

Major Christian Apocrypha Discussed

Date and Contents

(Arranged alphabetically, by genre)

GOSPELS

Title	Probable Date	Content
Epistle of the Apostles	Mid 2nd c.	Anti-Gnostic dialogue between Jesus and the disciples after the resurrection, emphasizing the reality of the flesh and of Jesus' own fleshly resurrection
Gospel according to the Hebrews	Early 2nd c.	A Gospel recording events of Jesus' life, possibly embodying Gnostic ideas, used by Jewish-Christians in Egypt
Gospel of the Ebionites	Early 2nd c.	A Gospel used by Jewish-Christian Ebionites, embodying their antisacrificial concerns; possibly a conflation of canonical accounts
Gospel of the Egyptians	Early 2nd c.	A Gospel in which the woman Salome figures prominently, used by non-Jewish Christians in Egypt and stressing ascetic ideals
Gospel of Mary	2nd c.	Dialogue of Mary Magdalene with the apostles in which she reveals a vision granted to her conveying Jesus' secret teachings
Gospel of the Nazareans	Early 2nd c.	An Aramaic version of Matthew's Gospel, possibly lacking the first two chapters, used by Jewish Christians
Gospel of Nicodemus	5th c.	Legendary account of Jesus' trial before Pilate, his crucifixion, and descent into Hades (may incorporate a later form of the Acts of Pilate)
Gospel of Peter	Early 2nd c.	Fragmentary narrative of Jesus' trial, death, and resurrection, with an account of Jesus' emergence from the tomb; probably the Gospel proscribed by the second-century bishop Serapion
Gospel of Philip	3rd c.	Collection of disparate Gnostic mystical reflections recorded by his disciple Philip; discovered at Nag Hammadi
Gospel of the Savior	Late 2nd c.	Fragmentary Coptic Gospel recounting Jesus' last hours, including his prayer before his arrest and a final address to the cross

GOSPELS (*continued*)

Title	Probable Date	Content
(Coptic) Gospel of Thomas	Early 2nd c.	Collection of 114 sayings of Jesus, some possibly authentic, others embodying Gnostic concerns; discovered at Nag Hammadi
(Infancy) Gospel of Thomas	Early 2nd c.	Entertaining account of the miraculous deeds of Jesus between the ages of five and twelve
Gospel of Truth	Mid 2nd c.	Gnostic celebration of the joys of salvation brought by Christ's revelation of true knowledge; discovered at Nag Hammadi
Papyrus Egerton 2	Early 2nd c.	Fragmentary account from an otherwise unknown Gospel of four episodes from the life of Jesus, three with parallels in the New Testament Gospels
Proto-Gospel of James	Mid 2nd c.	Influential narrative of the birth, young life, and betrothal of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and of Jesus' own miraculous birth
Secret Gospel of Mark	58? 1758? 1958?	Discovered by Morton Smith in 1958, allegedly a longer version of Mark's Gospel written for the spiritually elite, with possible homoerotic overtones

ACTS

Title	Probable Date	Content
Acts of John	Late 2nd c.	An episodic account of the missionary activities and miraculous deeds of Jesus' disciple John the son of Zebedee, missionary to Ephesus
Acts of Paul	End 2nd c.	A composite text of the missionary activities and miraculous deeds of the apostle Paul, which includes the Acts of Thecla and 3 Corinthians
Acts of Peter	End 2nd c.	An account of the missionary activities of the apostle Peter, especially his miraculous overpowering of his heretical adversary, Simon Magus
Acts of Pilate	Mid 2nd c.	Account of Jesus' trial, which exonerates Pilate for his involvement and shows Jesus' superiority to the pagan gods
Acts of Thecla	End 2nd c.	An account of the conversion, persecutions, and miraculous escapes of Paul's most famous female convert

ACTS (*continued*)

Title	Probable Date	Content
Acts of Thomas	3rd c.	An account of the missionary activities and miraculous deeds of Jesus' brother Thomas, missionary to India

