

## *Why are Some Books of the Bible Missing?*

If you hear a lie often enough it begins to seem like the truth. Periodically, supermarket tabloids headline the discovery of missing books of the Bible. The headline grabs our attention and may even sell some newspapers when it screams that Lost Books of the Bible Have Been Found. You wonder what that's all about. You may even think it's true until you scan down the page and see another article about Bill Clinton running against Gerald Ford to be the dog catcher for San Francisco. Then you wonder about the credibility of the entire publication.

The idea of missing Bible books received extra attention in 2004 when sales of *The DaVinci Code* by Dan Brown began skyrocketing. This book claims that everything written inside is fact. Then it goes on to make preposterous statements that would make even a novice historian cringe. For example, it says on page 231, "More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion." The truth is that any credible scholar will tell you that the total of everything anyone has ever alleged to be a gospel, even if only a scrap of paper and one sentence long, wouldn't come up to half of eighty.

Our purpose here is not to linger on all the mistakes and misinformation in *The DaVinci Code*, however. Actually, awhile back a couple thousand people gathered at Wooddale Church to hear a detailed response to *The DaVinci Code*. I just mention the book because it raises

once again our strange Bible question for today: Why are some books of the Bible missing? In order to answer the question, let's break it down into four different questions. The first question is: What is the Bible?

The word "Bible" comes from the Greek word "biblos". Originally that meant "papyrus" or "paper". Later it came to mean "book" and eventually it referred to "The Book". In many ways, a better name would be "library" because the Bible is a library of 66 separate books written by 40+ authors over a period of about 1,500 years.

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If you have a Bible, open it to the Table of Contents in the front. You will see that the Bible is divided into two parts: The Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament contains 39 books written to Jewish readers from 1500-400 BC. Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. The order is different from the Jewish order of the books, but the content is the same. Genesis through Job is mostly history. Psalms is all music or hymns; it's the hymnal of the nation of Israel. Proverbs through the Song of Solomon is wisdom literature or sayings. Isaiah through Malachi is mostly speeches and predictions from prophets.

The New Testament contains 27 books written mostly to Christians during the first century AD. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are four different biographies of Jesus. The book of Acts is the history of the early church. Romans through Revelation are all letters written to churches or individuals to teach them about Christian faith and life. Almost all of the New Testament was written in Greek.

At first these books were written on scrolls that were individually copied and circulated. They were read aloud in synagogues and churches. Through the centuries, chapters and verses were added and the books were translated into many languages, including English, and bound into single volumes.

Until the 16<sup>th</sup> century invention of the printing press, Bibles were relatively rare and most people were illiterate. The Bible was learned through reading, teaching, memorization and art. Only highly educated people had actual Bibles they could read.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the Bible has been translated and printed into more languages by far than any other piece of literature in all of human history so that most people in the world can have access to it.

The Old Testament is the sacred writing for Jews. The Old and New Testaments are sacred writings to Christians and Muslims.

That gives a brief overview of what the Bible is and leads us to a second question: So what's left out? What are people talking about when they talk about missing books of the Bible?

There certainly was other religious literature written by Jews and Christians that was not included in the Bible. These are the so-called "missing books" of the Bible, although they have never been missing. They have been read by scholars in libraries for thousands of years and have been translated into English and readily available to us all our lives.

To understand some of the terms describing literature in and out of the Bible, let's begin with a few easy words we've already used and then add some words that will test your pronunciation: Bible; Old Testament; New Testament; Homologoumena; Antilegomena; Apocrypha; and, Pseudepigrapha.

Let's expand some of our vocabularies and understanding of biblical and non-biblical writing with the last four words on our list.

Homologoumena means to "say the same thing." The "homo" in the first part of the word means "the same" and the last part of the word means "saying". So, it's saying the same thing.

These are the books of the Old Testament and New Testaments that scholars, leaders and churches have universally agreed belong in the Bible. The list includes 34 of the 39 Old Testament books (all but Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Ezekiel and Proverbs). The list also includes 20 of the 27 New Testament books (all but Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, Jude and Revelation). In other words, there has been a long and wide agreement by Jews and Christians as to what belongs in the Bible and what doesn't.

