

September 2016

The Gospels of Judas, Peter, and Thomas: Is Their Exclusion from the Canon Merited?

David Heady

Liberty University Online, dheady@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/djrc>

Recommended Citation

Heady, David (2016) "The Gospels of Judas, Peter, and Thomas: Is Their Exclusion from the Canon Merited?," *Diligence: Journal of the Liberty University Online Religion Capstone in Research and Scholarship*: Vol. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/djrc/vol1/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Divinity at Scholars Crossing. It has been accepted for inclusion in Diligence: Journal of the Liberty University Online Religion Capstone in Research and Scholarship by an authorized editor of Scholars Crossing. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu.

The Gospels of Peter, Judas, and Thomas:
Is Their Exclusion from the Canon Merited?

David Heady

RLGN 490-D01: Research and Scholarly Capstone

April 24, 2017

Introduction

Throughout all human history, tension has existed between truth and error. When God placed humanity in Eden, He instructed, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17).¹ Not long after this, Satan came and flatly contradicted God by saying, “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4b). In that moment, mankind was faced with the choice to believe either God or the serpent. All human history has been marred by the effects of the choice made that day.

While the ages have passed and times have changed, Satan’s attack on God’s truth has in no way subsided. Although he might not take on the form of a serpent and verbally challenge the veracity of God’s truth, this in no way precludes his deceitful agenda. Similarly, despite the fact that God no longer physically walks with and audibly talks to humanity, He has nevertheless made His truth available in the form of His written Word. Hence, Satan’s attacks on God’s truth in the modern setting primarily take the form of undermining God’s written (rather than spoken) Word.

One way Satan has attempted to undermine God’s Word has been by trying to introduce error into the canon of Scripture. Since the time of the first-century church, many writings have claimed to be Scripture; however, only twenty-seven have found their way into the canon. Those that have been rejected access into the canon are designated as *apocryphal*. The apocryphal writings take many forms, some of which include apocryphal gospels, epistles, and acts. The *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* explains, “When the term *apokruphos* occurs in the NT, it simply means ‘hidden things’.”² However, it goes on to explain, “In the formation of the

¹ Scripture quotations are from The English Standard Version Bible, Crossway, 2001.

² Chad Brand, ed., et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Holman, 2003), s.vv. “Apocrypha, New Testament.”

Christian canon of Scripture, ‘apocrypha’ came to mean works that were not divinely inspired and authoritative.”³ Three of the most popular apocryphal works are the gospels of Judas, Peter, and Thomas. They will be compared and contrasted with the canonical Gospels to determine if their exclusion is justified. After examining the most basic characteristics of the canonical Gospels, such as dates of origin, authorship, and coherence of material, it would appear that these three apocryphal gospels do not merit inclusion into the canon of Scripture.

Delimitations

It is no secret that, “Historically, Protestant theology has embraced the Bible as the standard and authority of belief and practice,” as John Peckham points out.⁴ Therefore, the process of granting a writing entrance into the canon is of the utmost importance. Volumes have been written concerning canonical models. Canonical models are essentially the rationale used to determine a writing’s canonicity. About 35 years ago, Brevard Childs asserted, “The problem of canon turns on the failure to reach an agreement regarding the terminology.”⁵ Peckham argues, “The fundamental question is whether the canon is determined by humans or by God.”⁶ He concludes that everyone in this debate falls into one of the following two groups: those who believe “the canonization of Scripture to be something officially or authoritatively imposed upon certain literature” and those who believe “that the canon was not determined, but recognized.”⁷ B. B. Warfield’s comments represent the latter view. He says, “The Canon of the New Testament

³ Ibid.

⁴ John C. Peckham, “The Canon and Biblical Authority: A Critical Comparison of Two Models of Canonicity,” *Trinity Journal* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 229. Accessed March 31, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/trinj28-2-05?highlight=canon>.

⁵ Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, PA: Augsburg Fortress, 2011), 51.

⁶ Peckham, “The Canon and Biblical Authority,” 229.

