the early part of the third century. Three Greek fragments of the Gospel of Thomas had previously been discovered in 1897 and 1903 in another area of the Egyptian desert known as Oxyrhynchus. The Coptic version discovered at Nag Hammadi represents the only complete version of this ancient text that we possess. The Gospel of Thomas was of immediate interest to researchers because of its many parallels to passages from the Synoptic Gospels. These similarities have led to seemingly endless

speculation about the date of the Gospel of Thomas, with some concluding that it appeared before our earliest written Gospels and others arguing that it was dependent on them.

The Gospel of Thomas is not a "gospel" in the purest sense. It has no overarching narrative structure, no birth story, and no passion or resurrection narratives. Instead, it is a list of 114 independent sayings of Jesus, most of which begin with the phrase "Jesus said" or "he said." Below are examples of both familiar and unfamiliar sayings of Jesus found in the Gospel of Thomas:

Familiar Sayings

9. Jesus said, "Look, the sower went out, took a handful (of seeds), and scattered (them). Some fell on the road, and the birds came and gathered them. Others fell on rock, and they didn't take root in the soil and didn't produce heads of grain. Others fell on thorns, and they choked the seeds and worms ate them. And others fell on good soil, and it produced a good crop: it yielded sixty per measure and one hundred twenty per measure." [see Mark 4:1–8; Matt. 13:4–8; Luke 8:5–8]

31. Jesus said, "No prophet is welcome on his home turf; doctors don't cure those who know them." [see Mark 6:4; Matt. 13:57; Luke 4:24]

34. Jesus said, "If a blind person leads a blind person, both of them will fall into a hole." [see Matt. 15:14; Luke 6:39]

Unfamiliar Sayings

7. Jesus said, "Lucky is the lion that the human will eat, so that the lion becomes human. And foul is the human that the lion will eat, and the lion still will become human."

42. Jesus said, "Be passersby."

77. Jesus said, "I am the light that is over all things. I am all: from me all came forth, and to me all attained. Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there."

82. Jesus said, "Whoever is near me is near the fire, and whoever is far from me is far from the kingdom."[6]

6. From the translation by Stephen J. Patterson and Marvin Meyer in *The Complete Gospels*, ed. Robert J. Miller, 4th ed. (Salem, OR: Polebridge, 2010).