The antilegomena are the books of the Bible that some Jews and Christians disputed (spoke against) or were undecided about belonging in the Bible. The term comes from the early church historian Eusebius. They include Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Ezekiel, Proverbs, Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation. Let's take a quick look at why some of these books were disputed.

Does anyone want to guess why some people opposed the inclusion of Song of Solomon in the Bible? If you guessed "sex", you are right. Those who wanted Song of Solomon to be in-

cluded argued that the book is about a wholesome God-ordained marriage relationship.

Those who oppose Esther being in the Bible say that the name of God never appears once in the book of Esther. Others give good explanations including the fact that God's power and providence are obvious even if he isn't named.

Proverbs was opposed by some because a few of the Proverbs seem contradictory. But, defenders say that seemingly contradictory proverbs simply apply to different situations.

There was a controversy in the early Christian church over Hebrews because nothing in Hebrews indicates who the author was, so that raised doubts. Many believed that St. Paul wrote Hebrews and they easily included it in the New Testament.

The controversy over the book of James related to its teaching about good works. It is argued that the message doesn't seem adequately consistent with the teaching of St. Paul that salvation is by grace. In fact, when Martin Luther translated the Bible into German he put James at the end of the New Testament to indicate it had lesser importance.

Second Peter, by far, has been the most questioned and attacked of all of the books in the Bible. The reason is that it has a very different literary style than 1 Peter. That raised doubts about its authenticity and authorship. But that argument doesn't necessarily stand. An author can use different writing styles on different occasions. There is a difference if you are a lawyer writing a brief for court or a love letter to your husband or wife.

Jude was criticized because it quotes books that were left out of the Old Testament. That worried some early readers.

The book of Revelation was initially accepted by Christians and churches as part of the New Testament, but a couple of hundred years later some decided they didn't like the teaching about a 1,000 year reign of Jesus over the earth and they tried to dump Revelation from the Bible. It didn't work. Revelation stuck.

Let's move on to the Apocrypha. These are books of Hebrew religious writing that are included in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church Bibles. The word means "hidden" or "secret" although there really isn't much hidden or secret about them. They were mostly written between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament.

The original King James Version of the English Bible included these 15 books. They were: The Wisdom of Solomon (written about 30 BC); Ecclesiasticus (132 BC); Tobit (c. 200 BC); Judith (150 BC); 1 Esdras (c. 150-100); 1 Maccabees (c. 110 BC); 2 Maccabees (110-70 BC); Baruch (c. 150-50 BC); Letter of Jeremiah (c. 300-100 BC); 2 Esdras (c. AD100); additions to Esther (140-130 BC); Prayer of Azariah (2<sup>nd</sup> or 1st century BC); Susanna (2<sup>nd</sup> or 1st century BC); Bel and the Dragon (c. 100 BC); and the Prayer of Manasseh (2<sup>nd</sup> or 1st century BC).

Two important observations: 1.) The Apocrypha have never been accepted by Jews as belonging in the Old Testament; and 2.) The Apocrypha are basically history and literature but they are not particularly contradictory of the rest of the Bible.

You can probably figure out what the word Pseudepigrapha means. “Pseudo” means “fake” and the rest of the word means “writings”. These are writings that no one ever seriously considered to be part of the Bible. These are writings where heretics have tried to use the credibility of someone who has been dead for hundreds of years by making up writings that were attributed to them to teach particular heresies. In other instances, they were simply religious writings by early Christians. Some lists include as many as 280 titles. Sample titles include: The Gospel of Thomas; the Gospel of Peter; the Gospel of the Egyptians; the Gospel of Nicodemus; the History of Joseph the Carpenter; the Passing of Mary; the Epistle of Paul to the Laodiceans; and the Six Letters of Paul to Seneca (written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD).

In addition to all of this, Christians have written devotionals, biographies, sermons and other books since the first century. We do the same today. Our bookstores and libraries are full of Christian literature. Sometimes we even print what we write inside our Bibles (look at the introductions to each book in your own Bible). But we don’t think that’s supposed to be part of the Bible, although someone could possibly make that mistake. Some of this literature is very good and some of it is very bad.

