

Lost Books Part 2: The New Testament Also-Rans

On Easter 367 AD Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria released a letter that contained a list of books that were suitable for Christians to consider scripture in addition to the Hebrew texts. This was the first list that definitively contained the 27 books of our New Testament and only those. The core of this list, however, had been the same for about a hundred years at that point. Although debate would continue by 400 this list was the authoritative list and set the New Testament for all time.

There were literally hundreds of works that were possible inclusions in the New Testament. Here is a brief list of some of the books that were strongly considered in the long debate between 150 and 400.

Apocalypse of Peter: Included in the earliest list of New Testament with a note that it was not to be read during worship, this book claims to be a vision given to Peter of Heaven and Hell.

Barnabas: Associated with the Barnabas of Acts but of unknown authorship, this work declares that Christians are the only true Children of God and that Jews have been rejected unless they convert.

1 Clement: Clement was the Bishop of Rome from 88 to 99. This letter calls the church at Corinth to repentance over the baseless dismissal of ministerial leaders. Included in many scriptural lists along with a sermon on Christian virtue called 2 Clement but of unclear origin.

Diatessaron: This work was produced around 170 by Tatian. It is an attempt to harmonize the four gospels into a single text. Considered the main Gospel by Syrian Christians for several centuries.

Didache: "Teachings" is an anonymous work of the late 1st century. It is similar in many ways to the book of James, but also includes instructions for baptism, fasting, daily prayers, and communion.

Gospel of James: This work focuses on Mary and includes the concept of her immaculate conception, angelic selection of Joseph to be her husband, and the story of Jesus' birth and early childhood.

Letter to the Philippians: By Polycarp of Smyrna around 130 concerning Christian behavior and Church organization. The Pastoral Epistles have many similarities with the writings of Polycarp, including not only content but grammar, vocabulary, and style.

The Shepherd of Hermas: This book consists of five visions granted to Hermas, a former slave, followed by twelve mandates or commandments, and ten similitudes, or parables. It relies on allegory and pays special attention to the Church, calling the faithful to repent of the sins that have harmed it.