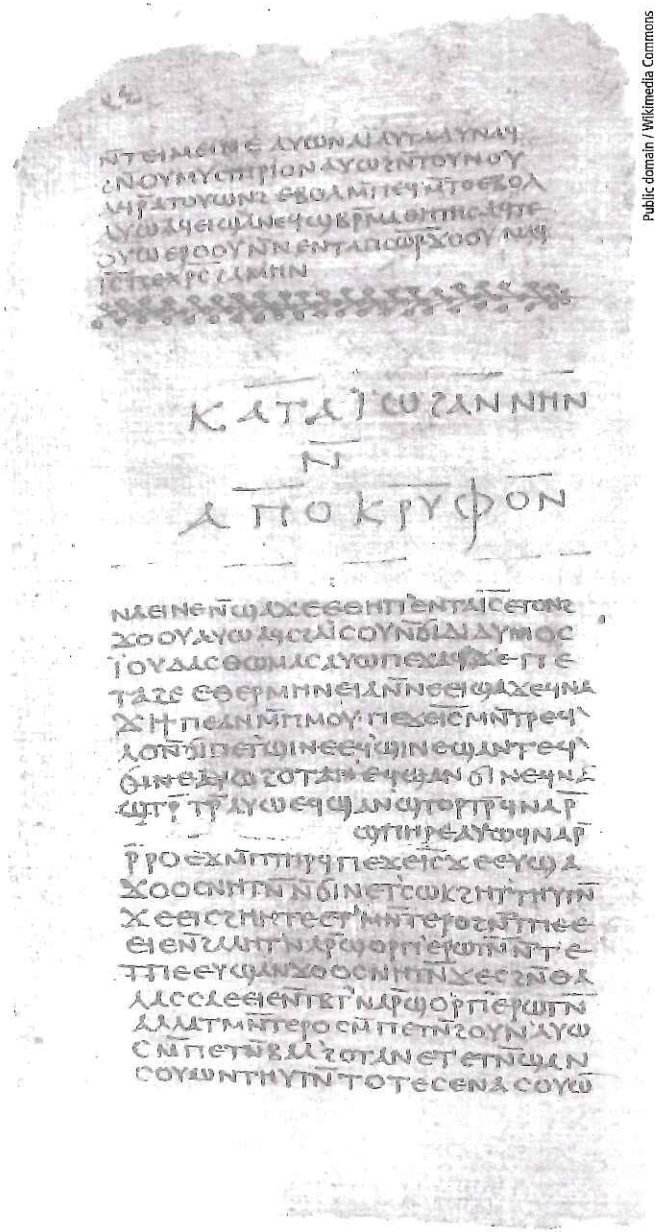


Figure 5.3. A page from Nag Hammadi Codex II, with the ending of the Apocryphon of John and the beginning of the Gospel of Thomas.

The New Testament Apocrypha

The term "Apocrypha" is an English **transliteration** of a Greek word meaning "hidden" or "secret." When preceded by "New Testament," it designates nonbiblical Christian literature about Jesus, his disciples, his family members, or other associates. (Thus, the NT Apocrypha should not be confused with the OT Apocrypha, or **deuterocanonical** books, discussed in ch. 3 and included in some Christian canons.) These books themselves were not necessarily hidden—many were widespread—though some may have been composed as part of a corpus of writings for smaller "secret" Christian groups. As with the Pseudepigrapha, there is no officially recognized list of NT apocryphal writings, and the texts commonly identified as apocryphal likely had no organic relationship to one another outside the work of modern scholars.

The various NT Apocrypha were composed in Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Coptic, the four major languages of the Roman Empire's eastern provinces. With a few exceptions, these writings appeared between 100 and 400 CE—later than most, if not all, of the canonical NT documents. In certain respects they are similar to much of our NT material and were often used alongside the writings of the NT. However, they were excluded from the canon because they did not attain widespread use or approval in the churches, because those in charge of deliberating about what was included in the NT found them objectionable on theological or historical grounds, or because they were composed after the process of selection.

One goal of many apocryphal texts was to supplement beliefs that had become foundational to the experience of early Christians, though the texts often appear to rival their canonical counterparts. In particular, the virginal conception of Jesus, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and the **parousia** (or second coming) are ideas that appear frequently in the NT Apocrypha. Special attention is also paid to Jesus' birth and crucifixion. Apocryphal texts expand upon what the NT has to say about these and other theological concerns, sometimes filling in perceived lacunae (gaps) in the NT documents. Some apocryphal texts appear to have been written with the goal of solidifying the historical nature of various biblical stories—especially those concerning Jesus—and others focus on helping the reader develop Christian virtues.

The apocryphal writings appear in various genres, many of which are similar to those found within the NT. Below is an abbreviated list:

- Infancy gospels: Protoevangelium of James, Infancy Gospel of Thomas, Tales of the Magi

- Gospels of Jesus' ministry: Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Bartholomew, Gospel of the Savior
- Apocryphal acts: Acts of John, Acts of Andrew, Acts of Barnabas, Acts of Peter, Acts of Paul and Thecla, Acts of Thomas
- Apocalypses: Apocalypse of Paul, Apocalypse of Peter
- Stories of people associated with Jesus: History of Joseph the Carpenter, Dormition of Mary, Life of John the Baptist

The NT Apocrypha provide an important historical window into the growth of Christianity within the four or five centuries of the church after the first century CE. We see what virtues Christians cherished, what doctrines they valued, and even the ways they envisioned Jesus as present in their world. We also see the veneration of other figures from the life of Jesus. Early Christianity continued to develop as various groups sought to articulate their understanding of the faith. One of the most important concerns within these discussions—as reflected in many apocryphal texts—is the nature of Jesus. Was he human? Was he divine? How do those two concerns relate to each other, if at all? The early **ecumenical councils** of the church were explicitly concerned with such christological controversies, so it is no surprise to see these discussions taking place in some of these early Christian writings.

