

# Noncanonical Gospels

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As a young BYU undergraduate majoring in ancient Near Eastern studies, I was fascinated with extrabiblical texts. My initial fascination was born out of the teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that more scripture is yet to come (2 Nephi 29:12–13; Articles of Faith 1:9) and that truth can be found in a noncanonical text (Doctrine and Covenants 91:1). When I discovered that these texts were called *apocryphal*, from the Greek word for “hidden” or “secret,” my interest grew all the more. What Latter-day Saint wouldn’t want to read a secret ancient text about Jesus? And if there is evidence within such a text that would support the idiosyncrasies of contemporary Latter-day Saint beliefs and practices, I thought, all the better! What I did not realize at the time was that the importance of these texts lay outside their ostensible parallels to our current beliefs and practices. I also did not realize that these “hidden” texts number in the hundreds and that most are readily available in English translation.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will show how the apocryphal gospels provide us with unique insight into the world of early Christians. In particular, we will see that some Christians were not content with the four Gospels that would eventually become part of our New Testament. As Christianity developed and faced new challenges, some imaginative Christians wrote new gospels to deal with those challenges or to present new theological understandings of Christ. Before I introduce some of the important apocryphal gospels, however, it may be helpful to discuss the terminology used to describe noncanonical texts and to review the history of Latter-day Saint engagement with these texts.

## Key Terminology

*Noncanonical*, *extracanonial*, *apocryphal*, and *pseudepigraphal* are all terms used to describe texts written by Jews and Christians that include some of the same people, places, themes, and genres of the Bible but are not included in our Bible today. Yet none of these terms is perfect, and each one can be misleading if not properly understood. The terms *noncanonical* and *extracanonial* designate texts existing outside the authoritative books, or canon, of Christian scripture (Latter-day Saints prefer the term *standard works*). So it would make sense for Latter-day Saints, Protestants, or Roman Catholics, for instance, to refer to 1 Enoch or Jubilees as noncanonical since they do not appear in the editions of the Old Testament embraced by those faiths. We instantly realize how imprecise the designation “noncanonical” is when we discover that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church includes 1 Enoch and Jubilees in their Old Testament canon.

What’s more, at the time that many extracanonial texts were written, the canon we know today did not exist. Christians, at least as early as the second century AD, began to develop traditions around the proper use of texts; certain books were accepted for public use and others for private use.<sup>2</sup> Yet strict practices distinguishing between authoritative and unauthoritative texts—that is, between canonical and noncanonical—continued to develop well into the fourth century and beyond (see chapter 43 herein on canonization).<sup>3</sup> In the first century AD, for instance, the New Testament book of Jude quotes as authoritative—as if it were canon—a noncanonical tradition about Moses (Jude 1:9) and the noncanonical book of 1 Enoch (see Jude 1:14–15, quoting 1 Enoch 1:9). A list of canonical books from perhaps as early as the late second century AD, called the Muratorian Fragment, includes the Apocalypse of Peter in addition to the Apocalypse of John (Revelation) as authoritative, though it acknowledges that “some of us are not willing that the [Apocalypse of Peter] be read in church.”<sup>4</sup> The term *noncanonical* is therefore anachronistic.

The terms *apocryphal* and *pseudepigraphal* are also used to describe extracanonial literature. The English word *pseudepigrapha* (singular, *pseudepigraphon*) comes from the Greek adjective *pseudēs* (ψευδής) meaning “false” and the noun *epigraphē* (ἐπιγραφή) meaning “title” or “ascription”; it designates a text that is falsely titled or ascribed to someone who did not write it. And the English word *apocrypha* (singular, *apocryphon*) comes from the Greek adjective *apocryphos* (ἀπόκρυφος), which means “hidden” or “secret.” This term was used in a positive way by some Christians in antiquity to describe special esoteric teachings. For instance, one noncanonical text is titled *Apocryphon of John* or *Secret Teaching of John*. Other Christians, however, used the term *apocrypha* pejoratively to describe texts they considered dangerous. For instance, Irenaeus of Lyons, a late second-century Christian, describes texts he deems heretical as “an untold multitude of apocryphal and spurious writings, which they [heretics] have composed to bewilder foolish men and such as do not understand the letters of Truth.”<sup>5</sup>

Today it has become common to distinguish between noncanonical texts relating to the Old Testament and those relating to the New Testament by labeling the former as “Old Testament Pseudepigrapha” and the latter as “New Testament Apocrypha.” This distinction

is artificial and somewhat imprecise because most of the New Testament Apocrypha are also pseudepigraphal, or falsely ascribed. For instance, the correspondence between Paul and the Roman philosopher Seneca was written by neither Paul nor Seneca. Yet the author writes as if he were both of them.<sup>6</sup> Regardless, in this chapter I follow the standard practice of referring to collections of texts that incorporate New Testament figures and narratives as New Testament Apocrypha.

One more distinction must be made about the term *apocrypha*. The New Testament Apocrypha should not be confused with the collection of texts found in some Bibles, often between the Old and New Testaments, labeled “Apocrypha” or “Deuterocanon.” The biblical collection called the Apocrypha includes such books as Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus), 1 and 2 Maccabees, and additions to the biblical book of Daniel. These are Jewish works mostly written in the centuries after the Old Testament books had been completed and prior to the birth of Jesus. Since these texts have more in common with the Old Testament than the New Testament, some of them also appear in collections of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. What set them apart originally from the rest of the Old Testament was their language: whereas the Old Testament was written predominantly in Hebrew, the books of the Apocrypha were written mostly in Greek.<sup>7</sup> Since the Old Testament used by most early Christians was entirely Greek, those texts that now form the Apocrypha were used by some early Christians as authoritative scripture. As Tony Burke notes in his introduction to *New Testament Apocrypha*, “It wasn’t until the early sixteenth century that a Bible was printed that was arranged [in such a way] that the books set apart from the Old and New Testaments acquired the name ‘Apocrypha.’ The influential King James Version followed suit, but most modern Protestant Bibles omit the texts entirely.”<sup>8</sup> Today the Apocrypha appears primarily in Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Bibles and is labeled “Deuterocanonical” to designate it as a secondary (*deutero-*) canon of scripture.<sup>9</sup>