⁷ Ibid., 230.

was completed when the last authoritative book was given to any church by the apostles, and that was when John wrote the apocalypse, about A.D. 98.”⁸ Michael Kruger’s comments have been very helpful in the discussion of canon. He has argued that one’s definition of canon should be multifaceted in that it entails exclusive,⁹ functional,¹⁰ and ontological¹¹ elements. This is due to the fact that

While the exclusive definition correctly reminds us that a general consensus on the boundaries of the canon was not achieved until the Fourth Century, it can give the misleading impression that there was little agreement over the core books prior to this time period. While the functional definition correctly reminds us that New Testament books served as an authoritative norm at quite an early time, it still does not address what these books are in and of themselves. While the ontological definition brings the necessary balance to both of these approaches—offering a reminder that these books do not *become* canonical simply by the actions of the church—it too cannot stand alone. To have only the ontological definition would lead us to wrongly conclude that these books were basically lowered from heaven as a completed canon with no development or history in the real world. Ironically, then, perhaps the debate over canon is best addressed not by choosing one definition, but by allowing for the legitimacy of multiple definitions that interface with one another. If canon is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, then perhaps it is best defined in a multi-dimensional fashion.¹²

Regardless of one’s canonical model, whether it be simple or sophisticated, the fact remains that the canon exists. Furthermore, the writings contained therein hold certain common characteristics. Therefore, if additional writings are to be added to the existing canon, they must also share those common characteristics.

⁸ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1980), 415.

⁹ Michael J. Kruger, “The Definition of the Term ‘Canon:’ Exclusive or Multidimensional?” *Tyndale Bulletin* 63, no. 1 (NA, 2012): 3. Accessed April 2, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/tyndbul63-1-01?highlight=canon>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, 20.

Dates of Origin

The date of origin is a crucially important criterion for determining canonicity. This is because the Gospels have traditionally been believed to be eye-witness testimonies that pertain to the life and teachings of Christ. Richard Bauckham affirms this when he says, “The Gospels are testimony. This does not mean that they are testimony rather than history. It means that the kind of historiography they are is testimony.”¹³ For this to be possible, the author would have to have been alive during Jesus’ ministry or have interviewed someone who was. The later the writing’s origin, the less plausible this would be. As Kruger points out, “Given that there are very few extant Christian writings outside the New Testament that can reasonably be dated to the first century, there simply are not many other potential candidates for canonicity.”¹⁴

Canonical Gospel of Matthew

Suggestions regarding Matthew’s date of origin have undergone a significant shift in the last 20 years. It was previously believed with relative certainty that Matthew composed his Gospel after 70 A.D. This was primarily due to critical scholars positing that Matthew could not have had knowledge of the temple’s impending destruction.¹⁵ However, the patristic witnesses

¹³ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company), 15. Accessed May 6, 2017. <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzEwNTg1MTZfX0FO0?sid=00f5ecb6-4ff8-4bbb-8519-313a5cdd454d@sessionmgr102&vid=2&format=EK&rid=1>

¹⁴ Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 121. Accessed April 8, 2017. <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1140484&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

¹⁵ Andy M. Woods, “The Purpose of Matthew’s Gospel: Part 1,” *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 11, no. 33 (August, 2007): 13-14. Accessed April 5, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/jodt11-33-01?highlight=%22Date%22%20Gospels%20gospel%20matthew%20mark%20luke%20john>.

place the date of origin prior to 70 A.D. Andy Woods points out, “Irenaeus. . . says that the book was written during Nero’s reign while Peter and Paul were in Rome. Since these apostles were martyred in AD 67–68, the book obviously had to have been written prior to this time.”¹⁶ Woods personally favors a Matthean priority and therefore states, “A date of AD 45–50 for the composition of Matthew’s Gospel seems appropriate.”¹⁷ Based on the sources consulted, this would seem to be the current consensus among conservative New Testament scholars.