EPISTLES AND RELATED LITERATURE

Title	Probable Date	Content
1 Clement	ca. 96	Sent from the Christians of Rome to the Christians of Corinth to urge the restoration of unity by reinstating their deposed presbyters
2 Clement	Mid 2nd c.	Proto-orthodox Christian homily celebrating the salvation provided by God, based on an interpretation of Isa. 54:1
3 Corinthians	Late 2nd c.	Written by "Paul" to the Corinthians to counter the claims of two Gnostic teachers and emphasize proto-orthodox doctrines of God, creation, and the flesh
Correspondence of Paul and Seneca	4th c.	Fourteen letters between Paul and the Roman philosopher Seneca, forged to show Paul's high standing in philosophical circles of his day
The Didache	ca. 100	Proto-orthodox church manual that discusses Christian ethics (the "two-paths"), rituals such as baptism and Eucharist, and community life
Epistle of Barnabas	ca. 135	Proto-orthodox letter allegedly by Paul's companion Barnabas, which argues that the Judaism is a false religion and the Old Testament is a Christian book
Letter to the Laodiceans	Late 2nd c.	Containing a pastiche of Pauline phrases, evidently inspired by a reference in Col. 4:16 to a letter to the Laodiceans, possibly made to counter a Marcionite forgery
Letter of Peter to James and its Reception	Early 3rd c.	Letter allegedly by Peter urging the acceptance of the Jewish Law as essential for salvation, and attacking his "enemy" (apparently Paul); includes the positive reply of James, Jesus' brother

**EPISTLES AND
RELATED LITERATURE**

(continued)

Title	Probable Date	Content
Letter of Ptolemy to Flora	Mid 2nd c.	Letter by the famous Gnostic Ptolemy to a proto-orthodox enquirer, in which he details a distinctively Gnostic understanding of the Old Testament
The Preaching of Peter	Early 2nd c.	Known only from quotations by later authors, a defense (“apology”) for Christian belief against pagan attacks
Pseudo-Clementine Literature	3rd c.	A set of <i>Homilies</i> and biographical accounts (<i>Recognitions</i>) about and allegedly by Clement of Rome that describe his journeys and association with Peter and that embrace a Jewish-Christian, anti-Pauline perspective
Pseudo-Titus	5th c.	Letter allegedly written by Paul’s companion Titus which argues for a strictly ascetic life and opposes all forms of sexual activity
Treatise on the Resurrection	Late 2nd c.	In the form of a letter to a proto-orthodox Christian, Rheginus, a Gnostic explanation of death and the spiritual resurrection

**APOCALYPSES AND
RELATED LITERATURE**

Title	Probable Date	Content
Apocalypse of Paul	4th c.	A description of Paul’s ascent into heaven, where he is shown the fate of individual souls; based in part on the Apocalypse of Peter
Apocalypse of Peter	Mid 2nd c	A proto-orthodox vision of the abodes of the blessed and the damned, narrated by the apostle Peter
(Coptic) Apocalypse of Peter	3rd c.	A Gnostic revelation given to Peter, which shows the error of the proto-orthodox belief that salvation comes through the real physical death of Jesus
First Thought in Three Forms	Late 2nd c.	Gnostic mythological document in which the “First Thought,” the first emanation from the true God, describes her three descents to the world to reveal saving knowledge to humans

APOCALYPSES AND RELATED LITERATURE

(continued)

Title	Probable Date	Content
Hymn of the Pearl	Late 2nd c.	Tale of a youth from the East who is sent to rescue a great pearl from a dragon in Egypt; sometimes taken as a figurative Gnostic depiction of the descent of the soul into the world of matter
Origin of the World	3rd c.	A detailed description of a Gnostic myth explaining how the divine realm, the material world, and humans came into existence, based on an interpretation of early chapters of Genesis
Second Treatise of the Great Seth	3rd c.	A Gnostic revelation that gives a docetic interpretation of Christ's death, in explicit opposition to proto-orthodox views
Secret Book of John	Mid 2nd c.	Nag Hammadi treatise that provides a full Gnostic myth of creation and redemption, showing how the divine realm, the material world, and humans came into existence
<i>Shepherd</i> of Hermas	Mid 2nd c.	Proto-orthodox book that records visions given to the author, Hermas, as interpreted by angelic figures, including one in the form of a shepherd