## History of Latter-day Saint Engagement with Apocryphal Texts

In the twentieth century, Latter-day Saint engagement with apocryphal texts focused on ancient parallels to the idiosyncrasies of modern beliefs. For instance, BYU professor Hugh Nibley began his book *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri* by suggesting, “There are countless parallels, many of them very instructive, among the customs and religions of mankind, to what the Mormons do.”<sup>10</sup> In particular, he argued, “the Near East . . . is littered with the archaeological and living survivals of practices and teachings which an observant Mormon may find suggestively familiar.”<sup>11</sup> For Nibley, noncanonical texts were not to receive the same standing as the standard works; there exists a “world of difference between [them].”<sup>12</sup> He insisted that extracanonical texts were merely pale imitations of the truth.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Nibley believed that ancient parallels to the contemporary scripture, theology, and practice of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints could be instructive for Latter-day Saints today.<sup>14</sup> Other Latter-day Saint authors went further with the identification of ancient parallels and argued that these in fact demonstrated the veracity of modern beliefs.<sup>15</sup>

Mining ancient texts for parallels to the modern beliefs and practices of Latter-day Saints can, however, be problematic. In an important article about Latter-day Saint approaches to apocryphal texts, Stephen Robinson offers this caution: “The apocrypha do often prove that ideas peculiar to the Latter-day Saints in modern times were widely known and widely believed anciently, but this is not the same as proving that the ideas themselves are true, or that those who believed them were right in doing so, or that they would have had anything else in common with the Latter-day Saints.”<sup>16</sup> In order to demonstrate the dangers of searching through apocryphal texts for evidence supporting modern Latter-day Saint beliefs, Robinson draws our attention to the Hymn of the Pearl from the apocryphal Acts of Thomas:

Particularly annoying is the practice of “proof-texting” from the apocrypha, that is, of selecting certain passages to prove a particular point while ignoring its context and the rest of the text. For example, I have heard it argued that the Acts of Thomas supports LDS theology because it contains a beautiful poem called the Hymn of the Soul, or Hymn of the Pearl, which teaches the doctrine of premortal existence. But the Acts of Thomas also teaches a transubstantiationist view of the Eucharist, that celibacy is the goal of all Christians, that sexual intercourse is evil, and that baptism was performed by sprinkling. . . . Is it not dishonest to represent an apocryphal book as being firm evidence for the truth when it agrees with us, and yet quietly look the other way when it does not? The truth is that it’s just as easy to support Catholicism or Lutheranism or Calvinism by proof-texting the apocrypha as it is to prove our views. It’s all a matter of which passages one decides to use.<sup>17</sup>

We should take care that our search for truth does not lead us to proof-texting. Section 91 of the Doctrine and Covenants, although it addresses only that collection of texts in the Bible called the Apocrypha, affirms that truth can be found in a noncanonical text.<sup>18</sup> Yet there is a difference between discovering truth and discovering ostensible evidence to support what we already believe to be true—the former opens our minds to new understanding; the latter lulls us away into the false security that we already know all we should ever need to know.<sup>19</sup> Apocryphal writings are valuable to Latter-day Saints regardless of their similarity to or difference from the doctrine proclaimed in the Church today. We ought to liken to ourselves the command given to Joseph Smith that wisdom and understanding should be sought in all good books and that we should obtain a knowledge of history (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118; 90:15; 93:53).<sup>20</sup>

## Survey of Important Apocryphal Gospels

The remainder of this chapter focuses on a small subsection of New Testament Apocrypha, the apocryphal gospels. In the canonical New Testament today there are four Gospels, yet one recent collection of extracanonical gospels contains nearly forty distinct entries.<sup>21</sup> Some of these entries are nothing more than short fragments of what once might have been gospels of equal length to canonical Mark or even Matthew. Nevertheless, the number is indicative

of the great diversity of gospel accounts that were written during the early centuries of Christianity. This chapter will focus on four important extracanonical gospels: the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Mary, and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas.

In what follows, I will show, first, how some of the apocryphal gospels were used as though they were canonical and, second, how the apocryphal gospels were either passed down through the ages or rediscovered in modern times. Then, we will turn our attention to the questions of purpose and function: Why did people write gospels in the names of Peter, Thomas, or Mary? To answer this question, I will show how these writings (1) participated in the second-century debate over the legitimacy of various Christian groups, (2) adopted the authority of first-century figures to address second-century problems, and (3) used that authority to answer questions about material missing from the earliest record, such as Jesus's childhood. In the process of exploring these issues, we will see how the apocryphal gospels reveal the variety of ways that early Christians interpreted and continued to develop their unique religious traditions in dialogue with the scripture and traditions of the past.

## The Gospel of Peter

### *An example of canonical use*

Manuscript evidence suggests that in the second century the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were used publicly, whereas extracanonical gospels were generally read in private.<sup>22</sup> Yet some Christian communities did engage with apocryphal texts publicly as though they were authoritative scripture. For instance, we learn from Eusebius's *History of the Church* that some Christians in the town of Rhossus, Syria, used the Gospel of Peter as an authoritative text.<sup>23</sup> In fact, when Serapion, the bishop of Antioch, Syria, visited the church in Rhossus in the early third century AD, he approved their use of the Gospel of Peter without reading a page—it was, after all, the Gospel of Peter, and if the great apostle Simon Peter had written a gospel, of course it was appropriate to read! Later, Serapion had a change of heart when he learned that some Christians in Rhossus were using passages from the Gospel of Peter to support what he considered to be false teachings. They were teaching that Christ was fully divine, but not fully human, and that during his mortal ministry he only appeared to be mortal.<sup>24</sup> When Serapion learned that this was being taught from the Gospel of Peter, he studied that gospel himself, identified the problematic passages, and wrote a letter to the

### Select Noncanonical Gospels

with approximate dates of origin

- Gospel of the Ebionites (early 2nd cen.)
- Gospel of the Hebrews (early 2nd cen.)
- Gospel of Judas (mid 2nd cen.)
- Gospel of Mary (2nd cen.)
- Gospel of Nicodemus (early 5th cen.)
- Gospel of Peter (mid 2nd cen.)
- Gospel of Philip (3rd cen.)
- Gospel of the Savior (late 2nd cen.)
- Gospel of Thomas (early 2nd cen.)
- Infancy Gospel of Thomas (early 2nd cen.)
- Papyrus Egerton 2 (late 2nd cen.)
- Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840 (early 3rd cen.)
- Proto-Gospel of James (mid 2nd cen.)

church of Rhossus. Eusebius includes a quotation from that letter: “I have been able to go through the book and draw the conclusion that while most of it accorded with the authentic teaching of the Savior, some passages were spurious additions. These I am appending to my letter.”<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, Eusebius does not quote the offending passages from the Gospel of Peter. For Eusebius, writing in the early fourth century AD, the Gospel of Peter was a forgery and had no place among the authoritative scriptures of Christendom.<sup>26</sup> For Serapion, however, even after discovering problematic passages, he did not forbid its use; “most of it,” he wrote, “accorded with the authentic teaching of the Savior.”<sup>27</sup> Today we have a better idea regarding which passages might have offended Serapion and Eusebius. Even though these Christians did not find the text worthy of preservation, others did, and it has been rediscovered in our own age.

