

Question: Occasionally we hear of ancient documents which have been discovered that some people claim are lost books of the Bible. Why do Christians of today refuse to accept these books?

The books of our Bible were written at separate times and places. The ancient Jewish community and later the Christians gathered these manuscripts together. Then through a long, thorough process, they determined which ones should be accepted as part of the authoritative, Holy Spirit-inspired books (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). Through the centuries, questions have continued to be raised about which of these writings should have been included in or excluded from the list of authoritative writings. However, no one has been able to convince scholars in general that another document should have been accepted as part of the Bible. You can learn more about this process in books and encyclopedia articles on “the canon of the Bible.”

It was very common during the second and third Christian centuries for people to write documents they hoped would persuade others to believe their unique doctrinal and philosophical ideas. To gain acceptance for a writing, often the name of a known biblical character was attached as an acclaimed author. Among these were the writings of a group known as the Gnostics which included the *Gospel of Judas*, *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Mary*, *Gospel of the Savior* and others.

As an example of the kind information we now have about these books, consider the so-called *Gospel of Judas*. About the year 180 A.D., the respected Christian writer Irenaeus made reference to the *Gospel of Judas* in his book, *Against Heresies*. This is the earliest known reference to this document. Irenaeus was a second century bishop in Lyon, France, who had been a student of Polycarp. Polycarp had been taught by the apostle John. Irenaeus discounted the *Gospel of Judas* as a document of the “Cainites” that taught anti-Christian heresy.

Even with a limited knowledge of the ancient teachings of the Gnostics, one can see the Gnostic influence in the *Gospel of Judas* (An English translation is available on the Internet.). The Gnostics believed that only pure spirit is good and that all physical matter is evil. Thus, this gospel suggests that by betraying Jesus to death Judas freed him from the evil body that held him back. It claims that Jesus said to Judas, “But

you will exceed all of them. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me” (The *Gospel of Judas*). Not only is this Gnostic doctrine, but it is also very inconsistent with the teachings of the accepted writings of the Bible.

The only copy of the *Gospel of Judas* available today was discovered in 1970 in Egypt. It was written in the ancient Coptic language and not in Greek as were the other books of the New Testament. After years of study, scholars have finally authenticated it as an ancient document from about A.D. 300. Even non-Christian scholars agree that the *Gospel of Judas* was written long after the death of Judas. It is a fake writing of more recent origin and is not an actual book by the Judas who betrayed Jesus.

A similar story lies behind each of the above mentioned gospels. Such inconsistencies are not found among the sixty-six books that have been accepted as the Bible for nearly 2,000 years. That is why Christians today do not accept the so-called “lost books of the Bible.” Those who claim there are additional books of the Bible are either uninformed of the real nature of these books or else they are trying to discredit the accepted books of the Bible.

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