Excerpt: The Gospel of Peter

In 1886, a parchment manuscript dating from the late eighth to early ninth century was discovered in the grave of a monk in the upper Egyptian region of Akhmim. The manuscript contained several Greek fragments, including 1 Enoch, the Apocalypse of Peter, and a text that has come to be known as the Gospel of Peter. Containing material obviously drawn from the canonical Gospels, the Gospel of Peter recounts a fantastic story of Jesus' descent into hell, accompanied by his cross. The cross eventually emerges from the grave and begins to speak about what it has seen. While most scholars are convinced that this is a much later tradition, at least one scholar has argued that the cross material in the Gospel of Peter reflects some of the earliest preaching of the church.[7] Others have suggested that this story, while fanciful in what it recounts, may have been close to the way some early Christians told the story of Jesus' resurrection and defeat of death. Provided below is an excerpt from the Gospel of Peter:

7. John Dominic Crossan has argued that there was originally a Cross Gospel, presenting a passion narrative now reflected in three closely connected units in the Gospel of Peter. For more on this subject, see his book *The Cross That Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

> That stone which had been cast before the entrance rolled away by itself and moved to one side; the tomb was open and both young men entered. When the soldiers saw these things, they woke up the centurion and the elders—for they were also there on guard. As they were explaining what they had seen, they saw three men emerge from the tomb, two of them supporting the other, with a cross following behind them. The heads of the two reached up to the sky, but the head of the one they were leading went up above the skies. And they heard a voice from the skies, "Have you preached to those who are asleep?" And a reply came from the cross, "Yes." They then decided among themselves to go off to disclose what had happened to Pilate. While they were still making their plans, the skies were again seen to open, and a person descended and entered the crypt. Those who were with the centurion saw these things and hurried to Pilate at night, abandoning the tomb they had been guarding, and explained everything they had seen. Greatly agitated, they said, "He actually was the Son of God." (lines 37–45)[8]

The Apostolic Fathers

The corpus of writings known to us as the Apostolic Fathers represents the earliest Christian writings that have been preserved outside the NT. These documents were written in Greek during what is sometimes called the **postapostolic era** (ca. 70–150 CE), a period within which some of our later NT documents were also being composed. This was a critical period in the life of the earliest church since it was no longer possible to learn directly from one of the apostles. There was a serious concern about which voices and texts were authoritative and which practices were normative for the Christian life. Thus, as postapostolic Christianity began to move in the direction of orthodoxy, there was a call for clarity about Christian practice and authority; these concerns are reflected in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. In recent years, it has become common for scholars to group these texts with other writings that emerged slightly later under the heading "Early Christian Fathers."

The phrase "Apostolic Fathers" was probably first used in the sixth century by a monophysite Christian named Severus, though the modern collection of texts that goes by that name did not emerge until the late seventeenth century.[9] As with other collections discussed in this chapter, there is no official list of works that make up the Apostolic Fathers. Texts generally found in volumes on the Apostolic Fathers include 1–2 Clement, the Letter of Polycarp to the

8. From Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše, *The Other Gospels: Accounts of Jesus from Outside the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 199.

9. The monophysites understood the divine and human natures of Christ to be commingled, or confused, which was deemed a **heresy** by the Fourth **Ecumenical Council** at Chalcedon in 451.

Philippians, the Martyrdom of Polycarp, the Didache, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle to Diognetus, and the **Epistle of Barnabas**. Also included are seven letters attributed to Ignatius of Antioch, though some scholars doubt the authenticity of several of those letters. Most texts in the Apostolic Fathers are epistles, though we also have examples of **apologetic** texts, lists of instructions, and martyrdom stories. As in the case of the NT Apocrypha, it appears that one purpose of these texts was to supplement the NT, though in some cases certain writings appear to have rivaled their NT counterparts.

It is often said that the authors of the texts we include among the Apostolic Fathers knew or had worked directly with the apostles, though in fact most of the writings are anonymous, and there is little evidence to establish a direct connection with the apostles. Some have attempted to argue that Clement of Rome, to whom two epistles are attributed, was associated with either Peter or Paul, but this is little more than speculation.[10] Though we cannot establish a link between Clement and Paul, the letter known as 1 Clement contains important parallels in tone and subject matter to Paul's writings that should not be ignored. The letter was written to the Corinthian church around 95 CE and makes an appeal to the Corinthian Christians to handle their disagreements in a peaceful manner, referencing Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians in several places (see 1 Clem. 13.1; 34.8; 37.3).