### *Discovery and identification*

Some apocryphal gospels have been passed down through the ages in a similar fashion to the New Testament Gospels.<sup>28</sup> Yet others were lost to time only to be rediscovered through archaeological excavations or by mere happenstance. The Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Truth, and Gospel of Philip, for instance, were discovered at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945 when a small group of Bedouin were digging for fertilizer and happened upon a skeleton buried next to a large sealed earthenware jar full of leather-bound books (codices).<sup>29</sup> The stories of this discovery and of the codices’ journey into the hands of a Coptic Christian priest and finally the Coptic Museum are full of scandal and intrigue.<sup>30</sup> Some key details remain sketchy. Suffice it to say, the discovery of the “Nag Hammadi library,” as it is now called, was a watershed for our understanding of ancient Christian history—it has provided insight into forms of Christianity previously known only through the accounts of their theological opponents.<sup>31</sup> Despite its significance for scholars of Christian history, public knowledge of this discovery was eclipsed one year later by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The discovery of the Gospel of Peter was similarly important. Before its discovery about 130 years ago, little was known regarding its contents since Eusebius had failed to quote any part of it. In the winter of 1886–87, French archaeologist M. Grébant was digging near Akhmîm, Egypt, a town on the shore of the Nile in the center of Egypt (Upper Egypt) and to the northwest of Nag Hammadi and Luxor. He was excavating a portion of an ancient Christian cemetery with graves dating from the eighth to twelfth centuries AD when he discovered a small book (codex), no bigger than most modern cell phones today, that had been buried alongside an eighth-century monk.<sup>32</sup> The book was a collection of texts. One of them was clearly identifiable as a gospel even though it began and ended mid-sentence. It contained an account of Jesus’s trial by Herod Antipas and Pilate and an account of his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, but it did not match any previously known gospels.

This gospel was soon identified as the Gospel of Peter, the same gospel discussed by Eusebius in his *History of the Church*.<sup>33</sup> Although it did not contain a title, portions of it were written in first person. For instance, after the crucifixion and death of Jesus, the author

writes, “I and my companions were grieving and went into hiding” (26). Then, after the story about the women discovering an empty tomb, the author continues, “But we, the twelve disciples of the Lord, wept and grieved; and each one returned to his home, grieving for what had happened. But I, Simon Peter, and my brother Andrew, took our nets and went off to the sea. And with us was Levi, the son of Alphaeus, whom the Lord . . .” (59–60).<sup>34</sup> There the Akhmîm fragment ends, but not before the author identifies himself as Simon Peter.

The conclusion that this was the same Gospel of Peter discussed by Eusebius also comes from evidence within the text. Scholars have identified at least two passages that could lend themselves to the sort of “heretical” interpretation that Serapion, and later Eusebius, lobbied against. First, in the Gospel of Peter, immediately before Jesus dies, he shouts from the cross words that echo Mark 15:34 and Matthew 27:46: “And the Lord cried out, ‘My power, O power, you have left me behind!’ When he said this, he (*or* it) was taken up” (19). The wording of this passage could have allowed some Christians to draw a distinction between the divine Christ and the human Jesus. For those who have always heard the words *Jesus* and *Christ* together as though they formed a single name, this idea may sound strange. Yet, according to Irenaeus, the late second-century Christian and chronicler of heresies (heresiologist), at least one group of Christians believed that there was a distinction between the human being, Jesus, and a divine being that possessed Jesus, called Christ.

[Cerinthus] proposes Jesus, not as having been born of a virgin—for this seemed impossible to him—but as having been born the son of Joseph and Mary like all other men, and that he excelled over every person in justice, prudence, and wisdom. After his baptism Christ descended on him in the shape of a dove from the Authority that is above all things. Then he preached the unknown Father and worked wonders. But at the end Christ again flew off from Jesus. And Jesus indeed suffered and rose again from the dead, but Christ remained impassible, since he was spiritual.<sup>35</sup>

It is possible, therefore, that Christians with a similar understanding of Jesus’s humanity and Christ’s divinity could have understood the passage in the Gospel of Peter where Jesus cries out about a “power” leaving him behind as describing the divine Christ leaving behind the body of the human Jesus to die on the cross alone.<sup>36</sup>

A second passage that could have troubled Serapion and later Eusebius appears in the account of the Resurrection. The Gospel of Peter is the only extant gospel that provides an account of Jesus leaving the tomb after his resurrection.

But during the night on which the Lord’s day dawned, while the soldiers stood guard two by two on their watch, a great voice came from the sky. They saw the skies open and two men descend from there; they were very bright and drew near to the tomb. That stone which had been cast before the entrance rolled away by itself and moved to one side; the tomb was open and both young men entered. . . . [Then] they saw three men emerge from the tomb, two of them supporting the other, with a cross following behind them. The heads of the two reached up to the sky, but the head of the one they

were leading went up above the skies. And they heard a voice from the skies, "Have you preached to those who are asleep?" And a reply came from the cross, "Yes." (Gospel of Peter 35–37, 39–42).<sup>37</sup>

The narrative seems to imply that the two "men" or "young men" who entered the tomb were angels and that the third person who exited the tomb with them was Jesus resurrected. That it was Jesus is implied not only because he had been buried in that tomb but also because he is shown to be superior to the two "men": the angels' heads only reached the sky, but Jesus's head reached beyond. The representation of these angels and Jesus being extraordinarily tall borrows from Greek and Roman depictions of the gods. Throughout Greek and Roman literature, gods often reveal their divinity by manifesting themselves with extraordinary height.<sup>38</sup> Yet the height of Jesus and the angels is not the only unordinary aspect of this account. Jesus and the angels are followed by a walking, talking cross. Although this certainly seems strange to us today, the idea that an inanimate object could become miraculously animated is not entirely unheard of in antiquity. In some Greek and Roman accounts of divine manifestations, the gods take on the forms of inanimate objects and come to life. In the Homeric Hymn to Dionysus, for example, the god appears first in disguise as a prince and then manifests himself as a lion, a bear, a vine, and a flood of wine.<sup>39</sup> If Christians were reading the account of the Resurrection in the Gospel of Peter as similar to such Greek and Roman accounts of pagan gods, then they likely interpreted the walking, talking cross to be another manifestation of Jesus.<sup>40</sup> With the manifestation of Jesus as both extremely tall and in the form of a cross, it is clear how some Christians could have read this account to suggest that Jesus's body was not an ordinary human body.