Canonical Gospel of Mark

A great deal of debate has existed about Markan priority. It is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt to settle this dispute, especially considering that Markan priority does not affect its date of origin as much as it does Matthew and Luke’s. The consensus among conservative scholars would seem to be that Mark was composed sometime in 60-70 A.D. This is based primarily on two elements. First, early church tradition strongly affirms that Mark was written while Peter was in Rome during Nero’s persecution, which is historically dated 64-68 A.D.¹⁸ Furthermore, C. A. Evans argues, “Careful study of Mark 13 and a few related passages suggests that the Gospel of Mark was published in the early stages of the Jewish war with Rome (AD 66-70).”¹⁹

Canonical Gospel of Luke

Like Matthew’s, Luke’s date of origin hinges on the priority of Mark. If Mark is given priority, it is assumed that Luke was written sometime very soon after (i.e. late 60s to early 70s

¹⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Brand, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s.vv. “Mark, Gospel of.”

¹⁹ T. Desmond Alexander, ed., et al., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000) s.v. “Mark.”

A.D.). However, if Matthew is given priority, an early 60s A.D. date of origin is generally favored. It seems also that the absence of certain facts from Luke's gospel favors an earlier date. These absent facts include the persecution of Nero, the death of Peter and Paul, the revolt of the Jews, and the destruction of the temple. Given the absence of the facts, "It seems best, then, to date the writing of Luke somewhere between A.D. 61 and 63."²⁰

Canonical Gospel of John

Like Matthew, John is another Gospel whose date of origin is under reconsideration. For many years, the favored date of John has been 80-90 A.D. However, many scholars have lately begun to favor an earlier date. Thomas Stegall points out, "Though the later-date position in the 80s-90s is still the majority opinion among Johannine commentators and scholars, there have been several scholars in the last century who have made an equally plausible case for an earlier pre-A.D. 70 date."²¹ He points out that it seems unreasonable to think that had John penned his Gospel after 70 A.D. He would have excluded the account of the temple's destruction from it.²² After a lengthy presentation of the data supporting the different dates of origin, he concludes, "The existing evidence reasonably eliminates any possible dates that fall outside the range of roughly the 60s-90s A.D., with the weight of evidence slightly favoring a date before A.D. 70."²³

Hence, there are differing opinions regarding the specific dates of origin for each of the canonical Gospels. However, the point of convergence would seem to be that they all very likely

²⁰ Brand, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s.vv. "Luke, Gospel of."

²¹ Thomas L. Stegall, "Reconsidering the Date of John's Gospel," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 14, no. 2 (Fall, 2009): 83. Accessed April 6, 2017.

<http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/cts14-2-04?highlight=%22Date%22%20Gospels%20gospel%20matthew%20mark%20luke%20john>.

²² *Ibid.*, 84.

²³ *Ibid.*, 102.

could have been written in the first century. This would allow for them to have been written by someone who had been an eyewitness to Christ's ministry or someone who had interviewed just such a person.

Apocryphal Gospel of Peter

No small amount of literature has been written pertaining to the apocryphal gospel of Peter. While a few attempts have been made to place its date of origin into the first century, they have generally been met with great resistance from scholars of a wide variety. Bart Ehrman states, "There are reasons for dating the text to a period after the canonical Gospels, probably sometime in the beginning or middle of the second century."²⁴ On this point, Dr. Ehrman and Dr. Kruger agree. Kruger affirms, "Its [Gospel of Peter] composition dates from [*sic*] the middle of the second century, most likely in Syria."²⁵ Paul Foster goes even further by affirmatively stating, "Theories that attempt to press the text of the Gospel of Peter, or a source embedded within it, back into the first century are not sustainable. The text is best understood as a reflection on canonical traditions, and it also demonstrates theological trajectories that are part of later Christianity."²⁶ Hence, it would appear that the gospel of Peter could not have been written by someone who had walked with Christ or who had interviewed someone who had.

²⁴ Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše. *Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 376. Accessed April 6, 2017. <http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=10521082>.

²⁵ Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 329.

²⁶ Paul Foster, "The Gospel of Peter," *The Expository Times* 118, no. 7 (July, 2016): 324. Accessed April 6, 2017. <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177%2F0014524607077127>.