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God is not keeping parts of the  
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For example, two of the most popular early church books outside the New Testament were the Didache (Teaching of the Twelve), written around AD 100-120, and Shepherd of Hermes, written later in the first century. The Didache was used for church catechisms and for indoctrinating and teaching people about Christian theology. Shepherd of Hermes was more of a devotional book.

The important point here is to distinguish between the Bible and other literature. Every once in awhile I upset someone because I quote from a current book or newspaper they don’t like or even from ancient writings like the Apocrypha. They think that quoting something endorses the entire book. They say it’s dangerous to quote something that contains error.

The Bible often quotes from secular, religious and even pagan literature to make a point. Here are some examples: Numbers 24:7 quotes a pagan prophet; Jude 14-15 quotes from the Pseudepigraphical Book of Enoch; Joshua 10:13 quotes the “Book of Jashar”; Acts 17:28 quotes the heathen poet Aratus; 1 Corinthians 15:33 quotes the heathen poet Menander; Titus 1:12 quotes the heathen poet Epimenedes; and if that doesn’t impress you, Numbers 22:28 quotes from a donkey. (Just because the Bible quotes from a donkey doesn’t mean that it endorses everything every donkey ever says!)

All of this is to say that lots of literature has been written and read but that doesn’t mean that it belongs in the Bible or was ever part of the Bible. There are no missing books. The Bible consists of the 66 books that are in it. All this other literature may be interesting or even helpful but it’s not part of the Bible (and it was never missing!).

If all these other writings were omitted, how did some books get into the Bible? It’s a question that deserves more than a three minute answer. We have plenty of books and classes to explain all the details, so let me give you the really quick version.

The Bible starts with God. He decides what to include. He breathes his truth into what is written. 2 Peter 1:21 says, “*For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke*

*from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*” Prophecy refers to telling forth God’s truth. The Bible did not originate in a human mind or decision. The Bible is God’s book.

God started it and then God chose 40+ human authors over a 1500 year period to write his truths through their personalities, languages and styles. The Bible is a very human book.

The books that became part of the Bible were chosen by community recognition. The Jewish nation and the Christian church recognized and ratified what God originated and men wrote. They didn’t determine what is in the Bible; they recognized what is in the Bible. God helped the nation of Israel and he helped the church to get it right.

Maybe all of this seems like a lot of information overload—more than you ever wanted to know. What’s the point of the Bible, anyway? The point of the Bible is not to answer all of our questions. I have plenty of questions that aren’t answered in the Bible. The point of the Bible is not to include all religious writings. Most religious writings are not in the Bible; the Bible is highly selective. The point of the Bible is not to create a sacred book to be worshiped. The point of the Bible is not even to tell us everything about God and Jesus. What the Bible tells us is only a small fraction of the information about God and Jesus.

The point of the Bible is for us to know God through belief in Jesus and thereby to have eternal life. Know God. Believe in Jesus. Have eternal life. John 20:31 says, *“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*

So the Bible is not an end in itself. The Bible is a means to the end of knowing God. Every book and every word is to teach us about God. Our heart is primarily for God not the Bible. When we read the Bible it is not primarily to learn the stories, count the books or learn about prophecy.

The Bible is God’s gift to us so that we can know him. *“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.”*

God is not playing games with us. God is not keeping parts of the Bible secret or hidden. There are no books missing from the Bible. It’s all here. He has not withheld sections of the Bible from past generations. He’s not asking us to become private investigators. He has wonderfully given to us the Old and New Testaments so that *“we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name.”*

Think of life as a road trip with God as the destination. Along the way there are signs that point to God. Those signs are in the Bible. All we need to do is follow the signs. God has given all the signs we need to get us to where he wants us to go.

There are plenty of other signs besides God’s signs. Some of them are helpful and some of them are distracting. It is okay to read the other signs, but be sure not to follow them and get lost. There are even some vandals who twist and turn God’s signs to mislead us along the way. That’s why we need to keep checking all the signs by the Bible.

A children’s Sunday School song says, *“The B-I-B-L-E, yes that’s the book for me!”* May this be true for all of us who seek to know and love God through his book: The B-I-B-L-E, yes that’s the book for me!

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