Although neither this account nor the passage about Jesus's cry from the cross would have compelled the reader to see Jesus as a being who was not fully human, it is clear how someone could interpret them in that way. And this was sufficient to suggest to scholars that the fragment they discovered in Akhmîm was the same text read by Eusebius and Serapion.

### *Question of authorship*

The two passages from the Gospel of Peter reviewed above may be sufficiently different from the four canonical Gospels to convince most Christians today that the Gospel of Peter was not actually written by Jesus's disciple Simon Peter. And there is evidence that the Gospel of Peter was written after the four canonical Gospels had been composed and circulated.<sup>41</sup> The Gospel of Peter seems to weave together the author's memories of stories from the early (canonical) Gospels, with some unique twists and new stories.<sup>42</sup> For instance, the Gospel of Peter includes the involvement of Herod Antipas in Jesus's trial, which is unique to the account in Luke 23:7–12 (Gospel of Peter 1–5). Then the Gospel of Peter adds a narrative explanation for why Jesus's legs were not broken (14), a detail found elsewhere only in John 19:31–33. The Gospel of Peter also includes an earthquake following Jesus's death (21), which is otherwise found only in the Gospel of Matthew 27:51, 54. In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, a Roman soldier declares at Jesus's death that he "truly . . . was the



Son of God” (Mark 15:39; Matthew 27:54), but in the Gospel of Peter this proclamation is postponed until after soldiers guarding Jesus’s tomb witness his resurrection (45). Whoever wrote the Gospel of Peter seems to have fashioned a new Gospel from his memory of those written previously. But why?

If the Gospel of Peter was not written by Simon Peter, then who wrote it and why did the author claim to be Peter? It is impossible to say who wrote the Gospel of Peter, but something can be said about why the author would write in the name of Simon Peter.<sup>43</sup> First, it should be acknowledged that the author could have believed that he was accurately representing Peter’s “Gospel.” According to 2 Esdras 14, the biblical scribe Ezra received a revelation from God that allowed him to accurately reproduce the Torah, the five books of Moses, after every copy had been burned. No reader of 2 Esdras 14 would have understood this chapter to mean that Ezra forged the Torah. Rather, under inspiration, Ezra faithfully reproduced the original. Similarly, when Tertullian, a Christian living in Carthage in the early third century, suggested that the book of 1 Enoch had been destroyed in the Flood and then miraculously and accurately reproduced by Noah, Tertullian was not suggesting that Noah was a forger.<sup>44</sup> Regardless of how the authors of apocryphal literature understood their work, the result of attributing a text to a famous figure from the earliest period of Christian history was to claim that figure’s authority for the text. This was one of the most common purposes for the forgery of all sorts of documents in antiquity. As Bart Ehrman argues in his study of ancient forgeries, “The single most important motivation for authors to claim they were someone else in antiquity . . . was to get a hearing for their views. If you were an unknown person, but had something really important to say and wanted people to hear you . . . one way to make that happen was to pretend you were someone else, a well-known author, a famous figure, an authority.”<sup>45</sup> By writing in the name of Simon Peter, the author of the Gospel of Peter claimed for his gospel the authority of Jesus’s premier apostle. Of course, Peter was not the only early disciple who was held in high esteem by the second century. So it should come as little surprise that the authority of other early disciples was likewise co-opted in the writing of other apocryphal gospels.

## The Gospels of Thomas and Mary

### *Authority in the second century*

The question of who had authority within the early Christian church was a matter of debate in many congregations from the earliest period of Christian history.<sup>46</sup> In one of Paul’s letters to the saints of Corinth, he describes such a debate: “Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:12). This debate continued into the second century with some Christians promoting one apostle over another.<sup>47</sup> We already saw how the Gospel of Peter claims the authority of the chief apostle, Simon Peter. Other Gospels, however, promoted other apostles as the foremost

authority on Christ and his message. Here we will consider the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Mary.

The Gospel of Thomas, in contrast to the Gospel of Peter, calls into question the knowledge of Peter and promotes Didymus Judas Thomas as the Lord's special apostle. The Gospel of Thomas includes a passage that echoes Matthew 16:13–20, Mark 8:27–30, and Luke 9:18–21, wherein Jesus questions his disciples regarding his identity. In the Synoptic Gospels, it is Peter who responds properly by identifying Jesus as the Messiah or Christ. In the Gospel of Thomas, however, Peter's answer is wrong. "Jesus said to his disciples, 'Make a comparison and tell me: who am I like?' Simon Peter said to him, 'You are like a righteous angel.' Matthew said to him, 'You are like a wise philosopher.'" After both Peter and Matthew attempt unsuccessfully to answer the Lord's question, Thomas declares, "Teacher, my mouth cannot let me say at all what you are like." Although Jesus corrects Thomas's honorific address by explaining, "I am not your teacher," he also declares that Thomas has rightfully "drunk and become intoxicated from the bubbling spring that I myself have measured out." The author makes it clear that Thomas provided the best answer of the three, because Jesus next leads Thomas away from the other apostles to give him special instruction: "[Jesus] took him, withdrew, and said three sayings to him." When Thomas returns to his companions, they all desire to know what the Lord had revealed. Thomas's response once again sets him apart as the chosen apostle: "Thomas said to them, 'If I tell you one of the sayings he said to me, you will take up stones and cast them at me, and fire will come out of the stones and burn you'" (Gospel of Thomas 13).<sup>48</sup> This brief narrative demonstrates to the readers of Thomas's gospel that he has superior authority and insight into the message of Jesus, supporting the promise made at the beginning of the gospel: "These are the hidden sayings that the living Jesus spoke and Didymus Judas wrote down" (preface to the Gospel of Thomas).<sup>49</sup> According to the Gospel of Thomas, Didymus Judas Thomas is clearly the most authoritative witness of Jesus Christ and his message.<sup>50</sup>