Apocryphal Gospel of Judas

The apocryphal gospel of Judas has also received a vast amount of attention in the world of New Testament studies. While opinions may vary about many aspects of the gospel of Judas, its date of origin is not one of them. Patristic interaction with this gospel has led scholars to place its date of origin somewhere in the 140-220 A.D. range. Ehrman has posited, “Since the book had been in circulation before it came to Irenaeus’s attention, a date of 140–150 CE seems plausible.”²⁷ Foster has come to similar conclusions and asserts, “The first edition of the Gospel of Judas was almost certainly written in Greek, probably sometime between 140 and 200 ce.”²⁸ Simon Gathercole, based on a lengthy examination of the gospel of Judas and of Gnosticism in the first three centuries, feels that the apocryphal gospel of Judas shares strong similarities with other gnostic literature written from the mid-second to early-third centuries; therefore, “Sometime between 140 and 220 is a reasonable estimate of when the original Greek text of the Gospel of Judas was composed.”²⁹

Apocryphal Gospel of Thomas

Perhaps the most famous of all the apocryphal works is the gospel of Thomas. Indeed, admission into the canon has been argued for more strongly for the gospel of Thomas than for any other apocryphal work. As is the case with Peter and Judas, the general consensus is that Thomas originated in the mid-to-late second century.³⁰ After an in-depth analysis of and

²⁷ Ehrman, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 390.

²⁸ Paul Foster, *The Non-Canonical Gospels* (New York City, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008), 86. Accessed April 8, 2017. <http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=10427233&ppg=1>.

²⁹ Simon Gathercole, *The Gospel of Judas: Rewriting Early Christianity* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 140. Accessed April 8, 2017.

<http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=10199724&ppg=1>.

³⁰ Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 328.

comparison between Tatian's *Diatessaron* and the gospel of Thomas, Nicholas Perrin concludes that Thomas "was written in Syriac, as a piece, showing dependence on the first Syriac gospel record, Tatian's *Diatessaron* (c. AD 173)."³¹ Joshua Jipp, through examination of the early church's distancing from Judaism, comes to a similar conclusion. He explains, "Based on the texts examined above that demonstrate a strong disassociation of Christianity from its Jewish heritage, it is safe to conclude that Gos. Thom. should be dated somewhere between the end of the first century at the earliest and the mid second century at the latest."³² Based on arguments of this nature, John Jelinek states, "The burden of proof falls upon those who desire to reject the traditional date for the book (140 A.D.) and thus prove an earlier setting for Thomas."³³

Therefore, to give any one of these three apocryphal works canonical status would set a precedent. It would be the only book in the canon to have a date of origin that is not just in the second century but is well into it. However, if other compelling reasons for allowing its entrance were evident, perhaps the date of origin could be overlooked. One such reason could be authorship.

³¹ Nicholas Perrin, "Thomas: The Fifth Gospel?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 1 (March, 2006): 69. Accessed April 3, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/jets49-1-05?highlight=%22Gospel%20of%20Thomas%22>.

³² Joshua W. Jipp, "Dating Thomas: Logion 53 as a Test Case for Dating the Gospel of Thomas within an Early Christian Trajectory," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20, no. 2 (NA, 2010): 254. Accessed April 3, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/bbr20-2-05?highlight=%22Gospel%20of%20Thomas%22>.

³³ John A. Jelinek, "The Parable of the Lost Sheep in the Gospel of Thomas," *Michigan Theological Journal* 5, no. 1 (Spring, 1994): 55. Accessed, April 3, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/mtj05-1-02?highlight=%22Gospel%20of%20Thomas%22>.

Authorship

While in theory God could use anyone to compose His Word, there is an observable pattern in the men God used to write the twenty-seven books of the New Testament canon. All of the New Testament authors were either disciples of Christ, disciples of the apostles, or apostles. This position is strongly supported by evidence from the books themselves and by the testimony of the early church fathers.³⁴

Canonical Gospel

The early church fathers give strong affirmation of the canonical Gospels being written by the men whose names are assigned to them. The patristic affirmation of Matthew, the tax-collector and disciple of Christ, as the author of the Gospel of Matthew is compelling. It is so compelling that Andy Woods points out, “The virtual unanimous voice of the early church is that Matthew is the book’s author.”³⁵ Given this fact, one wonders how this strong tradition could have developed if it were not true. It seems that, somewhere along the line, if there were any reason to doubt the book’s authenticity, one of the church fathers would have; however, that doubt is nowhere to be found until the Age of the Enlightenment. While patristic affirmation of Mark authoring the book that carries his name might not be as unanimous as with Matthew, it is nonetheless still very strong. Black explains, “Tradition asserts explicitly that Mark is the result of a series of lectures given by Peter in Rome to a distinguished audience that included a number of high-ranking officers from the Roman Praetorium.”³⁶ As Peter’s companion and fellow

³⁴ David Alan Black, “The Historical Origins of the Gospels,” *Faith and Mission* 18, no. 1 (Fall, 2000): 21-38. Accessed April 5, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/fm18-1-02?highlight=%22Date%22%20Gospels%20gospel%20matthew%20mark%20luke%20john>.

