

From the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Nag Hammadi Library —
your guide to once-hidden works and their impact on the Bible

Lost Books of the Bible

FOR
DUMMIES[®]



Dr. Daniel L. Smith-Christopher

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Lost Books of the Bible For Dummies®

Published by
Wiley Publishing, Inc.
111 River St.
Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774
www.wiley.com

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Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2008927907

ISBN: 978-0-470-24380-0

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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Dedications

From Daniel: This book is dedicated to Zsa Zsa, whom I married in 1992 because I'm no dummy!

From Stephen: I dedicate this book to the memory of my father, with love.

Authors' Acknowledgments

From Daniel: This has been a very rewarding task, largely because of my talented cowriter Stephen, who transformed my often difficult (and occasionally just plain bad) writing into something understandable. If there are still problems in this text, it has nothing to do with him — he had plenty of heavy lifting with all the stuff he did catch! I would like to thank Chrissy Guthrie and Elizabeth Rea for their always valuable and insightful questions and clarifications in the writing process, and a special thanks to Mike Lewis for giving me the honor of writing this book. His insistence that I was the perfect author for this project was flattering and humbling. You have my heartfelt gratitude, Mike. Also, the entire editorial staff at Wiley have been tremendously helpful, and I appreciate them very much. Finally, I have two important sets of folks to mention: I feel deep appreciation to all my adult students in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the Diocese of San Bernardino, and the Diocese of Las Vegas (yes, you, Fr. Joe and St. Anthonys!) who always kept me on my toes and helped me to understand the importance of explaining things as clearly as I could — you are no dummies! And lastly I want to acknowledge the patience of my family as I worked on this project — love to Zsa Zsa, our son Jordan, and our daughter Sydney.

From Stephen: First and foremost, I'd like to thank my coauthor Daniel for his friendship, his good humor, and his talent and astonishing knowledge of biblical theology, which made working with him an absolute delight. Also, I must thank our Acquisitions Editor Mike Lewis for his . . . well, for just about everything. You're a real paesan, brother. Also, mucho gratitude to our Senior Project Editor Chrissy Guthrie and our Senior Copy Editor Elizabeth Rea for their keen sense of what this book needed to be, and for their counsel and questions that served to get it there! Also, personally, I'd like to thank my agent and great friend John White, my inordinately helpful Teaching Assistant Adrienne Candela, and my dearest friends Valerie, George, Jim, Charlie, and Bob for their support and strong shoulders on which I have been known to occasionally lean.

Publisher's Acknowledgments

We're proud of this book; please send us your comments through our Dummies online registration form located at www.dummies.com/register/.

Some of the people who helped bring this book to market include the following:

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Introduction

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The phrase “lost books of the Bible” is an oxymoron. If a book is really lost, then how does anyone know about it? Good question, right? In some cases, there are some genuinely “lost” books because historians and scholars know the title and maybe a quotation here and there from other ancient sources, but the writing itself isn’t available because it didn’t survive into the modern world. However, if that were the only kind of writing covered in *Lost Books of the Bible For Dummies*, it would be a very short book!

In most cases, of course, the lost books aren’t really lost; they’re simply rarely read, forgotten, or only recently rediscovered. That is, the main subject of this book is the ancient Jewish and Christian religious writings that didn’t end up in the Hebrew Bible (what many Jews refer to as the “TaNaK,” an acronym from the Hebrew words for “Torah, Prophets, and Writings”), the Christian Old Testament, or the Christian New Testament.

About This Book

If you’re intrigued by the idea that the Bible was a “selection” of writings and that there were some writings “not selected,” then this book is for you!

In this book, we attempt to summarize most, if not all, of the religious writings that have survived from ancient Jewish and ancient Christian writers. But if you want to know about those books not included in the Bible, then you clearly won’t be satisfied with short summaries! So, this book is intended to be your *starting* point on your journey of discovery. From here, you can go to the various writings themselves (all available in English) and dig into them for yourself.

Here’s what you can expect from this book:

- ✓ A basic introduction to the process that led to the formation of the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and the New Testament
- ✓ A summary of most of the writings that are available for study and that aren’t in the Bible

- ✔ An explanation of the differences among the available non-biblical writings, especially because some of them arguably came close to being included while others were definitely less popular
- ✔ Suggestions of ways to understand some of the more difficult-to-read writings
- ✔ Suggestions of how to start your own exploration of the world of non-canonical writings

In short, this book starts you on a journey of discovery of lost books that won't be so "lost" when you finish!

Conventions Used in This Book

In this book, we use the following general conventions that you should be aware of:

- ✔ When we introduce a new term in a chapter, we *italicize* it.
- ✔ Keywords appear in **boldface**.
- ✔ Web sites and e-mail addresses appear in `monofont` to help them stand out from the rest of the text.

As well, some terms, abbreviations, and other elements of this book may be confusing without some explanation, so the following sections clear up additional conventions used in this book.

"Canon" and "non-canonical"

The word "canon" comes from the Greek and typically refers to a set of measurements, like a "ruler" or "yardstick." But it also can refer to a set of measurements used to reproduce a copy of something. When the early Christians started using the term (sometime after 100 CE, it seems), it eventually came to mean the "set list" of writings that were to be included in the Bible. Problem is, people started using "canon" before lists were drawn up, so no one is absolutely certain what the early Christians thought was their "canon" until the first actual list of writings appeared around 367 CE.

All writings that didn't make it into the canon of the Old or New Testaments or the Hebrew Bible are therefore known as *non-canonical* writings. Bottom line: This entire book is all about non-canonical writings! For a terrific resource

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