Another Gospel that includes a narrative intended to elevate one particular church leader over others is the Gospel of Mary. As the fragmentary Gospel begins, the Savior is providing his final words of instruction to his apostles. He then departs and the apostles weep. They cry not because their Savior has departed but because they fear his command to go forth and preach: "How can we go to the gentiles and preach the gospel of the kingdom of the Son of Man? If they did not spare him, how will they spare us?" (9).<sup>51</sup> It is Mary Magdalene who rises to inspire them and call them to action: "Do not weep or grieve or be of two minds, for his grace will be with all of you and will protect you" (9).<sup>52</sup> In the discussion that follows, the apostles listen intently as Mary shares with them special teachings that the Lord had revealed to her alone: "Mary replied, 'What is hidden from you I will tell you.' And she began speaking these words to them. 'I,' she said, 'saw the Lord in a vision and said to him, 'Lord, I saw you in a vision today.' He answered me, 'You are blessed, because you do not falter at seeing me. For where the mind is, there is the treasure'" (10). Even though the Gospel, as it exists today, is missing large portions of Mary's visionary experience, the apostles' response to her remains intact. After Mary finishes revealing the Savior's special teachings,

Andrew responds, “Say what you will about what she has said, but I do not believe that the Savior said these things” (17). Next, Peter addresses his fellow apostles, “Did [the Savior] really speak with a woman secretly from us, not openly? Should we turn about, too, and all listen to her? Did he choose her over us?” (17). The scene is ironic since the Gospel of Mary answers each of Peter’s questions with a resounding “Yes!” The Savior did speak to Mary secretly, the apostles should listen to her, and Jesus chose her over them—they wavered; she did not. At the end of the Gospel of Mary, it is Levi who comes to Mary’s defense:

Levi responded and said to Peter, “Peter, you are always angry. Now I see you disputing with this woman like the adversaries. If the Savior made her worthy, who are you then, for your part, to cast her aside? Surely the Savior knows her full well. That is why he has loved her more than us. Let us rather be ashamed, and put on the perfect human and bring it forth for ourselves, just as he commanded us; and let us preach the Gospel, laying down no rule or law other than what the Savior has spoken.” When Levi said these things, they began to go out to teach and proclaim. (Gospel of Mary 18–19)

In the Gospel of Mary, Mary Magdalene is clearly the most authoritative witness of Jesus Christ and his message. The other disciples must humble themselves and listen to her.

### *New theological ideas and questions*

As with the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Mary are not actually the writings of the historical disciples Thomas and Mary.<sup>53</sup> These Gospels adopted the authority of Thomas and Mary, important figures in the first century of Christian history, in order to present new theological ideas or address theological questions that came to the fore during the second century.

The Gospel of Thomas, unlike the canonical Gospels, presents a Jesus who saves primarily through his teachings.<sup>54</sup> There is no atoning sacrifice in the Gospel of Thomas, no narrative of his death or bodily resurrection; Thomas’s Jesus is a revealer of wisdom. Yet much of the Gospel of Thomas sounds like the canonical Gospels. In fact, two recent studies have independently and convincingly argued that the author of the Gospel of Thomas copied numerous passages from the canonical Gospels.<sup>55</sup> The Gospel of Thomas, even more directly than the Gospel of Peter, shows signs of reliance on the earlier Gospels now found in our New Testament. For instance, compare the unique saying of Jesus in Luke 14:26–27 to Gospel of Thomas 55:

Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26–27 NRSV)

Jesus said, “Whoever does not hate his father and his mother cannot be a disciple of mine; and whoever does not hate his brothers and his sisters and take up his cross the way I do, he will not be worthy of me.” (Gospel of Thomas 55)

This is only one example of the numerous parallels between the New Testament Gospels and the Gospel of Thomas. So why copy the sayings of Jesus from the canonical Gospels but leave out the climactic narratives of Jesus's death and resurrection? Mark Goodacre has argued, "The Gospel of Thomas' genius is that it conveys its radical difference from the Synoptic Gospels by hiding its theology in words and images it derives from them."<sup>56</sup> In other words, the Gospel of Thomas borrows not only the authority of Thomas to present its unique theology but also the authority of earlier Gospels already accepted by many Christians.

The Gospel of Mary does not evince the same dependence on the canonical Gospels as the Gospel of Thomas. And yet it likewise borrows the authority of an important figure from first-century Christianity in order to address a new audience in the second century. Karen King, in her study of the Gospel of Mary, explains: "The Gospel of Mary seems most concerned with challenges to the truth of its teaching by other apostles within the Christian community. . . . Those challenges were basically of two kinds: 1) the rejection of new teachings based on prophecy or private revelation, and 2) gender."<sup>57</sup> As the church grew and certain leaders attempted to create unity and consistency through the assertion of hierarchical authority from Rome or from other major metropolises, individual claims to "prophecy or private revelation" became problematic.<sup>58</sup> In this context, female authority was also viewed as increasingly problematic. By the end of the second century, Tertullian rails against Christians who allowed women to teach and perform ordinances in the church: "It is not allowed for a woman to speak in church, but also neither to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer [the Eucharist], nor to claim a share of any male function, much less of priestly office, for herself."<sup>59</sup> In one instance, Tertullian complains that Christians are justifying this behavior by appealing to an apocryphal text that he insists is a forgery:

But if certain Acts of Paul, which are falsely so named, claim the example of Thecla for allowing women to teach and to baptize, let men know that in Asia the presbyter who compiled that document, thinking to add of his own to Paul's reputation, was found out, and though he professed he had done it for love of Paul, was deposed from his position. How could we believe that Paul should give a female power to teach and to baptize, when he did not allow a woman even to learn by her own right? Let them keep silence, he says, and ask their husbands at home.<sup>60</sup>

Although the Gospel of Mary does not make any claims about women's authority to baptize, it nevertheless participates in this debate over women's authority within the church, which came to the fore in the second century.<sup>61</sup> Like the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Mary also borrows the authority of a key figure from the earliest century of Christian history in order to address new theological ideas and questions relevant in the second century.