³⁵ Woods, “The Purpose of Matthew’s Gospel,” 5.

³⁶ Black, “The Historical Origins of the Gospels,” 36.

laborer, Mark, led by the Holy Spirit, recorded the words of Peter as he shared the story of Jesus at Rome. Matthew and Mark are not the only canonical Gospels that the early church fathers wrote about, though. Second-century lists of sacred books “dating from between A.D. 160 and 190 agree that Luke, the physician and companion of Paul, wrote the Gospel of Luke,” according to Brand.³⁷ Of all the canonical Gospels, John’s authorship is probably the least well-supported in the patristic writings. Despite this fact, “There is good reason for thinking that John wrote it and that he was the beloved disciple who leaned on Jesus’ breast.”³⁸ Bauckham explains that, when we “take into account that the identity of the Beloved Disciple was certainly known to some of the Gospel’s first hearers or readers. . . then it becomes very likely that, when the Gospel first circulated beyond the Christian community in which it was written, it was accompanied by at least oral information as to its author and that the ascription of the Gospel to John is correct.”³⁹

Apocryphal Gospels

The Apocryphal gospels do not share the strong affirmation of authorship among the patristic writers with the canonical Gospels. In fact, it is quite difficult to find information pertaining to their authorship. For example,⁴⁰ Kruger points out, “The broad consensus is that *Thomas* was written. . . by an unknown author (certainly not the apostle Thomas).” That is not to say that the patristic writers do not mention them. However, the discussion largely centers on their content rather than their source. Unfortunately, a great deal of uncertainty surrounds the

³⁷ Brand, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s.vv. “Luke, Gospel of.”

³⁸ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), s.v. “John, Theology of.”

³⁹ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 425.

⁴⁰ Kruger, *Cannon Revisited*, 328.

authors of these works. Based on that ambiguity, it would seem unwise to grant them a place in the New Testament canon.

Coherence of Material

One aspect of Scripture that affirms its divine origin is its coherence. Only through the active work of God could multiple men write multiple books in multiple languages, on multiple continents, over the span of multiple centuries to produce such a unified and cohesive work. Therefore, if a work were to be added to the canon, it would have to reflect that same level of cohesiveness with the other books already in the canon. A brief overview of the content of the apocryphal works in question will reveal if they pass the cohesion test.

Apocryphal Gospel of Peter

One way that Scripture exhibits cohesion is through fulfilled prophecy. In the opening verse of Psalm 22, the author writes, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Kenneth Fleming explains, “Psalm 22 is the great psalm of the suffering Savior and one of the central passages on the atonement in the Old Testament.”⁴¹ Matthew’s and Mark’s Gospels both record Christ reciting these words while he was on the cross (Matt. 27:46, Mark 15:34). Richard Patterson highlights the importance of this recitation, “By citing the opening verse of Psalm 22, Jesus was inviting all to understand His divine mission and His intense struggle as the God-man.”⁴² However, the gospel of Peter recounts a slightly different expression coming from

⁴¹ Kenneth C. Fleming, “The Suffering and Glory of the Lord Jesus Christ,” *Emmaus Journal* 7, no. 2 (Winter, 1998): 145. Accessed April 15, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/emj07-2-01>.

⁴² Richard D. Patterson, “From Trial to Triumph,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 2 (June, 2004): 229. Accessed April 15, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/jets47-2-02>.

Christ, “And the Lord cried out, ‘My power, O power, you have left me behind!’”⁴³ It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in depth the implications of this change. However, it does demonstrate a lack of cohesion between the gospel of Peter and the canonical Gospels.

