

The New Testament Apocrypha

By Derek A. Shaver

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A Definitive collection of New Testament Apocrypha

The *New Testament Apocrypha* are a number of writings by early Christians that claim to be accounts of Jesus and his teachings, the nature of God, or the teachings of his apostles and of their lives. These writings often have links with books regarded as "canonical". Not every branch of the Christian church agrees on which writings should be regarded as "canonical" and which are "apocryphal". That some works are categorized as New Testament Apocrypha is indicative of the wide range of responses that were engendered in the interpretation of the message of Jesus of Nazareth. During the first several centuries of the transmission of that message, considerable debate turned on safeguarding its authenticity. Three key methods of addressing this survive to the present day: ordination, where groups authorize individuals as reliable teachers of the message; creeds, where groups define the boundaries of interpretation of the message; and canons, which list the primary documents certain groups believe contain the message originally taught by Jesus (in other words, the Bible). In general, the earliest books about Jesus were the ones included in the canons; later amplifications and variant traditions are now termed apocryphal. Some of them were vigorously suppressed and survive only as fragments. The earliest lists of canonical works of the New Testament were not quite the same as modern lists; for example, the Book of Revelation was regarded as disputed by some Christians, while *Shepherd of Hermas* was considered genuine by others, and appears (after the Book of Revelation) in the Codex Sinaiticus.

The works that presented themselves as "authentic" but that did not obtain general acceptance from within the churches are called New Testament Apocrypha. These are not accepted as canonical by most mainstream Christian denominations; only the Ethiopian Orthodox Church recognizes the *Shepherd of Hermas*, *1 Clement*, *Acts of Paul*, and several Old Testament books that most other denominations reject, but it should be noted that this church does not adhere to an explicit canon.

The Armenian Apostolic church at times has included the Third Epistle to the Corinthians, but does not always list it with the other 27 canonical New Testament books. This Church did not accept Revelation into its Bible until 1200 CE. The New Testament of the Coptic Bible, adopted by the Egyptian Church,

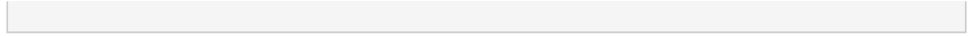
includes the two *Epistles of Clement*.

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