## Filling in the Blanks: The Infancy Gospel of Thomas

Sometimes apocryphal gospels also address questions about what is missing from the earliest Christian records. For instance, none of the earliest Gospels has much to say about

what Jesus was like as a child. Mark and John say nothing about Jesus's early life. Matthew includes Jesus's birth in Bethlehem and a brief account about a journey to and from Egypt, but says nothing about Jesus's childhood. Luke also describes Jesus's birth and includes only a brief account about Jesus and his parents visiting Jerusalem for Passover when he was twelve (Luke 2:41–51). In Luke, the rest of Jesus's childhood is summarized by the statement "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52; see 2:40). Certainly Christians must have wondered what Jesus was like as a child. Indeed, at least one apocryphal gospel was written in part to satisfy that curiosity: the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. This infancy gospel ends in the same way as Luke's childhood narrative of Jesus: it tells the story of Jesus's time in the Jerusalem temple as a twelve-year-old boy and concludes with the summative statement "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and grace" (19.5).<sup>62</sup> Leading up to that story, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* includes accounts of Jesus's youth, beginning with him as a precocious and somewhat temperamental five-year-old child (2.1). One story tells how Jesus was walking through his village when another child, running past, bumped into him.

Jesus was aggravated and said to him, "You will go no further on your way." Right away the child fell down and died. Some of those who saw what happened said, "Where was this child born? For everything he says is a deed accomplished!" The parents of the dead child came to Joseph and blamed him, saying, "Since you have such a child you cannot live with us in the village. Or teach him to bless and not to curse—for he is killing our children!" (*Infancy Gospel of Thomas* 4.1–2)

Christians today would likely balk at the idea that Jesus, even as a child, could have been so vengeful and violent. One might ask, How could a believing Christian, even in antiquity, ever imagine Jesus cursing and killing other children? For some time, even scholars of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* concluded that the Gospel must have been heretical because Jesus's "actions were . . . 'violent and vindictive,' 'bizarre and completely spiteful,' or 'offensive and repulsive.'"<sup>63</sup> Yet, as Stephen J. Davis suggests in his study of these accounts, "just because a story appears peculiar to our eyes does not mean that it would have been equally out of sync with the (diverse and often fractious) sensibilities and expectations of ancient readers."<sup>64</sup> This particular story seeks to demonstrate that, even in his youth, Jesus's words were powerful and he ought to be revered as the Lord (*Infancy Gospel of Thomas* 9.3; 17.2)—otherwise one might face dire consequences.<sup>65</sup>

The depiction of Jesus in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* is based in part on traditions of Jesus as an adult. For instance, another story from this gospel suggests that the rivalries and controversies of Jesus's adulthood had begun already in his youth. When the young Jesus was playing by a stream and made some pools of water, another boy approached, took a willow branch, and used it to scatter the water.

Jesus was irritated when he saw what happened, and he said to him: "You unrighteous, irreverent idiot! What did the pools of water do to harm you? See, now you also will be

withered like a tree, and you will never bear leaves or root or fruit.” Immediately that child was completely withered. Jesus left and returned to Joseph’s house. (3.2–3)

The child who had scattered the pools of water is identified at the beginning of the story as “the son of Annas the scribe” (Infancy Gospel of Thomas 3.1).<sup>66</sup> In context Annas’s son was not merely acting out of childish spite, but stood with those who had accused the five-year-old Jesus of “doing what is forbidden on the Sabbath” (2.3–4). It was the Sabbath when Jesus had formed those pools of water from a flowing stream, “things he ordered simply by speaking a word” (2.1). Jesus had then used those pools to make “some soft mud and [fashion] twelve sparrows from it,” which at his command came to life and flew away chirping (2.4). The actions of the scribe’s son against the child Jesus in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas mirror the harsh reactions of scribes and Pharisees toward Jesus as an adult in the canonical Gospels.<sup>67</sup>

## Conclusion

Latter-day Saints can sometimes imbue ancient Christian apocryphal texts with an air of mystery. Despite the meaning of the term *apocryphal*, these texts today are neither hidden nor secret—nor do they provide exclusive access to esoteric or deep doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In fact, the apocryphal gospels themselves reflect a practice in antiquity that is somewhat similar to this modern pursuit of esoteric teachings. Whereas some Latter-day Saints have searched through ancient texts in order to piece together evidence supporting the unique beliefs and practices of the Church in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, some ancient authors reworked the traditions of the earliest Christian texts in order to support their own unique beliefs and practices in the second century AD. This second-century engagement with early Christian authorities resulted in part in the creation of the apocryphal gospels. In other words, even though the apocryphal gospels do not provide evidence to legitimize our modern beliefs, they do reveal that the desire to legitimize contemporary beliefs by appealing to ancient authorities is not unique to Latter-day Saints.

These writings are valuable to Latter-day Saints regardless of their similarity to or difference from the doctrine proclaimed in the Church today. Apocryphal gospels provide us with unique insight into the world of early Christians. In particular, we have seen that some Christians were not content with only those four Gospels that would eventually become canonical. As Christianity developed and faced new challenges, some imaginative Christians wrote new gospels to deal with those challenges, to present new theological understandings of Christ, or to address gaps of knowledge in the earliest accounts. As historical artifacts of some of the earliest Christian traditions, we ought to read them. Indeed, we ought to “become acquainted with all good books” (Doctrine and Covenants 90:15)—especially those found at the foundations of Christianity.



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## Further Reading

- Burke, Tony. *Secret Scriptures Revealed: A New Introduction to the Christian Apocrypha*. Eerdmans, 2013. Currently the best and most up-to-date introduction to New Testament Apocrypha.
- Ehrman, Bart D. *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. An accessible introduction to the world of the New Testament Apocrypha. This book focuses on important developments in the history of early Christianity and situates key apocryphal texts within that history.
- Ehrman, Bart D., and Zlatko Pleše. *The Other Gospels: Accounts of Jesus from Outside the New Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. The most recent English translation of all early apocryphal gospels that survive in Greek, Latin, and Coptic manuscripts.
- Elliott, J. K. *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*. Revised ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. An English translation of most of the earliest apocryphal gospels, acts, letters, and apocalypses related to the New Testament.
- Meyer, Marvin, ed. *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts*. New York: HarperOne, 2007. An English translation of ancient gnostic writings discovered in 1945 near Nag Hammadi, Egypt, that include some New Testament Apocrypha. This book features essays by top scholars on the different forms of gnostic belief represented by these texts.