Apocryphal Gospel of Judas

The gospel of Judas represents an even greater problem with cohesion. According to Ehrman, “What was most striking to the scholars who first investigated the text is that Judas is given such a high profile in the account. He alone among the disciples is portrayed as recognizing who Jesus really is (he is not from the world of the creator).”⁴⁴ Now, contrast that “high profile” of Judas from his gospel with Judas’ “profile” in the canonical Gospels. He is portrayed as a traitor, (Matthew 26:14-16, 23-5, Mark 14:10-11) possessed by Satan, (Luke 22:3-6, John 13:27) a devil, (John 6:70-71) and controlled by the Devil (John 13:2). This perhaps leads Gathercole to conclude that, of all the antagonists in the story of Christ’s life, the “worst offender is one of his own disciples— Judas Iscariot.”⁴⁵

Apocryphal Gospel of Thomas

While the gospel of Judas presented greater difficulty with cohesion than did the gospel of Peter, the gospel of Thomas presents even greater difficulty. First, unlike the canonical Gospels, the gospel of Thomas is not a narrative. Rather, it is a collection of Christ’s supposed sayings. While some of these sayings are very similar to the words of Christ as found in the Canonical Gospels, many of them are startlingly different. The result is a Christ quite different from the one found in the canonical accounts. Kruger points out, “The book has a strong Gnostic

⁴³ Ehrman, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 381.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 390.

⁴⁵ Gathercole, *The Gospel of Judas*, 11.

flavor throughout, advocating a Jesus less concerned with showing that he is divine and more concerned with teaching us to find the divine spark within ourselves.”⁴⁶ William Lane goes even farther in his assertion by saying, “Far from being Synoptic in character, is thoroughly gnostic.”⁴⁷ Still others passionately warn, “The so-called Gospel of Thomas is shot through with Gnostic philosophy.”⁴⁸ Therefore, it would seem that the gospel of Thomas, like Peter and Judas, would damage the cohesiveness of the canon if they were granted entrance therein.

Conclusion

Until Christ returns, Satan will continue to actively work to undermine the Word of God. Mankind will be forced on a daily basis to choose between truth and error. This paper has made no attempt to critique the different canonical models. Rather, it has recognized the clear existence of a well-established canon. Furthermore, it has attempted to demonstrate that the books contained in the canon possess certain qualities and characteristics. Therefore, it is only logical that, if a book is to be added, it must also possess those qualities and characteristics. At face value, the gospels of Peter, Judas, and Thomas do not seem to meet those minimum requirements. While the exact date of their origins is unknown, scholars can tell that they originated significantly later than the canonical Gospels. For the most part, their authors are unknown while the authors of the canonical gospels are fairly well documented by the early

⁴⁶ Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 328.

⁴⁷ William L. Lane, “A Critique of Purportedly Authentic Agrapha,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 18, no. 1 (Winter, 1975): 34. Accessed April 3, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/jets18-1-03?highlight=%22Gospel%20of%20Thomas%22>.

⁴⁸ William Lane Craig, “Rediscovering the Historical Jesus: Presuppositions and Pretensions of the Jesus Seminar,” *Faith and Mission* 15, no. 2 (Spring, 1998): 8. Accessed April 6, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/fm15-2-01?highlight=%22Date%22%20%22gospel%20of%20Philip%22>.

church fathers. Most importantly, their message is not cohesive with the message of the canonical Gospels. It seems clear that the exclusion of the apocryphal gospels of Judas, Peter, and Thomas from the canon is merited.

God takes His Word very seriously. In the closing verses of Revelation, John gives this sober warning, “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book” (Revelation 22:18-19). For the past two centuries, Christ’s bride has carefully guarded His Word. If He tarries, she must continue to do so in the years, decades, and centuries to follow.

