



No Lost Books of the Bible

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Some people claim there are 'lost books' that should have been included in the Bible. Greg says this view doesn't make sense, whether or not you think the Bible has supernatural origins.

The whole question of lost books of the Bible hinges on what the Bible is. Now the Bible can only be two things. What is it that we mean when we use the word 'Bible'? Well, a Bible is either God's supernatural Word -- God supernaturally oversees its production and its care. Or it's a statement of beliefs of the leaders of Christianity. They say 'this represents what we believe.' Disregarding any supernatural element, it's based on consensus. Let's just say we're the only Christians in the world. We say we believe in these things, but we don't believe these other things so throw them out because they don't reflect what we believe. Any group has the right to determine what it is they believe.

Now, notice that there are two ways of looking at this: a supernatural or natural perspective. I would contend that there are no other ways of looking at this question; no other options. No matter who you are out there you either think of the Bible as being God's inspired Word (most of the conservative Christian world holds this view, in some form), or the Bible is merely the statement of beliefs of the early church, without any supernatural content. Pretty much the rest of the world looks at it this way.

Now, the question of the lost books of the Bible comes up. But my problem is: how is it possible that there can be any lost books of the Bible?

Is it possible that in the first sense of the word

Bible that the books could be lost? Wait a minute, if God is supernaturally overseeing it, then God is supernaturally involved in seeing that His book gets written down and preserved. So we have God's supernatural protection if it has a supernatural quality to it. You may say that the supernatural element is bogus, but you can see that from this sense of the definition that it's not really possible to think that God could lose His own book. 'But man wrote it...!' Can you make your dog sit? Of course. If you a mere man can make your dog sit, can't an infinite God oversee the care of His Word? It doesn't matter if man or monkeys were responsible for taking care of it.

Maybe the Bible isn't supernatural, it's a statement of beliefs of the leaders of the church. Okay, if that's the case then who has the final word on which books belong in the Bible? The leaders of the early church. Therefore, by very definition any books that they cast into outer darkness are not part of the Bible. It's their decision to decide which books represent their beliefs. And if they say the Gospel of Thomas isn't our book and somebody else picks it up two thousand years later and say it's a lost book of the Bible, then it's fair to ask 'In what sense is it a lost book of the Bible?' It might be a lost book of antiquity, a great archaeological find, a wonderful piece of literature, but a lost book of the Bible? No.

The Bible has to be either a supernatural book, or a non-supernatural book. If it's supernatural -- if God is responsible for its writing, its transmission and its survival -- then God, being God, does the job right. God doesn't make mistakes, he doesn't forget things, he doesn't get confused about what is true and what is false, and He isn't absent-minded -- He doesn't lose his lessons.

If the Bible is not supernatural -- as many will contend, especially those who claim to have found lost books -- we have a different problem. By what standard do we claim these are bonafide lost books of the Bible? If, from a human perspective, the Bible is that collection of writings that reflect the beliefs of the leaders of early Christianity, then those writings they discard are not parts of the Bible by very definition. It's like writing a book of your personal beliefs from a stack of ideas you've collected over the years and then have someone rummage through your trash to find

other beliefs you didn't include and then claim that these were your secret or lost beliefs. You say, 'No, they're not my beliefs; that's why they're in the trash. If they were really mine, they'd be in the book.

The irony is that many of the the 'lost books' advocates make the point that these books they've rediscovered, books like the so-called Gospel of Thomas, were missing because the church fathers 'suppressed' them, which is another way of saying the early Christians threw them out, trashed them. And the accusation is true. They did. Critics think this strengthens their case. It doesn't; it destroys it, because it proves that these books were simply not accepted by the leaders as representative of their beliefs. So therefore it can't be their Bible.

The Jesus Seminar people are taking a little different tack. They reject the idea that the Bible has supernatural origins. They suggest that since it's just man's opinion anyway, we should have a recall vote on the Bible and fix the defects. We should reconvene and reshuffle the deck, tossing some books out and including others to reflect what the church now believes about spiritual truth, which means 'what the Jesus Seminar now believes about spiritual truth.' They are not using the 'lost books of the Bible' tack.

So regardless of your view of the Bible -- supernatural or natural -- there is no sense in which it makes any sense to talk of lost books of the Bible. Ergo it's impossible, rationally -- nothing to do with spiritual commitments at all -- that there can be anything like lost books of the Bible. The phrase just doesn't make any sense.