Other themes of importance to the early Christian experience that are found in the Apostolic Fathers include the development of the ***regula fidei*** (or **rule of faith**, a summary of basic Christian teaching) and an emphasis on moving toward a single-bishop system of church polity (monepiscopacy). In addition, a trend that runs throughout the Apostolic Fathers is the move toward institutionalizing certain elements of early Christian practice.

The Apostolic Fathers contribute to our study of the Bible in numerous ways. First, they contain traditions about Jesus that both parallel NT traditions and add to what we already know. Second, they provide some of the earliest interpretations of specific passages or entire books of the NT. Third, they contain traditions about the authorship of various NT writings as well as other traditions relating to the development of practices in the earliest Christian churches.

Excerpt: The Didache

The Didache (also known as the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles) was discovered in the late nineteenth century in a monastery in Turkey. Although

10. 1 Clement was commissioned by presbyters in Rome to address problems in the Corinthian church. Clement, a well-known member of this group, may have been its leader, and thus his name is associated with this letter.

the work was known by its title from various references in early Christian writers, this discovery yielded the first full version of the document. Generally dated as early as 100 CE but no later than 150 CE, its material is thought to have circulated for decades before it was formally written down. Functioning as a manual for early Christian behavior and worship, the Didache is divided into two major sections. The first (1.1–6.2) summarizes basic instructions about the Christian life for catechumens (those being instructed in the faith prior to formal entrance into the church), and the second (6.3–16.8) contains instructions about baptism, fasting, prayer, and the **Eucharist** (Communion). Numerous NT texts attest to this foundational early Christian practice (e.g., Mark 14:22–24; 1 Cor. 11:23–26). Specific guidelines for the observation of the Eucharist are also found in the Didache:

> Now concerning the Eucharist, give thanks as follows. First, concerning the cup: "We give you thanks, our Father, for the holy vine of David your servant, which you have made known to us through Jesus, your servant; to you be the glory forever." And concerning the broken bread: "We give you thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge that you have made known to us through Jesus, your servant; to you be the glory forever. Just as this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and then was gathered together and became one, so may your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom; for yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever." (9.1–4)[11]

Conclusion

It is not enough for serious students of the Bible to know only the content of the canonical writings. We must also be aware of the vast amount of literature related to, and contemporaneous with, the Old and New Testaments. This chapter has surveyed some of the major categories of nonbiblical Jewish and Christian writings with which students of Scripture should gain familiarity, but the material covered here is by no means exhaustive. Those who wish to go further would do well to investigate the religious and mythological texts of ancient Mesopotamia; the various Jewish writings such as the **Mishnah** and the **Talmud** (along with other rabbinic writings), the **Targums**, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the **Septuagint** (which is, in many ways, not merely a translation but an alternate version of the OT),[12] and the works of Philo and Josephus; the Corpus Hermeticum; and **Greco-Roman** authors such as Tacitus, Suetonius,

11. English translation from Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers in English*, 167–68.

12. Every translation of a text is an interpretation; this is especially true with respect to the Septuagint.

and Plutarch.[13] There is no shortage of material to help us understand the wider world from which the Bible emerged, and the literature of various regions in which the Old and New Testaments were written is a helpful starting point. Against that backdrop, students who wish to immerse themselves in the social, historical, and religious contexts of the Bible should also familiarize themselves with the particulars of each culture in which the biblical writings materialized, including those of the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman Empires. These avenues of investigation will help students situate their Bible reading in a wide historical context and provide broad exposure to key developments within Judaism and Christianity.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Although many of the writings discussed in this chapter were in circulation at the same time as writings that became part of the canon and had an obvious impact upon developments within Judaism and Christianity, they were not included in either canon for one reason or another. How does this recognition help you in thinking about the processes that led to the eventual canonization of the Bible?
2. Part of a contemporary Judeo-Christian religious experience is the privileging of a set of formalized sacred writings. However, it is also true that within various expressions of both Judaism and Christianity (especially Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy), ongoing traditions are also considered authoritative for faith and practice. How might this comparison assist us in thinking about the value of these nonbiblical writings for ancient Jews and Christians?
3. Some scholars have estimated that in order to situate the Old and New Testaments in their original historical and religious contexts, one would need to be familiar with around five hundred ancient texts. How might this claim inform and/or change your approach to studying the Bible?