Bibliography

- Alexander, T. Desmond, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy, eds. *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000.
- Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006. Accessed May 6, 2017. <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzEwNTg1MTZfX0FO0?sid=00f5ecb6-4ff8-4bbb-8519-313a5cdd454d@sessionmgr102&vid=2&format=EK&rid=1>
- Black, David Alan. "The Historical Origins of the Gospels." *Faith and Mission* 18, no. 1 (Fall, 2000): 21-38. Accessed April 5, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/fm18-1-02?highlight=%22Date%22%20Gospels%20gospel%20matthew%20mark%20luke%20john>.
- Brand, Chad, Charles Draper, Archie England, Steve Bond, E. Ray Clendenen, Trent C. Butler, and Bill Latta, eds. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Rev. ed. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003.
- Childs, Brevard S. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. 1979. Reprint, Philadelphia, PA: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2011.
- Craig, William Lane. "Rediscovering the Historical Jesus: Presuppositions and Pretensions of the Jesus Seminar." *Faith and Mission* 15, no. 2 (Spring, 1998): 3-13. Accessed April 6, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/fm15-2-01?highlight=%22Date%22%20%22gospel%20of%20Philip%22>.
- Ehrman, Bart D. and Zlatko Pleše. *Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Accessed April 6, 2017. <http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=10521082>.
- Elwell, Walter A. Editor. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001.
- Fleming, Kenneth C. "The Suffering and Glory of the Lord Jesus Christ." *Emmaus Journal* 7, no. 2 (Winter, 1998): 139-156. Accessed April 15, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/emj07-2-01>.
- Foster, Paul. "The Gospel of Peter." *The Expository Times* 118, no. 7 (July, 2016): 318-325. Accessed April 6, 2017. <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177%2F0014524607077127>.

- . *The Non-Canonical Gospels*. New York City, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008. Accessed April 8, 2017. <http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=10427233&ppg=1>.
- Gathercole, Simon. *The Gospel of Judas: Rewriting Early Christianity*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. Accessed April 8, 2017. <http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=10199724&ppg=1>.
- Jelinek, John A. "The Parable of the Lost Sheep in the Gospel of Thomas." *Michigan Theological Journal* 5, no. 1 (Spring, 1994): 26-56. Accessed, April 3, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/mtj05-1-02?highlight=%22Gospel%20of%20Thomas%22>.
- Jipp, Joshua W. "Dating Thomas: Logion 53 as a Test Case for Dating the Gospel of Thomas within an Early Christian Trajectory." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20, no. 2 (NA, 2010): 237-55. Accessed April 3, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/bbr20-2-05?highlight=%22Gospel%20of%20Thomas%22>.
- Kruger, Michael J. *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012. Accessed April 8, 2017. <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1140484&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- Kruger, Michael J. "The Definition of the Term 'Canon: Exclusive or Multidimensional?'" *Tyndale Bulletin* 63, no. 1 (NA, 2012): 1-20. Accessed April 2, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/tynbul63-1-01?highlight=canon>.
- Lane, William L. "A Critique of Purportedly Authentic Agrapha." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 18, no. 1 (Winter, 1975): 29-35. Accessed April 3, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/jets18-1-03?highlight=%22Gospel%20of%20Thomas%22>.
- Patterson, Richard D. "From Trial to Triumph." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 2 (June, 2004): 213-233. Accessed April 15, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/jets47-2-02>.
- Peckham, John C. "The Canon and Biblical Authority: A Critical Comparison of Two Models of Canonicity." *Trinity Journal* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 229-49. Accessed March 31, 2017. <http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/trinj28-2-05?highlight=canon>.
- Perrin, Nicholas. "Thomas: The Fifth Gospel?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 1 (March, 2006): 67-80. Accessed April 3, 2017.

<http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/jets49-1-05?highlight=%22Gospel%20of%20Thomas%22>.

Stegall, Thomas L. "Reconsidering the Date of John's Gospel." *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 14, no. 2 (Fall, 2009): 68-102. Accessed April 6, 2017.
<http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/ctsj14-2-04?highlight=%22Date%22%20Gospels%20gospel%20matthew%20mark%20luke%20john>.

Warfield, Benjamin Breckinridge. *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. 2nd ed. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1980.

Woods, Andy M. "The Purpose of Matthew's Gospel: Part 1." *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 11, no. 33 (August, 2007): 5-19. Accessed April 5, 2017.
<http://www.galaxie.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/jodt11-33-01?highlight=%22Date%22%20Gospels%20gospel%20matthew%20mark%20luke%20john>.