## Notes

1. See the further readings listed above.
2. Tony Burke, *Secret Scriptures Revealed: A New Introduction to the Christian Apocrypha* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 14. See also Scott D. Charlesworth, *Early Christian Gospels: Their Production and Transmission*, *Papyrologica Florentina* 47 (Florence, Italy: Edizioni Gonnelli, 2016), *passim*.
3. Burke, *Secret Scriptures Revealed*, 144.
4. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 305–7; see also 191–201. This list may be as late as the fourth century AD; see Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 193. Yet the point remains that practices distinguishing between official and unofficial texts continued to develop well into the fourth century and beyond.
5. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.20.1. The edition used here is Dominic J. Unger, trans., rev. John J. Dillon, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons, Against the Heresies, Book 1*, *Ancient Christian Writers* 55 (New York: Newman, 1992); hereafter Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*.
6. For the text of the Letters of Paul and Seneca, see J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 547–53. For a discussion of the Letters of Paul and Seneca as pseudepigraphal, see Bart D. Ehrman, *Forged: Writing in the Name of God—Why the Bible’s Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 90–92.
7. Some Old Testament books were written in part in Aramaic (i.e., Ezra and Daniel), and some of the Apocrypha may have been originally written in Hebrew and then translated to Greek (i.e., Wisdom of Ben Sira).
8. Burke, *Secret Scriptures Revealed*, 7.
9. For more on the biblical Apocrypha, see Timothy Michael Law, *When God Spoke Greek: The Septuagint and the Making of the Christian Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 58–74.

10. Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), xii.
11. Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, xii.
12. Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, xii. Regarding the Egyptian Book of Breathings, which was the focus of his study, Nibley argued that “the Egyptians did not have the real thing, and they knew it.” See Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, xii.
13. For instance, regarding what Nibley called the “Egyptian Endowment,” he said, “In the words of Abraham, Pharaoh, ‘being a righteous man,’ was ever ‘seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first patriarchal reign’ (Abraham 1:26), for he ‘would fain claim [the priesthood]’ (1:27).” Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, xii–xiii.
14. Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, xiii. For an important recent critique of Nibley’s approach to identifying ancient parallels to modern Latter-day Saint beliefs, see Taylor Petrey, “Siding with Heretics: Evaluating Hugh Nibley Today,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 7 (2015): 66–70.
15. For example, see Eugene Seach, *Ancient Texts and Mormonism: The REAL Answer to Critics of Mormonism, Showing that Mormonism is a Genuine Restoration of Primitive Christianity* (Sandy, UT: Mormon Miscellaneous, 1983).
16. Stephen E. Robinson, “Lying for God: The Uses of Apocrypha,” in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1986), 148.
17. Robinson, “Lying for God,” 147–48. For more on the challenges associated with identifying parallels between texts or religious groups, see Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 1–13; and Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
18. In Doctrine and Covenants 91, Joseph Smith receives a revelation about the biblical Apocrypha. He learns that “there are many things contained therein that are true . . . [and] there are many things contained therein that are not true” (91:1–2). This revelation also promises that “whoso is enlightened by the Spirit shall obtain benefit therefrom” (91:5). See Robinson’s caution about applying Doctrine and Covenants 91 to other collections of texts, such as “the Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nag Hammadi Codices, or the New Testament apocrypha,” in Robinson, “Lying for God,” 154n59.
19. Joseph Smith himself saw in extracanonical texts the opportunity for new insight and theological reflection. See Thomas A. Wayment, “Joseph Smith’s Developing Relationship with the Apocrypha,” in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, ed. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 331–55.
20. “Indeed, the apocrypha do have great value, but not because they teach Mormonism; for by and large they do not. . . . I want to affirm the importance of the apocryphal literature for our understanding of biblical history, of biblical languages, and of the background of the biblical books themselves. There is much valuable information here for the Latter-day Saints if we understand the texts for what they really are and use them appropriately.” Robinson, “Lying for God,” 148.
21. See Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše, *The Other Gospels: Accounts of Jesus from Outside the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
22. Charlesworth, *Early Christian Gospels*, passim.
23. Eusebius, *History of the Church* 6.12. For a translation of Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History*, see G. A. Williamson, *Eusebius: The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, rev. ed., ed. Andrew Louth (London: Penguin, 1989). References to Eusebius’s *History* hereafter use this translation. For an introduction to the role of Peter in early Christian apocryphal literature, written for a Latter-day Saint audience, see Nicholas J. Frederick, “Peter in the Apocryphal Tradition,” in *The Ministry of Peter, the Chief Apostle*, ed. Frank F. Judd Jr., Eric D. Huntsman, and Shon D. Hopkin (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), 337–59.



24. This view on the nature of Christ is sometimes called “docetism”—from the Greek *dokein* (δοκεῖν), meaning “to seem” or “to appear.” For more on the various perspectives held by second-century Christians about the nature of Jesus Christ, see my article “‘Christ’ after the Apostles: The Humanity and Divinity of the Savior in the Second Century,” in *Thou Art the Christ, the Son of the Living God: The Person and Work of Jesus in the New Testament*, ed. Eric Huntsman, Lincoln Blumell, and Tyler Griffin (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2018), 303–34.
25. Eusebius, *History of the Church* 6.12.6.
26. Eusebius, *History of the Church* 3.3.2; 3.25.6. It should be noted that Eusebius also calls into question the authenticity of 2 Peter; see Eusebius, *History of the Church* 3.3.1; 3.25.3.
27. Eusebius, *History of the Church* 6.12.6.
28. For instance, the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, which will be discussed below, was quite popular; it survives in different forms in multiple languages. See Ehrman and Plese, *Other Gospels*, 3–7.
29. The Gospel of Thomas will be discussed below.
30. Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 51–55; but see the recent analysis of discovery narratives in Mark Goodacre, “How Reliable is the Story of the Nag Hammadi Discovery?,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 35 (2013): 303–22.
31. For instance, Irenaeus tells us that Valentinus was a heretic, but in the Nag Hammadi library we find the Gospel of Truth, which likely provides us with Valentinus’s own theology. See David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 100–104.
32. The average size of a page was 13 x 16 cm. There were sixty-six total pages. For more on this book, see Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 16–17. For an academic analysis, see Paul Foster, *The Gospel of Peter: Introduction, Critical Edition and Commentary* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 43–55.
33. For a detailed academic overview of the history of scholarship on the fragmentary Gospel of Peter, see Foster, *Gospel of Peter*, 7–38.
34. This is where the manuscript ends, but the missing story could have been something like the account from John 21:1–14.
35. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.26.1.
36. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 18.
37. Ehrman and Plese, *Other Gospels*, 199.
38. For instance, see the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* 275–80. For an accessible English translation, see Apostolos N. Athanassakis, *The Homeric Hymns: Translation, Introduction, and Notes* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 9. For an academic study of the common characteristics of Greco-Roman epiphanies, including manifestation of enormous height, see H. S. Versnel, “What Did Ancient Man See When He Saw a God? Some Reflections on Greco-Roman Epiphany,” in *Effigies Dei: Essays on the History of Religions*, ed. Dirk van der Plas (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1987), 42–55.
39. For additional examples, see Jason Robert Combs, “A Walking, Talking Cross: The Polymorphic Christology of the Gospel of Peter,” *Early Christianity* 5 (2014): 207–9, 213–15.
40. Combs, “Walking, Talking Cross,” 215–19.
41. See Raymond E. Brown, “The Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 321–43. Crossan argues that an earlier, hypothetical form of the Gospel of Peter, which he calls the “Cross Gospel,” would have predated some of our canonical Gospels. See John Dominic Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988).
42. See Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 321–43.
43. Although it is impossible to say who wrote the Gospel of Peter, sometimes there is evidence for the authorship of apocryphal texts. For instance, Tertullian claims to know the author of the apocryphal Acts of Paul. See Tertullian, *On Baptism* 17.5.

44. Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women* 1.3.1.
45. Ehrman, *Forged*, 31.
46. See also, for example, 2 Corinthians 11:4–5, 13; Galatians 1:6–8; 3 John 9–10.
47. For more on claims to authority in the second century, see Elaine Pagels, “Visions, Appearances, and Apostolic Authority: Gnostic and Orthodox Traditions,” in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, ed. Barbara Aland and Ugo Bianchi (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978), 415–30.
48. Trans. Ehrman and Plese, *Other Gospels*.
49. Trans. Ehrman and Plese, *Other Gospels*.
50. Regarding Gospel of Thomas 13, Goodacre suggests, “As well as legitimizing the role of *Thomas’s* alleged author, the exchange cleverly situates the book over against Christian Gospels that are already becoming authoritative by virtue of their popularity and greater antiquity”—referring specifically to the Gospel of Mark and Gospel of Matthew. See Mark Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels: The Case for Thomas’s Familiarity with the Synoptics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 178–79.
51. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations of the Gospel of Mary are from Ehrman and Plese, *Other Gospels*.
52. On the Gospel of Mary being the Gospel of Mary Magdalene rather than the Gospel of Mary, Jesus’s mother, see Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2003), 205n58.
53. Both date to the second century AD. On the date of the Gospel of Mary, see King, *Gospel of Mary of Magdala*, 183–84. On the date of the Gospel of Thomas, see Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels*, 154–71.
54. For an introduction to the theology of the Gospel of Thomas written for a popular audience, see Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003). For a recent academic commentary, see Simon Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 144–75.
55. See Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels*; and Simon Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas: Original Language and Influences*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 151 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
56. Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels*, 192.
57. King, *Gospel of Mary of Magdala*, 87. See also Ann Graham Brock, “What’s in a Name: The Competition for Authority in Early Christian Texts,” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 37 (1998): 106–24; and Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, the First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority*, Harvard Theological Studies 51 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).
58. Pagels, “Visions, Appearances, and Apostolic Authority,” 415–30; Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority, and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Laura Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity*, Harvard Theological Studies 52 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).
59. Tertullian, *On the Veiling of Virgins* 9. Translation adapted from Geoffrey D. Dunn, trans., *Tertullian* (London: Routledge, 2004), 109; see also Tertullian, *Prescription against Heretics* 41.5. For more on women and baptism, see Ross Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women’s Religions among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 181.
60. Tertullian, *On Baptism* 17. The edition used here is Ernest Evans, trans., *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1964), 37. For a translation of the apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla, see J. K. Elliott, “The Acts of Paul,” in *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*, ed. J. K. Elliott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 351–88.
61. By the end of the second century, Ross Kraemer notes, “the debate over women’s leadership in early Christian communities became particularly acute around the question of women’s authority to baptize.” Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 181.
62. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas are from Ehrman and Plese, *Other Gospels*.

63. Stephen J. Davis, *Christ Child: Cultural Memories of a Young Jesus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 6, 224n8. Kristi Upson-Saia suggests that the original narratives were anti-Christian but were later adopted and adapted by Christians. See Upson-Saia, “Holy Child or Holy Terror? Understanding Jesus’ Anger in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas,” *Church History* 82, no. 1 (2013): 1–39.
64. Davis, *Christ Child*, 7.
65. Davis, *Christ Child*, 64–91, especially 87–91. On the Christology of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas as closer to the Gospel of John than the Synoptics, see Reidar Aasgaard, *The Childhood of Jesus: Decoding the Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (Cambridge, England: James Clarke, 2010), 153, 155–56. The depiction of Jesus as already fully cognizant of his power and divinity even as a child is also represented in the account of Jesus as a twelve-year-old in the Jerusalem temple. In Luke the young Jesus is discovered “sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions” (2:46). In the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, Jesus is the teacher: “After the third day they found him sitting in the temple in the midst of the teachers, both listening and asking them questions. Everyone was attending closely, amazed that though a child, he silenced the elders and teachers of the people, explaining the chief points of the Law and the parables of the prophets” (19.2). This same tendency, to present the young Jesus as similar to the adult Jesus, is also seen in the Joseph Smith Translation of Luke 2:46 (see footnote *c* of Luke 2:46 in the Latter-day Saint edition of the Bible; for an alternative view, see Doctrine and Covenants 93:12–14). On the types of changes Joseph Smith made to the Bible, see Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 8–11.
66. Rendered in the Greek *Paidika* as “Annas the high priest”; see Davis, *Christ Child*, 64. For Annas the high priest in the canonical Gospels, see Luke 3:2; John 18:13, 24; and Acts 4:6.
67. For examples of scribes and Pharisees reacting to Jesus’s actions on the Sabbath in the canonical Gospels, see Matthew 12; Mark 2–3; Luke 6; and John 5.