FOR FURTHER READING AND STUDY

Bauckham, Richard, James Davila, and Alex Panayotov, eds. *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*. 2 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013. Up-to-date translation of and commentary on the OT Pseudepigrapha, containing many texts previously unpublished.

13. The Mishnah, Talmud, and Targums are discussed briefly in ch. 9.

Bockmuehl, Markus. *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels*. Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017. A nontechnical introduction to the apocryphal gospels, their relationship to the canonical Gospels, and their significance.

Burke, Tony. *Secret Scriptures Revealed: A New Introduction to the Christian Apocrypha*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013. Extremely useful, student-friendly overview of the major works and genres that compose the Christian Apocrypha.

Burke, Tony, and Brent Landau, eds. *New Testament Apocrypha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017. Collection of thirty little-known and, for the most part, previously untranslated texts.

Charlesworth, James H., ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. 2 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010. Definitive translation of sixty-five writings with brief commentary by each contributor.

Collins, John J. *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. Best available introduction to the Jewish apocalyptic writings of the Second Temple period.

Docherty, Susan. *The Jewish Pseudepigrapha: An Introduction to the Literature of the Second Temple Period*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015. Up-to-date, student-friendly introduction to the most important writings of the Second Temple period.

Ehrman, Bart D. *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It into the New Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Lay-friendly introduction to many important works that influenced developments within early Christianity but did not become canonical.

Evans, Craig A. *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies: A Guide to the Background Literature*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012. Scholarly introduction to and summary of the kinds of writings discussed in this chapter, and others.

Goodacre, Mark. *Thomas and the Gospels: The Case for Thomas's Familiarity with the Synoptics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012. A critical scholarly engagement with the question of Thomas's awareness of synoptic traditions.

Holmes, Michael. *The Apostolic Fathers in English*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. Best available translation of the Apostolic Fathers in English.

Jefford, Clayton N. *Reading the Apostolic Fathers: A Student's Introduction*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012. Introduces nonspecialists to the issues involved in studying the Apostolic Fathers.

Kasser, Rodolphe, Marvin Meyer, and Gregor Wurst, eds. *The Gospel of Judas*. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2008. Complete text of the Gospel of Judas reconstructed and translated into English, with commentary.

Lewis, Nicola Denzey. *Introduction to "Gnosticism": Ancient Voices, Christian Worlds*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Useful, student-friendly introduction to the major issues and documents associated with the label "gnosticism."

Magness, Jodi. *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls.* Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. Introduction to the world behind the Dead Sea Scrolls by a leading archaeologist.

Meyer, Marvin, ed. *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts Complete in One Volume.* San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009. The most up-to-date, definitive translation of the Nag Hammadi texts available in English.

Skinner, Christopher W. *What Are They Saying about the Gospel of Thomas?* Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012. Overview of recent scholarly opinion on three important questions: Thomas's date, relationship to the NT, and theological outlook.

VanderKam, James. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today.* Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010. A leading authority considers the story of the discovery, the community that produced the documents, the various genres and texts found, and the path to getting the scrolls published.

6

From Books to Library: The Formation of the Biblical Canons

Michael W. Holmes

This chapter is devoted to the complex topic of the **canon** of the Bible. More accurately, it is about the *canons* (plural) of the Bible, for as we have already seen in various chapters, there always has been, and still is, more than one scriptural canon. The chapter begins with the question of defining the word, looks briefly at the Jewish canons, and then examines in more depth (because of more data) the various Christian canons for both Testaments.[1]

Introductory Issues

An initial challenge when discussing canon is defining the term. Of its many meanings, two are particularly relevant for this chapter. One is canon as a rule, norm, or guide, as in Galatians 6:16, "Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule" (Greek *kanōn*). The other is a list, register, or catalog (*katalogos*).

1. This chapter is based in part on my essay "The Biblical Canon," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Used by permission of Oxford University Press. For modern canons of Scripture, see figs. 1.2–5 in ch. 1 of the present book.